Deerskin Short Guide

Deerskin by Robin McKinley

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The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers".

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Overview

Charles Perrault's "Donkeyskin," included in his 1697 collection Histoires et contes du temps passe (Histories and Tales of Past Times), is unlikely to be made into a Disney movie anytime soon. This story of a girl who is raped by her father is seldom retold unedited. McKinley takes on this story in her moving depiction of Princess Lissla Lissar's journey to heal herself, body and soul. Although much has been made of the incest theme, the actual pursuit and assault take up little space in the novel.

Deerskin is concerned primarily with the process of recovery, with taking back one's body and owning one's memories and emotions. Lissar is never truly alone. Her fleethound, Ash, is her constant companion and protector. She is also helped by the Moonwoman, a kind of fairy godmother who gives her healing gifts and watches over her. And at last, she finds friendship and love with Lilac and Ossin. The fairytale framework serves as a useful distancing device to discuss issues of relevance today. Although a painful read in places, Deerskin is ultimately a hopeful book, showing that one can not only survive but also heal grievous wounds of body and spirit.

About the Author

Jennifer Carolyn Robin McKinley was a self-confessed "navy brat." Her father, William, was an officer in the U.S. Navy and Merchant Marines. Her mother, Jeanne Carolyn (maiden name Turrell), was a teacher. Robin McKinley was born in her mother's hometown of Warren, Ohio, in 1952, but she did not have a rooted childhood. Her father's career necessitated several moves, to Arlington, Virginia, Washington, D.C., Long Beach, California, New York, Fuchinobe, Japan, Rhode Island, and finally, Vinalhaven, Maine, upon her father's retirement. She has claimed repeatedly that the only way she could keep track of her life was by remembering the book she was reading at the time. She still remembers where she was when her mother told her about the assassination of President Kennedy, because she was reading The Hobbit in Japan. McKinley found books a substitute for "home" and became a voracious reader. Among her favorite authors were Rudyard Kipling and J. R. R. Tolkien.

She also remembers the "Oz" books by L. Frank Baum, the "Narnia" books by C. S. Lewis, and Andrew Lang's "Fairy" books.

Fantasy literature and fairy tales were early interests, as well as adventure stories.

Her reading developed her interest in becoming a writer. After reading Frances Hodgson Burnett's A Little Princess, she decided that she wanted to be able to tell stories as vivid and believable as those told by Sara Crewe. She majored in English literature in college, graduating summa cum laude from Bowdoin College in 1975. After Deerskin 149 finishing her studies, she set out to become a writer. Her models were Dickens, Hardy, George Eliot, Kipling, Rider Haggard, and Tolkien, with one crucial difference: her stories were going to be about girls having adventures; she was tired of seeing boys have all the fun.

Her first published novel, Beauty (1978), began as an exercise. She had been writing a series of stories that would eventually evolve into the Damar books. However, after seeing a Hallmark Hall of Fame production of Beauty and the Beast with George C. Scott and becoming incensed by its "wrongness," she sat down to write her version in a short story. That short story became a novel, an ALA Notable Book, and McKinley became known for her retellings and tellings of fairy tales.

McKinley eventually completed two novels set in the mythical land of Damar, both celebrating the female hero. The Blue Sword (1982) was an ALA Best Young Adult Book and a Newbery Honor Book. For The Hero and the Crown (1984), a prequel to The Blue Sword, McKinley was awarded the Newbery Medal. Both Harry Crewe (named for Burnett's Sara?) and Aerin wield the legendary blue sword, which can only be held by a woman, and both have marvelous adventures defeating evil. The world of Damar and fairy tale traditions come together in McKinley's fourth novel, Deerskin (1993). Based on Charles Perrault's tale "Donkeyskin," it is set in Damar; there is a reference to the hero Aerin, and Lissar shows signs of having kelar, a special power inherited by a Damarian ruling family. Although McKinley's novels are popular with young adult and adult

audiences, this book has been identified by many as an "adult" book because it deals with a young woman's rape by her father and her subsequent healing. In fact, McKinley received some hate mail for dealing with such a controversial topic. However, she claims not to write her books for a particular age group, but "for anyone who wants to read them."

