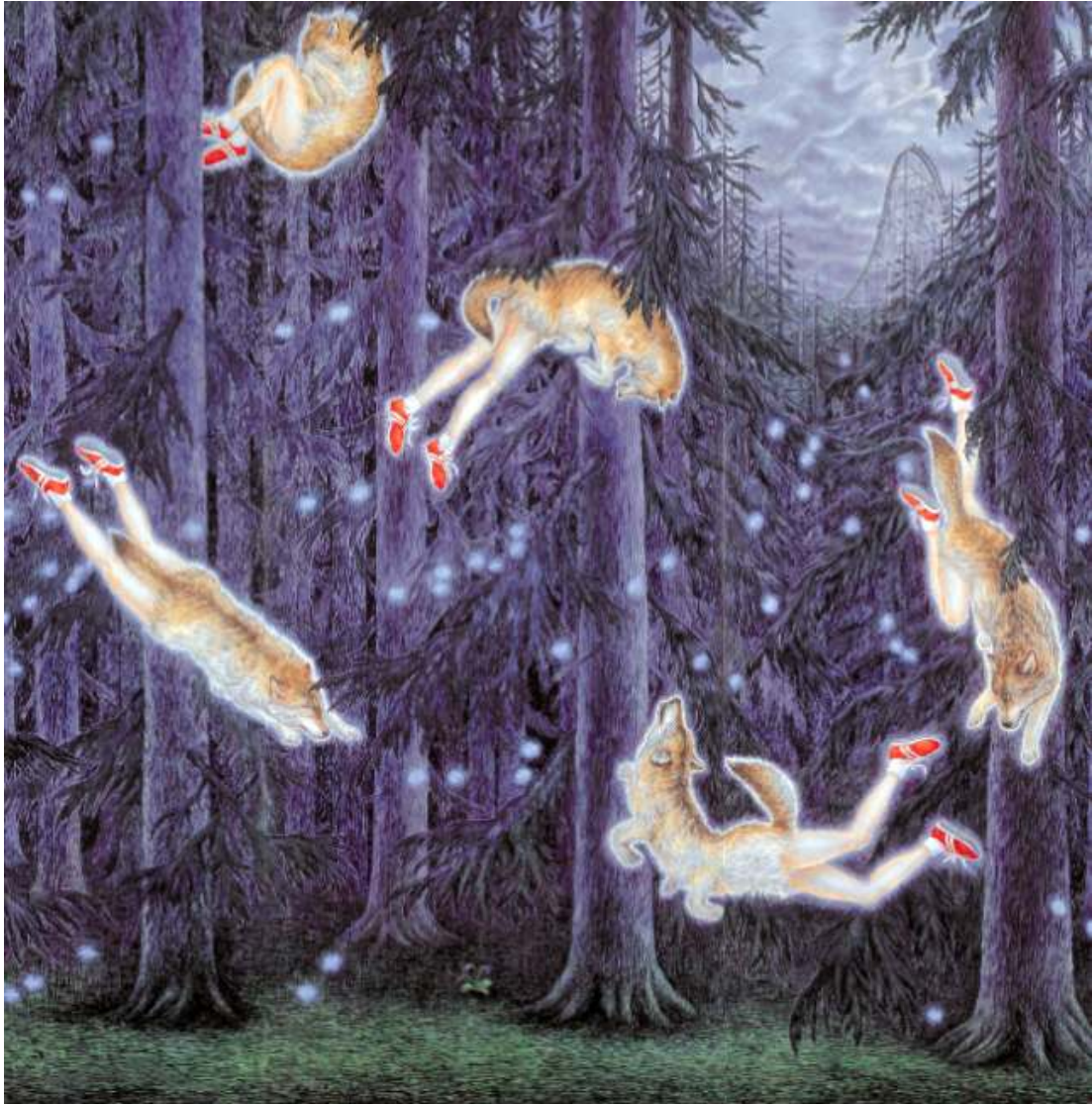


POSTMODERN REINTERPRETATIONS OF FAIRY TALES

How Applying New Methods Generates New Meanings



Edited by Anna Kérchy

Foreword by Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère

The Edwin Mellen Press, 2011

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Illustrations

Foreword by Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère	i
Preface	iv

SECTION 1: NEW MEDIA LITERACY

Hyperread, New Literacy, E-text	1
Hyperread. Repurposing Children's Literature and Digital Storytelling Dorothy G. Clark	
Cyber-Salons, Participatory Culture	17
<i>Salon des Fées</i> . Cyber Salon: Re-Coding the Commodified Fairy Tale Helen Pilinovsky	
Production Design	33
Imagining the Fairy Tale: Production Design in Neil Jordan's <i>The Company of Wolves</i> and Ridley Scott's <i>Legend</i> Andrea Wright	
Critical Dance Studies	49
Having a Ball. Intertextuality and the Performance of Feminine Identity in Maguy Marin's Dance Work, <i>Cinderella</i> Dorothy Morrissey	

SECTION 2: EMERGING GENRES

Urban Fantasy	67
<i>King Rat</i> to <i>Coraline</i> : Faerie and Fairy Tale in British Urban Fantasy Adam Zolkover	
Steampunk	83
Steampunk: Technofantasies in a Neo-Victorian Retrofuture Mike Perschon	
Forensic Crime Fantasy	107
Postmodern Fantasies of Salvation. Interfacing Forensic Crime Fiction and Fairy Tale in Tim Burton's <i>Corpse Bride</i> Ingrida Povidisa – Anna Kérchy	
Intermedial Text/Image. Graphic Narrative	126
The Intermedial/Inter-Authorial Dynamics of Text/Image in Rikki Ducornet's <i>The One Marvellous Thing</i> decorated by T.Motley Michelle Ryan-Sautour	
Guro-Kawaii (Grotesque-Cute) Manga/Art	145
Re-envisioning of Fairy Tales in Contemporary Japanese Art. The Post- Feminist Aesthetics of the Grotesque-Cute Guro-Kawaii Mayako Murai	

SECTION 3: REWRITING MYTH

The Interaction of Literature and Criticism. Feminist Imagination, Challenging the Canon 163

Reclaiming the Lost Code: Feminist Imaginations of the Fairy-Tale Genesis. Olga Broumas's and Nicole Cooley's Revisions

Vanessa Joosen

Anti-Fairy Tale, Revisiting *Blue Beard* 181

Anti-Fairy Tale and the Demythologising Business in Jane Campion's *The Piano*

David Calvin

Critical Musicology. Revisiting *Beauty and the Beast* 202

Monsters Beneath the Skin: Angela Carter's "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon" as Palimpsest in Snow Patrol's "Absolute Gravity"

Andrea Schutz

Cult Fairy-Tale Romance. Revisiting the Animal-Groom Tale 222

Bella and her Beastly Choices: Exploring the Fairy Tale in the *Twilight* Phenomenon

Natalie Robinson

Metamorphic Pornographic Fantasy. Revisiting Shakespeare 237

From Shakespeare to Carter: Metamorphic Interplay in Angela Carter's Pornographic Fantasy: "Overture and Incidental Music for a Midsummer Night's Dream"

Sabine Coelsch-Foisner

SECTION 4: RE-IMAGINING THE BODY

Body-Theatrical Performance 251

Postmodern Fantasies of Corporeality: Identity and Visual Agency in Postmodern Anatomy Theatres

Attila Kiss

Feminist Body-Studies 276

Monstrous Skins and Hybrid Identities in Catherynne M. Valente's *The Orphan's Tales*

Jeana Jorgensen

Cyborg Body 296

Cyborg Children, Illuminous Rabbits, Snowman: Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* as Speculative Fiction

Katarína Labudova

Re-fashioning Embodiments 316

Fairy Tale Fashionista: Angela Carter Dresses Wolf-Alice

Susan Small

SECTION 5: CREATING FICTIONAL REALITIES

Ludic Simulations in the Virtual Reality of Computer Games 330

Adventure Games in the Faerian Machine: Fairy Tales in Ludic Environments

Péter Kristóf Makai

Virtual FairyLands in Trans/Post-humanist Science Fiction 352

„...where we can dream ourselves into being” Science-fictional Fairylands as Transitional Sites to Post- or Trans-humanity

Sarah Herbe

Inventing a Fictitious Fairy Tale 367

Fictitious Fairy-Stories. Writing a Fictitious Character in *Lord of the Rings*

Gergely Nagy

Between Psychopathology and Fantasy 383

“Cover Your Eyes and Count to a Hundred”: Freud’s *Uncanny* and Guillermo del Toro’s *Pan’s Labyrinth*

Jacqueline Ford

SECTION 6: NARRATOLOGICAL NOVELTIES 403

Transmedial Narratology, Representations of Race and Gender

A Transmedial Narratological Reading of Racialized and Colonial Sexual Fantasies in the Libertarian Feminist Graphic Novel, Alan Moore and Melinda Gebbie’s *Lost Girls*

Ida Yoshinaga

Neo-Surrealism, Feminist Stylistics 421

(Re-)reading (Post-)Surrealism Through Dorothea Tanning’s *Chasm*: The *Femme-enfant* Tears Through the Text

Catriona Fay McAra

Affective Narratology and the Emotional Politics of Reading 442

Dancing in Worn Slippers: Narration, Affect and Subversion in Jeanette Winterson’s “Story of the Twelve Dancing Princesses”

Caroline Webb

Corporeal Narratology 460

A Corpusemiotical Interpretation of a Postmodern Alice Tale. Embodied Nonsense in Terry Gilliam’s *Tideland*

Anna Kérchy

List of Contributors 481

Index 489

List of Illustrations

Front Cover Piece: Tomoko Konoike, *Chapter Three Wreck* (detail), 2005. Acrylic, sumi, Kumohada-mashi (Japanese paper) and wood panel, 2200 x 6300 x 50 mm. Photograph by Keizo Kioku. © Tomoko Konoike. Courtesy of Mizuma Art Gallery.

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Plate 5: Tomoko Konoike, *Chapter One* (detail), 2006. Acrylic, sumi, Kumohada-mashi (Japanese paper) and wood panel, 2200 x 6300 x 50 mm. Photograph by Atsushi Nakamichi (Nasca&Partners). © Tomoko Konoike. Courtesy of Mizuma Art Gallery.

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Figure 10. Figure from Vesalius’ *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*, representing one particular stage in the process of dissection. Courtesy of Somogyi County Library, Szeged, Hungary.