Setting

As in all good fairy tales, the setting of Deerskin is vague regarding time and place.

A few hints, mentioned earlier, suggest that the story takes place in Damar. Moreover, references to unknown animals such as ootag or iruku and to strange foods like the borka root tell readers that this world is not exactly like ours. The time period is unclear as well. If this is indeed Damar, then the reference to Aerin places Deerskin in a time between that of The Hero and the Sword and that of The Blue Sword. The feudal social structures and medieval lifestyle place this story closer to Aerin's time than to Harry's, the latter seeming more akin to Victorian times. The lack of specificity regarding time and place is a strength of fairy tales; it makes them seem more universal in application. It also, surprisingly, makes them more believable. "Once upon a time" there might have been a Moonwoman.

Although the when and the where of the story are not specific, the references to particular flora and fauna make the reality of this world concrete and believable. The stifling formality of Lissar's father's court is contrasted with the humbler (and happier) court of Ossin's parents. When Lissar works first in the stables and then in the kennels, the details could be taken from a guide to medieval estate management. The supernatural elements of the story, the Moonwoman and her manipulations of time and form, are present when Lissar flees humanity.

Outside of the towns and courts, in the countryside, magic is possible. The country people even believe that Lissar is the Moonwoman, come to watch over their young and helpless. Their belief in magic allows the reader to accept it as well.

Above all, however, setting in this novel is subordinate to character and situation.

Social Sensitivity

It may seem odd to argue that a fantasy novel based on a fairy tale has any relevance for young adults today. However, reading about their own experiences is some times too painful for readers. The fairy tale provides some distance for the reader, and in offering magic, it may also offer hope.

Deerskin is a very sensitive portrayal of recovery from trauma.

One of the most moving moments occurs when Lissar repossesses her own body.

After escaping the castle and providing for her most basic needs for sleep, water, and food, she comes to terms with her fear of her body. Just the touch of her breast on her own inner arm is enough to make her retch, for it recalls other touches. As Lissar forces herself to touch herself, she talks to herself: "This is my body. I reclaim my own body for myself: for my use, for my understanding, for my kindness and care." This would make a wonderful affirmation for anyone who has been forced to give over control of his or her body.

McKinley's treatment of repressed memory is also realistic. Lissar's battle is mainly with herself. The inability to remember trauma is quite common, as is the mind's active resistance to memory when it is not ready to accept what happened. Lissar remembers only when faced with her own portrait. Initially, she recognizes Ash, but she is finally forced to acknowledge herself as that which she fears to be, the king's daughter. Upon remembering, Lissar is cast back into despair. The healing she has done and the friendships she has made seem for naught, since none of these can protect her from her memories. Yet just as she was able to rouse herself for Ash's sake, she is able to find the strength to confront her father in order to save Camilla from a disastrous marriage. Once she faces her pain, she gives it back to her father: "I return to you now all that you did give me: all the rage and the terror, the pain and the hatred that should have been love.... I want them no more, and I will bear them not one whit of my time on this earth more." In some therapies, victims of trauma are encouraged to visualize placing their painful emotions and memories outside of themselves to create a safe space to inhabit; Lissar goes one step further, for she refuses to carry them at all.

She has felt tainted by the blood that flowed during her assault, and by the blood from her stillbirth. In her confrontation with her father, she expels a cleansing gush of blood.

It is important that Lissar's healing not be easy, nor that it be too readily secured.

When Ossin finally persuades her to agree to marry him, the best she can offer him is that she will "put her strength now and hereafter toward staying and not fleeing."

She is unable to either guarantee her strength or make promises. This is an honest point at which to leave Lissar. For those readers who might look at Lissar as a role

model, the story offers hope that healing is possible, but like Lissar, it makes no false promises.