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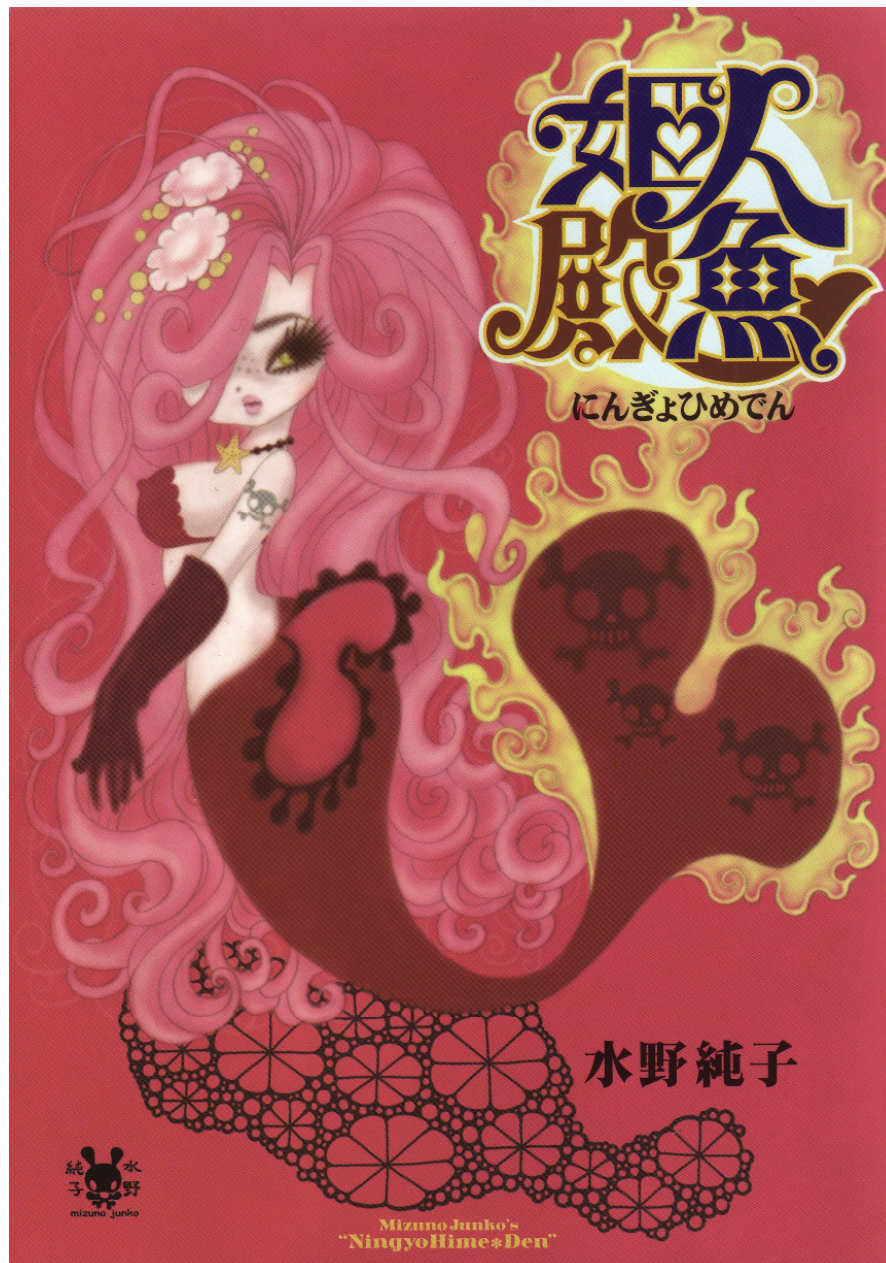


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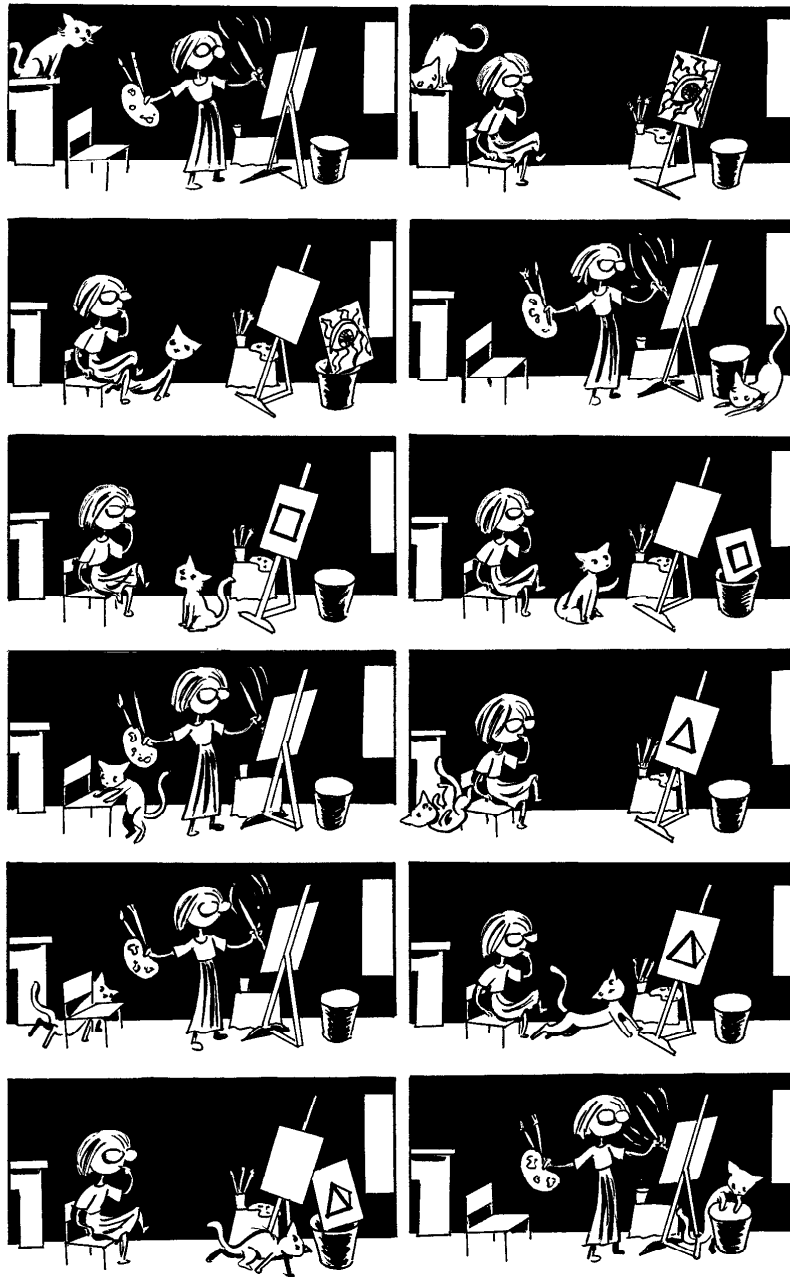


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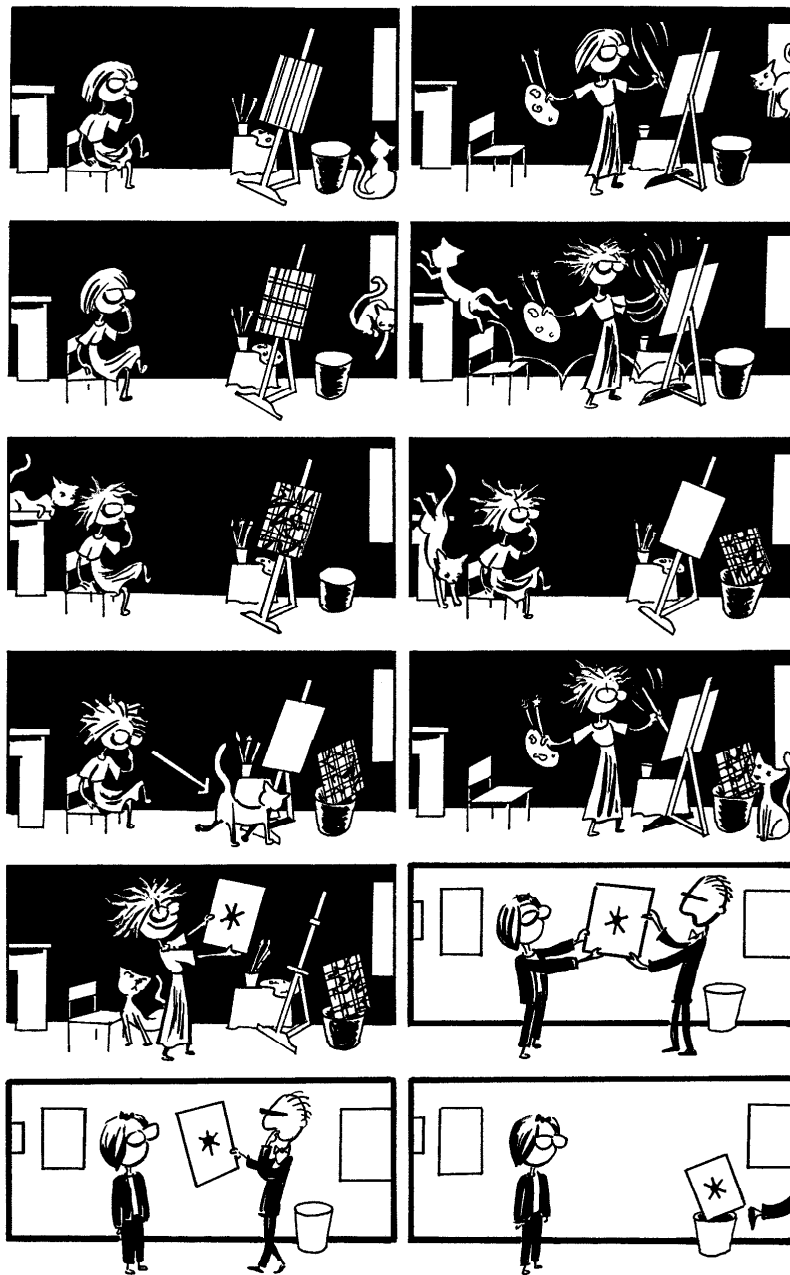