Closely related to the incest theme is the issue of neglect. Lissar is brutalized by her father, but long before that she is seen as having no value to her parents. Some readers may identify with Lissar's isolation and longing for friendship and love. With the aging of the general population, our culture seems to value the interests of older people more than it values those of young adults.

The novel provides some older parental figures who show that not all adults neglect the young, for example, Ossin's parents, and the couple who help Lissar when she first comes down from the mountain. And when we see Ossin and Lissar looking after the puppies, we see them learning how to nurture the young. In their union, and in Ash's pups, there is hope for the future.

McKinley presents a wounded yet strong heroine who is able to overcome a terrible start in life. Lissar's determination to fight her fears and to reach out to people sends one of the book's essential messages: human contact is precious. Lissar learns something that we all need to know: she is lovable, and she can love.

Literary Qualities

Deerskin is divided into three parts, a fitting number, since three is often the magic number in fairy tales. The tripartite structure also suggests a cycle of death/journey/rebirth. Part 1 ends when Lissar gives herself over to death after the rape. Her welcoming of death is indicated by the description of the cold creeping up her body like the touch of an animal; the only love Lissar has known is the touch of an animal, that of her dog. Part 2 opens with Lissar being called back. This is the opening of the longest portion of the book, Lissar's extremely challenging journey. Terribly injured and wounded in spirit, she at first can think only of her immediate physical needs.

Eventually, she progresses and finally reDeerskin 153 gains her memory. This section ends with a second trauma, which reopens old hurts.

When Ossin asks Lissar to marry him, she panics. The Moonwoman leaves her with a question: "You have not accepted your own gift to yourself, your gift of your own life.

Ash is looking forward to running through meadows again; can you not give yourself leave to run through meadows too?" The third part then sees a symbolic rebirth: out of the fiery ashes of her confrontation with her father, Lissar emerges ready, after a brief resistance, to try to make a whole life for herself with Ossin.

The structure of the novel is also informed by fairy-tale models. Clearly, Deerskin is based on "Donkeyskin." The differences are more interesting than the similarities, however. The most immediate difference is the change from a donkeyskin to a deerskin. On one level, this makes aesthetic sense: a deer is a lovelier animal than a donkey. However, subtle shifts in meaning accompany this change. For instance, in the original story, when Donkeyskin asks her father to kill his magic donkey for her sake, she is asking him to destroy the source of his good fortune. Lissar's deerskin is not tainted by contact with her father. Instead, whereas the donkeyskin is a sign of degradation, the deerskin announces an inner purity: it cannot be stained until the end, when Lissar confronts her father and her own blood changes her from Deerskin to Lissar. Finally, the donkey is often portrayed as a stubborn beast; the deer, a timid and innocent animal, is a more fitting metaphor for the wounded Lissar. Another key difference lies in the way the heroines achieve recognition. "Donkeyskin" is in part a "Cinderella" story. (Perhaps it is not accidental that "Ash" suggests "Aschenputtel"— the Grimm brothers' version of "Cinderella.") Like Cinderella, Donkeyskin seems dirty and inconsequential, and as with Cinderella, her worth is recognized only when she is dressed in fine gowns. However, Deerskin's worth is seen and properly valued before she attends the ball. The worship of appearance is not allowed to detract from what really matters: inner worth.

Finally, Lissar differs from many maleauthored fairy-tale heroines in her independence. Nobody rescues Lissar; the Moonwoman gives her only what she needs to help herself, and McKinley uses the Moonwoman sparingly. Lissar is responsible for her own survival and her own recovery.

Because the Moonwoman is presented as a double of Lissar, it almost seems that Lissar is getting help from some aspect of herself. McKinley makes good use of foils.

Comparing the stories of Lissar and the Moonwoman, we recognize that Lissar has a chance to find something the Moonwoman did not allow herself. People call Lissar Moonwoman, especially after she rescues the young boy Aric, but Lissar resists the title. On some level, she hungers to be among humankind; she does not truly want to live with only her dogs for company.