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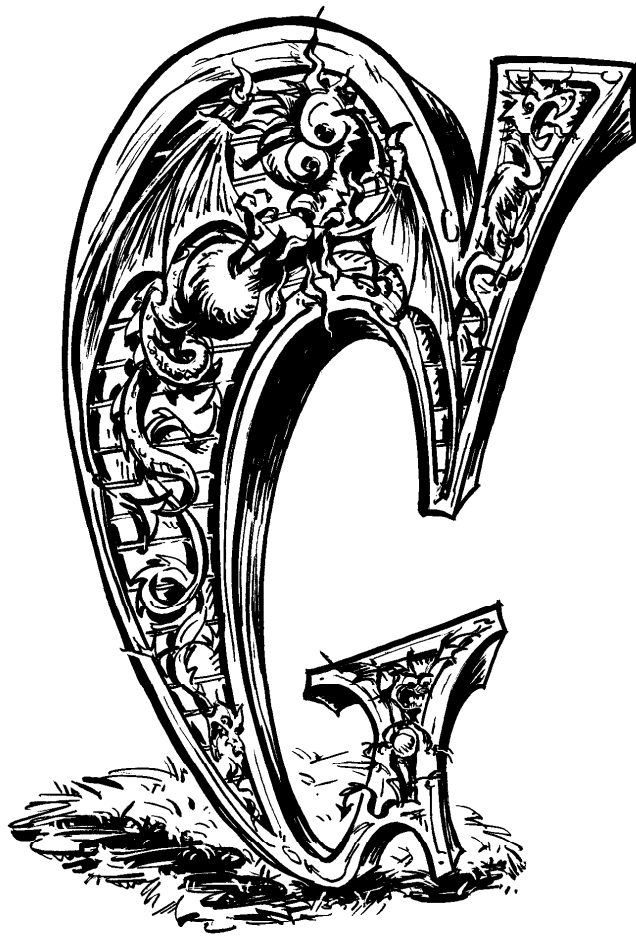


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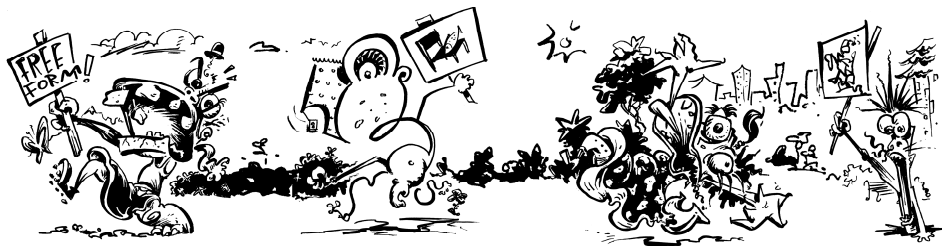


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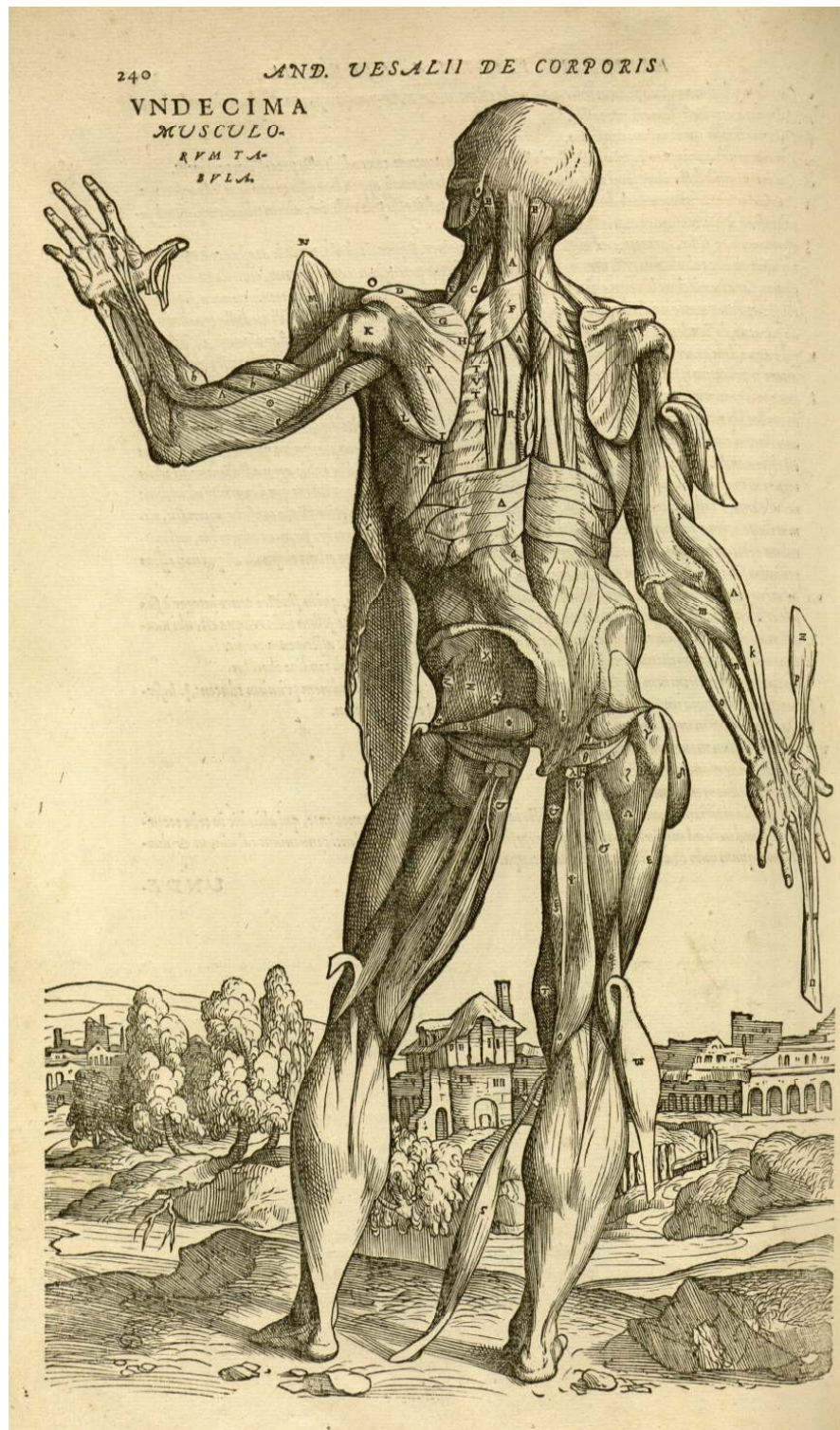


Figure 10. Figure from Vesalius' *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*, representing one particular stage in the process of dissection. Courtesy of Somogyi County Library, Szeged, Hungary.

FOREWORD

“When I examine myself and my methods of thought,
I come to the conclusion that the gift of fantasy has meant more to me
than any talent for abstract, positive thinking.” (Albert Einstein)

The extraordinary revival in the popularity of fairy tale literature and related modes of fantasy has generated much scholarly interest since the turn of the century. This collection of innovative and wide-ranging essays follows up on *The Fairy Tale After Angela Carter* conference (2009), which celebrated the ubiquity of the genre in contemporary culture. The conference gave a new impetus to fairy-tale criticism by bringing together such renowned figures as Jack Zipes, Marina Warner, Donald Haase, Cristina Bacchilega and Stephen Benson, as well as a new generation of international scholars eager to broaden the scope of the field. The event has stimulated exchanges and collaborations throughout the world. The members of this lively and open scholarly community respond to the spirit of the age, but they also exhibit the very features that we associate with the fairy tale tradition and storytelling itself – pleasure in sharing stories and debating ideas, intellectual curiosity and dialogue across disciplinary boundaries and national frontiers, a taste for novelty and experimentation, concern for cultural transmission, and a defense of progressive values (or so I want to believe). But it needed the enthusiasm and generosity of Anna Kérchy to take it upon herself to edit this rich, diverse and exciting collection of essays that reflects the exploratory spirit in which fairy-tale art, literature and culture is being produced and discussed today.

As the title indicates, the volume brings together contributions that give a sense of the range and variety of contemporary reinventions of the fairy tale in multiple and hybrid forms, styles and media, and maps out its fluid borders as it morphs into fantasy and its

avatars. Because fairy tales have always been 'stories to think with,' the present collection self-consciously addresses the constant interaction between theory and practice, creative and critical discourses that characterizes the genre. Artists and writers as diverse as Angela Carter, Terry Gilliam, Jane Yolen, Guillermo del Toro, Melinda Gebbie, A.S. Byatt and Kate Bernheimer have shown how this dynamic informs their creative engagements with the genre, while critics have frequently paid homage to significant fairy tale authors and acknowledged their impact on their work. Thus, the fairy tale invites us to question easy oppositions and divisions as it becomes a site of artistic experimentation and theoretical reflexion.

The fact that fantasy is a highly popular mode of cultural expression today may have to do with the nature of the genre itself, as it "inherently explore(s) boundaries and challenge(s) borders, and is therefore prime territory for the emergence of intermedial (and crossover) aesthetics," to quote Michelle Ryan-Sautour in this volume. Its success may in part reflect the growing impact of virtual reality on our lives, as well as a tendency toward escapism at a time of economic crisis, social divisions, political discontent and ecological threats. But as the essays demonstrate, it simultaneously fosters a recognition of the critical edge, subversive power, emancipating potential and utopian dimension of the genre. Because, to quote Carter, tales "tend to be overgenerous with the truth rather than economical with it," the book centrally engages with the fundamental paradox of the ever-renewed relevance and profound worldliness of this self-consciously fictitious genre that is not so remote from reality as we may think. Thus, the epistemological and ontological questions that fantasy raises are at the heart of Kérchy's collection, in addition to exploring the historical, cultural, aesthetic, political, ethical and technological specificities of its postmodern reinventions. From the cyber-salon to body politics, from consumer society to counter-cultural art forms, each essay resonates with

current debates and contemporary cultural practices. The volume thus builds from Jack Zipes' enumeration of the presence of the fairy tale in literature, theatre, opera, musical, film, art, ballet, television, publicity, cartoon, illustration and the Internet to encompass songs, blogs, TV series, fanfiction, video games, graphic books, manga, feminist pornography, fashion, and digital photography.

Ambitious in scope and content, the volume includes essays that present exploratory discussions of modern-day reinventions of the fairy tale and fantasy from a variety of perspectives that draw on emergent critical discourses, from intermediality and body theories to postfeminism. The contributors discuss the impact of technological transformations on the reading experience as well as the production and reception of fairy-tale culture and critical discourse (first section); the development of popular subgenres and intermedial art forms inspired by fantasy (second section); the phenomenon of fairytale rewritings for adults in the post-Carter generation to the present day (third section); representations and reconceptualizations of the body in the days of transhuman/virtual reality (fourth section); and it concludes with an important section on innovative methods of textual/semiotic analysis bridging narratology and cultural studies.