Other foils include Lissar and her mother; Lissar and Camilla; Ossin and Lissar's father, Ossin and the Curn. As well as using character foils, McKinley creates parallel situations. The marriage of Ossin's parents is compared to that of Lissar's parents. The two courts are also compared. As readers consider these comparisons, they learn to distinguish between positive and negative values.

The narrator also helps readers see beyond the surface. Although the novel is based on a fairy tale, the narrator highlights some key problems with fairy tales. In the opening of the novel, the story of Lissar's parents is a classic fairy tale. The handsome prince goes on a quest to win true love; he is successful in his trials, and he wins the beautiful princess. They seem to live happily ever after. However, the narrator undercuts this picture with sardonic interjections and sinister details. The story is better than anything out of Lissar's storybooks, but that is because her nursemaid cannot read well. The queen is "lucky" because her father-in-law died within a year of her marriage; her response is a secret smile. When the queen takes to her bed, the narrator comments that the true story, the one that most people do not believe, is that she cannot face losing any of her beauty as she ages. The narrative suggests that there might be more to stories than what is on the surface, and that there might be some underlying darkness. Happily-ever-after is a lie, not just for the child Lissar, but even for the king and queen. As a child, Lissar listens to her nursemaid tell what might be considered "old wives' tales." The narrator points out that Lissar takes more pleasure in reading stories herself, once she learns to read. This is not to say that McKinley is mounting an attack on fairy tales; rather, she is critical of certain kinds of tales—the ones that make her angry—because they celebrate female helplessness and false values. The dark elements have been edited from many of the versions of fairy tales we read or view today; however, there is truth to be found in facing the darkness.

The tone of the narrative shifts effectively throughout the book. Although there may be sly undercutting of some assumptions, there is nothing but sympathy for Lissar. When speaking of what should be unspeakable, the narrator echoes Lissar's own horror. Nor is there any cynicism in the narrator's tale of Lissar's journey. Images of blankness and darkness illustrate Lissar's inability to remember who she was; flashes of pain point to her unwillingness to do so.

Even while making it clear that Lissar resists her own healing on some deep level, the narrator does not judge her for it. When Lissar finally does remember, she is the one who calls herself a liar. The narrative treats her gradual movement toward knowledge

patiently. On the other hand, those characters who display willful foolishness, selfishness, or viciousness are not spared.

The theme of looking beyond appearances is highlighted in a key motif: paintings. As the queen's final portrait is painted, her beauty is described as "grueling." Before beginning, the painter feels her beauty hurt his heart, and he finishes the project in a blaze of candles and lanterns, for he has come to fear shadows. The queen dies after looking at her portrait. When the painting is hung in the ballroom for Lissar's comingof-age ball, it becomes a malignant presence. The portrait represents the queen's vanity, her will that she would have no rival, and her willingness to sacrifice her own daughter. Lissar is like an animal caught in a trap while her mother's face watches.

Whatever beauty the painting possesses, it brings no joy, just like the queen's beauty.

This is contrasted with a portrait of Lissar, discovered when she and Ossin visit the portrait room. Ossin initially admires the portrait, then corrects himself: it is "who [he] imagine[s] the person painted to be" he likes. He points not to the beauty of the painting but to the humanity of the subject.

If portraits indeed contain a piece of the sitter's soul, then these two paintings represent the essential difference between Lissar and her mother. Sitting quietly, Lissar looks out of the canvas; she is interested in life.

The queen wants only to subjugate with her beauty. There is an echo here of the wicked stepmother from "Snow White." Just as the wicked stepmother is punished by fire, the queen's power is vanquished when Lissar has a vision of her mother's portrait burning: there is no substance beneath the paint.

Themes and Characters

Lissar is the central figure of the novel, and she carries the main themes: the parent's betrayal of the child, the isolation of being psychologically wounded, the possibility of healing, and the bond between animal and human. In the opening of the novel, the king and his court are so enthralled with Lissar's mother, "the most beautiful woman in seven kingdoms," that Lissar lives in isolation. With only her nurse for company, she is ignored by her parents and denied the companionship of other children, or even of adults who might pay attention to her. This is an ironic twist on the conventional fairy tale: Lissar suffers during the "happily ever after" portion of her parents' story. Her betrayal by her father is obvious, but her mother also betrays Lissar on a deep level. Unable to accept that her beauty is fading with age, Lissar's mother wills herself to die, but first she makes her husband promise not to remarry unless he can find someone as beautiful as herself.

This person can only be her daughter. As Lissar struggles with premature labor, birthing a stillborn child, she has a vision of being pursued by her father/monster, but he is dwarfed by the even more monstrous figure of her mother behind him, urging the pursuit. Finally, when Lissar confronts her father, she has also to confront her mother, and her inheritance of her mother's looks.

An interesting theme is the questioning of beauty. The beauty of Lissar's mother can be terrifying. The painter who paints her final portrait is so overcome by the experience that he never fully recovers. In fact, aside from Lissar and Camilla, Ossin's sister, those who possess beauty are the least appealing characters. Lissar's father is a handsome man, but he is also a monster.

The Curn of Dorl is another attractive man whose spirit does not match his form; he is vain, haughty, and selfish. In contrast, many of the kindest figures are not particularly good-looking. Ossin ruefully comments on his own ugliness, yet he is kind, gentle, and generous. His parents, both quite plain, are nonetheless extremely good and happy people. As she did in the earlier Beauty, McKinley asks readers to question our culture's automatic association of goodness with beauty and to look beyond appearance. When Lissar and her mother are compared at the end, Lissar's beauty is at once lesser and greater; her mother seems more beautiful, but it is the kind of beauty "that stopped hearts and did not lift them or bring them joy."

Connected to the beauty theme is the theme of healing. Lissar's healing journey is a long one, and it is the main focus of the narrative. In the beginning, she is so traumatized that she cannot bear to be around other people, and she cannot bear to remember who she is. It is to McKinley's credit that she does not make Lissar's recovery unrealistically quick or easy. Lissar begins to reconnect to the human world when she leaves the cabin and, on her way to the city, allows herself to be helped by people along the way. The time she spends nursing a litter of puppies is also important; on one level, they are a recompense for her stillborn child. Looking after the puppies forces her to ask for help when she needs it; what she cannot request for herself she can request for the

puppies. She is finally needed somewhere as well. The shared work with Ossin teaches her that he is not like her father; he is a gentle and loving man. Ossin proves himself worthy of Lissar when he alone recognizes her at the end and can distinguish her from her mother; he knows her beauty of spirit is of more value than her appearance. Lissar learns to accept her own beauty when Ossin persuades her to attend the ball. McKinley treats the healing theme very realistically. Despite the magic involved, Lissar will always bear her scars, inside as well as out. It is a measure of her strength that she can move forward with her life nonetheless.

The Moonwoman is a significant figure.

Legend tells that she was once a young girl raped by a rejected suitor and abandoned by her father; her story, then, has some connections with Lissar's. Hurt and angry, the Moonwoman ran away to the moon with her dog. Now she watches over the young, "particularly those who are alone, who are hurt or betrayed, or who wish to make a choice for themselves instead of for those around them." The Moonwoman plays a key role in the recovery theme. Her gifts show understanding of what one needs to overcome trauma. Her first gift is the gift of time, four years of healing sleep in the course of hours. Her second gift is her transformation of Lissar into Deerskin: she changes Lissar's red-black hair to white and her hazel eyes to black, and gives her a dress of white deerskin to wear. She also transforms Ash into a long-haired dog so that the two can travel unrecognized. This is another gift of time: Lissar's memories gradually return only when she is ready for them. Finally, although unspecified, the third gift is the opportunity to make a life and to find love. The Moonwoman appears twice, first when Lissar goes into labor, and then again when Lissar runs away from Ossin's marriage proposal and her knowledge of who she is. The girl who ran away herself gives Lissar a chance to stop running.