In this sense, the present volume fulfills Donald Haase's programmatic preface to *Fairy Tales and Feminism* by engaging with the contemporary fairy tale in its multiple aspects. It expands the field of inquiry across national and cultural boundaries and develops cross-disciplinary approaches capable of accounting for its complex reinventions, textual, visual, virtual and otherwise, with an emphasis on methodological/critical self-awareness and a renewed attention to story as discourse or intersemiotic system that boldly points to new directions in fairy-tale studies.

Prof. Dr. Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère

PREFACE

This collection of essays focuses on contemporary fictional repurposings and theoretical revisitings of fairy tales and fantasies. The studies in the volume interpret immediately contemporary, late 20th and 21st century artistic texts – literary, visual, performance, and applied artworks – distinguished by a 'postmodernist' socio-historical attitude on accounts of 'repeating' the fairy tale and fantasy traditions 'with a difference,' with the aim to playfully challenge the univocity of meanings and epistemic certainties. The analyses exploit postmodernism's potential as a critical, rhetorical, strategic practice: they move beyond thematic, denotative concerns of classic realist aesthetics by regarding the artistic text as a multidimensional experience invested with a historical, psychological, ethical, political, narratological, performative significance; and more specifically by focusing on the following aspects respectively. (1) They adopt the interpretive perspectives of a wide range of cutting edge literary- and cultural theoretical trends, such as psychogeography, ludology, body studies, queer theory, disability studies, trauma studies, feminist poetics, affective narratology, cognitive neuroscience, post-colonial criticism, post-structuralist post-semiotics of subjectivity, critical musicology, critical dance studies, and production design analysis. (2) They propose to explore the dynamic interaction between contemporary fiction and criticism, and focus on fictionalizations of postmodernist theoretical dilemmas, involving concepts of ambiguity, intersubjectivity, heterotopia, heteroglossia, alternate worlds, metamorphosis, simulation, translation, rewriting, irony, alterity, identity and textuality in their relation to gender, sexuality, corporeality, (dis)ability, race, or class. (3) Challenging the presumed timelessness and escapism of the fairy tale and fantasy genres, they examine 'symptoms' resulting from the postmodern historical positioning and socio-cultural context of the individual works or

oeuvres studied, tackling issues like the 'multimedial generic expansion' surfacing in fairy tale and fantasy-themes and -modes infiltrating mixed media genres such as graphic novels, computer games, popular music, or performance arts. (4) They deal with specificities of emerging subgenres as steam punk, urban fantasy, anti-fairy tale, posthuman science fiction, forensic crime fiction, and cult fairy tale romance, while revealing remainders and (sub)versions of the original 'mastergenres' in them. They explore recent phenomena – hyperread, fanfiction and cybercafés – which prove to be formative of our ways of meaning and fantasy formations. (5) They trace how the new millennial dimensions of knowledge-production necessitate epistemological reconsiderations resulting in repurposings and reformulations of traditional means and forms of storytelling, eventually leading to ontological reconsiderations. The analysis of postmodern faerial, fantastic meaning-(de)constructions discloses a combined attempt at demythologization and mythomania, along with a heterodynamic fusion between the classic sensation of emotionally invested, self-destabilizing wonder and the intellectually stimulating, metanarrative self-reflection.

The collection functions very much as a reader or even anthology in so far as it contains twenty-six articles offering an overview of the current state of affairs regarding postmodernist fairy tale and fantasy fiction and theory.

The first section discusses (post)postmodernism's expanded conceptualization of literacy through the new media of digital storytelling, cybercafés' participatory cultural productions, and the intermedial textualities of contemporary stage design and ballet performance. **Dorothy G. Clark's** chapter provides an introduction to new media/ digital theory while addressing what happens to Children's Literature when texts are adapted to digital format. The analysis provides case studies of tales adapted to digital format, *Aesop's Fables*, *The Berenstain Bears* and *The Baby-sitters' Club*

CD-I and CD-ROMs, to reveal the technical and analytic processes that aided the transformation of Children's Literature print texts into hypertext and hypermedia, and to explore new media's effect on the narrative experience and children's print text adaptations. **Helen Pilinovsky** reveals how Walt Disney's commodification of *contes de fées* peaks in the "princess-industrial complex" associating fairy tales primarily with the marketing of consumer goods which reinforce normative scenarios of engendering instead of traditional proto-feminist concerns. By means of a counterreaction, cyber-salons' online fairy tale communities hearken back to the précieuses' earliest salons of *contes des fées*: the purpose of the tales is to entertain and provide an outlet for frustrations free of charge, to reclaim tale-elements occluded by convention and commodification, and establish a new genre based on fanfiction and retellings adapted for a new generation of enthusiasts and scholars. **Andrea Wright** examines production design in Neil Jordan's *The Company of Wolves* and Ridley Scott's *Legend* to show how the cinematic fairy tale creates a satisfactory and convincing three-dimensional visualisation of the space of enchantment, by relying on the audience's preconceived notions of the genre's narrative development, leitmotifs and characters, a background knowledge of previous ocular fairy tales' imagery, literary tradition's descriptive qualities, and marvellous motifs pervading popular culture. The production designer meets and exceeds these spectatorial expectations, while negotiating the discourse between design and narrative, to provide a cinematic reality that has texture, depth and dimension, whilst also fidelity to the fairy tale genre in all its forms. **Dorothy Morrissey** initiates readers to the field of critical dance studies. A feminist analysis of contemporary French choreographer Maguy Marin's postmodernist ballet adaptation of Perrault's *Cinderella* celebrates ironic, demythologised performances of feminine identity and the carnivalesque clash of multiple meanings and potential subject-positionalities resulting from

the intertextual combination of codes authored by a variety of traditions. Performativity as a stylized repetition of culturally prescribed acts – as defined by Judith Butler – is simultaneously problematised in connection with gender, classic dance choreography, and the adaptation's medial shift.