While the Moonwoman is both the double of Lissar and a fairy godmother, Ash the fleethound corresponds to the animal helper typical of some fairy tales. Ash's presence is crucial, because it reassures the reader that no matter how painful her experiences, Lissar is never alone. Indeed, it is Ash's love and will that give Lissar the strength to survive and escape after her father's brutal beating and rape. Her connection to Ash also keeps Lissar emotionally alive. Ash's devotion throws into relief the lack of humanity of the courtiers, who make no attempt to protect Lissar from her father. The bond between human and dog is one of the most powerful in the novel; doubtless it owes something to McKinley's own love of animals, particularly her whippet (a breed quite similar in appearance to the larger fleethounds). Lissar herself looks something like a fleethound: tall and slim, she too is a runner. It is Ash who helps give Lissar the courage to stop running. Ash is an important connection between Ossin and Lissar.

The dog was Ossin's gift to Lissar to comfort her after her mother's death. The bond between Lissar and her dog is what first draws Ossin to Deerskin. When Ash becomes pregnant with Ob's puppies, it is a sign that life must go on in spite of pain. In the end, Lissar cannot decide whether she has it in her to try to make a life with Ossin, so she lets Ash choose for her: Ash chooses Ossin.

Ossin is the only other fully realized character besides Lissar. In every way he is the opposite of Lissar's father: he is not particularly attractive; he is bored by royal functions; he loves animals, particularly the hounds; he is gentle, helping Lissar nurse the newborn pups; and although he likes to hunt, he asks pardon of the animals he kills and honors them. It is a measure of Ossin's feelings for Lissar that he wants to kill her father with his bare hands when he discovers what has been done to her. Ossin provides the catalyst for Lissar's recovery of her memories when he takes her into the portrait room and they find a portrait of Lissar as a young girl. He shows his perceptiveness by commenting on the character of the girl in the painting, not on her appearance. Ossin also makes the link between Lissar and the Moonwoman apparent when he tells the Moonwoman's story.

Interestingly, as a young boy Ossin had wanted to marry the Moonwoman; instead, he will marry Lissar, another wounded young woman with hounds. When Ossin and Lissar are talking about Ossin's marriage prospects, he refers to climbing a glass mountain, a detail from "The Princess on the Glass Hill," a Norse tale retold in Andrew Lang's Blue Fairy Book. As Ossin compares himself to the Cinderlad character, he is linked yet again with Lissar.

Lissar's father is the central antagonist in the story. Satisfyingly, he is punished for his crimes, as are all villains in the grimmest of fairy tales. He is given a bit of an excuse for his behavior: he appears to have gone mad with grief over his wife's death.

However, later in the story, when Lissar allows herself to remember, the reader learns that her father raped her three times, once for each day she kept her door locked and defied his authority. There is clearly an element of calculation in this brutality. It is also telling that, unlike Ossin, who wins his wife with a gift of love (Ash), Lissar's father won his bride with an empty gift: a leaf plucked from the tree of joy and an apple plucked from the tree of sorrow, both of which he threw on the fire. He is the fairytale prince who is truly a beast. When she discovers that he intends to wed Ossin's sister to beget an heir, Lissar knows that he is "no fit husband for any woman." To save Camilla, Lissar confronts her father, and in payment for his attempt to destroy her with his touch, she touches him and compels him to know what he has done and to know his true self. In the end he is a burnt-out husk of a man. Retribution can be a very satisfying theme, particularly when it is accompanied by healing of the innocent one who has been injured.

Topics for Discussion

1. Why is the story of the courtship of Lissar's mother and father given so much attention? What does it tell us about their characters? How does their story affect Lissar?

2. Why does the queen make her husband promise not to marry unless he can find someone as beautiful as she is? Does she mean to put her daughter at risk? Is she thinking about her daughter at all?

3. What is it that calls Lissar back to life after she wants to die? What keeps her going when her memories knock her back into that place of despair?

4. How do the Moonwoman's gifts help Lissar? Why does she need time and a disguise?

5. Why do people call Lissar Moonwoman?

What does she have in common with the Moonwoman?

6. In fairy tales, it is usually a male character who goes on a quest. Is there a quest in this book? Whose quest is it? What is its object?

7. Compare the portraits of Lissar and her mother. What does the daughter's picture tell us about the mother, and vice versa?

8. Why does Lissar run when Ossin wants to marry her? Is he her friend? Does she love him?

9. What is the nature of the bond between Lissar and Ash? What do different characters' responses to animals tell us about them?

10. Consider how McKinley creates a believable world in this novel. What species of flora and fauna does she invent?

What is its geography and climate?

Could you draw a map of this world?

Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Find Perrault's story "Donkeyskin."

Note how McKinley changes the story or adds elements to it. What is the impact of the changes she has made?

2. What are the main characteristics of fairy tales? In what way is this novel a fairy tale?

3. Compare Lissar to other fairy-tale heroines like Snow White, Cinderella, and Sleeping Beauty. Does she share any traits with them? What makes her different?

4. Read about incest survivors. Are Lissar's experiences and her healing realistic in this context?

5. At her lowest points, Lissar is comforted and supported by Ash. Discuss the roles that animals can play in helping humans deal with emotional pain.

6. Lissar must confront not only her abusive father but the vision of her mother as well. Research the relationship between survivors of abuse and their nonabusing parent. Does this angle help explain Lissar's need to confront her mother?

7. The Moonwoman's association with the moon links her to a number of goddess figures. What kind of myths seem relevant to the Moonwoman? How do they add meaning to the role she plays in the novel?

For Further Reference

Chauvette, Cathy. "Robin McKinley, Deerskin." School Library Journal 39, no. 4 (1993): 261. A brief but insightful review that is useful because there is very little criticism on this novel.

"(Jennifer Carolyn) Robin McKinley."Children's Literature Review, vol. 10, 121-26.

Detroit: Gale, 1986. A bit dated now, but a good overview of the critical response to her writing up to The Hero and the Crown.

"(Jennifer Carolyn) Robin McKinley." Something About the Author, vol. 89, 137-41.

Detroit: Gale, 1997. One of the more upto-date biographies available.

McKinley, Robin. "Newbery Medal Acceptance." HornBook 61, no. 4 (1985): 395-405.

Good discussion of McKinley's influences and her need to create strong female characters.

Sanders, Lynn Moss. "'Girls Who Do Things': The Protagonists of Robin McKinley's Fantasy Fiction." ALAN Review 24, no. 1 (1996): 38-42. A wide-ranging discussion that includes Lissar.

Windling, Terri, and Mark Alan Arnold.

"Robin McKinley." Horn Book 61, no. 4 (1985): 406-9. A somewhat whimsical character sketch of McKinley.

Related Titles/Adaptations

Deerskin is part of a growing trend in fantasy literature: mythic fiction, or revisionist fairy tales. Readers who enjoy this book will probably like McKinley's Rose Daughter, which revisits "Beauty and the Beast," and Spindle's End, in which she turns "Sleeping Beauty" inside out. Similar stories can be found in the Fairy Tale Series, edited by Terri Windling. Some of the notable titles include Charles de Lint's urban fantasy Jack the Giant Killer, which tells of Jackie Rowan's journey toward self-acceptance as she finds herself the new champion of the Seelie court (the "good" fairies); Patricia Wrede's Snow White and Rose Red, set in Elizabethan times; and Jane Yolen's powerful Briar Rose. Like Deerskin, Briar Rose touches on the dark side of fairy tales, using "Sleeping Beauty" to write about the Holocaust. Some interesting comparisons with Deerskin may be found in Donna Jo Napoli's Zel, a retelling of the story of "Rapunzel" that addresses the problem of parents who cannot set their children free.

A couple of noteworthy contemporary novels also deal with the issue of incest: Cynthia Voight's When She Hollers and Frances Lia Block's The Hanged Man.

Related Web Sites

"Robin McKinley." http://www.sff.net/people/robin-mckinley. An excellent site that features essays by McKinley and an excellent interview by John Morgan, among other resources.

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