The second section focuses on emerging new genres and styles, discussing urban fantasy, steampunk, forensic crime fiction, intermedial text/image, and grotesque cute guro-kawaii post-feminist visual narratives, in their relation with fairy tales, fantasies and postmodernism. **Adam Zolkover** traces the sketching of the borders of a liminal space between natural and supernatural, our geographies and those of an indeterminate and ominous faerie in urban fantasy by Neil Gaiman and China Miéville. They both draw on fairy-tale discourses, mapping Proppian structure and notions of the quest onto the world of everyday life, and on elements of folk legend to generate a sense of the uncanny. The purpose is to undermine our certainty about the dimensions and stability of the everyday-life world. The effect is to stretch the limits of the imaginative work that fairy tales are able to accomplish. **Mike Perschon** argues for an understanding of steampunk as a stylistic aesthetic, comprised of three key elements: technofantasy, neo-Victorianism, and retrofuturism. Demonstrating how etymological approaches and attempts at replacement terms have proved dead-ends with steampunk, the chapter shows that the body of work represented by books, art, and culture labeled steampunk share broad affinities. Steampunk is characterised by technologies with either weak or no relation to physical sciences, a loose adherence to nineteenth century and early twentieth century culture, and realizes worlds which evoke past visions of the future. **Ingrida Povidisa and Anna Kérchy** interpret Tim Burton's animated motion picture *Corpse Bride* as a postmodern pastiche fusing fairy tale, gothic formula and forensic crime fiction genres. A comparative interface of Burton's animated fantasy

romance and Kathy Reich's popular forensic crime novels points out similarities on formal narratological, symbolical tropological, and psychological levels; related to our society's primordial traumatic experience, the fear of death, compensated by fantasies of transgression, liberation and redemption. The protagonists both prove to be anthropologist detectives, shadowy border-crossers driven by a restless desire to give victims' back their stories. **Michelle Ryan Sautour** studies how the intermedial exchange between writer and illustrator functions as a constructive form of inter-authorial dynamics and speculates about the resulting effects on the reader. In Rikki Ducornet's collection *The One Marvellous Thing* decorated by graphic artist T.Motley the illustrations punctuate stories which ultimately evolve into graphic narrative; hidden faces and objects, grotesque and ineffable figures, lewd and playful drawings foster a pervasive sense of perplexity in a collection that defies definition. Otherworldliness infuses the ordinary to create an uneasy commingling of relationship narratives, indefinable creatures, erotic encounters, whimsical word games and picture play. **Mayako Murai** examines the post-feminist aesthetics of guro kawaii (grotesque cute) re-envisionings of fairy tales in contemporary Japanese women artists' work. Junko Mizuno's fairy-tale manga flaunts female sexuality in a grotesquely distorted way so as to disrupt gender stereotypes propagated by traditional tales. Miwa Yanagi's photographic recasting creates an all-female narrative space where desire is oriented towards a radical sameness. Tomoko Konoike's work, instead of retelling old stories, evokes a different narrative desire through its intensely sensuous texturisation. The fairy-tale uncanny gives the viewer freedom to explore alternative modes of desiring in a post-feminist and post-humanist age.

The third section problematises the revisionary potential of the postmodernist practice of rewriting. Chapters discuss the revisitings of classic fairy tales (Bluebeard, Beauty and the Beast, the animal

groom tale), literary mastermyths (Shakespearean fantasy), and canonical-critical postulates (fairy tales' genesis, oral and re/written tradition) via a variety of subversive means ranging from the emerging anti-fairy tale genre to feminist critical, fictional reimaginings, and intermedial musicological, teratological, pornographical countertexts. **Vanessa Joosen** tackles the fascinating interaction of fairy-tale literature and criticism. While feminist scholarship has addressed from the 1970s the unequal historical, canonical relationship between female sources and male transcribers, postmodern fairy-tale retellings form a creative, fictional discourse that supplements the academic feminist discussion at a point where it reaches its own boundaries and uncertainties. As Olga Broumas's and Nicole Cooley's fairy-tale poems demonstrate, contemporary fantasists take the liberty to re-imagine stories and voices of female fairy-tale tellers' oral narratives lost to academic criticism. As metatexts on the process of telling and meaning making they unsettle the fairy-tale code itself. **David Calvin** circumscribes the emergent *anti-fairy tale* genre as a subversive rescription that implements Angela Carter's "demythologising business" and challenges ideologically limiting roles, rules and archetypes generated by the traditional fairy tale, while extracting its latent subversive contents. A comparison of Jane Campion's cinematic anti-tale, *The Piano* with a literary equivalent, Carter's "The Bloody Chamber" reveals how revisionary narratives (of the Bluebeard-myth) attack original misogynistic foundations by re-exploring the tale from a neglected, marginal perspective (of Bluebeard's unnamed, silenced wife), so as to turn the latent into the patent, and divest the symbolic bloody chamber of any moral currency or authority. **Andrea Schutz** complements critical musicology with Medieval monster theory to explore the relationships between song and story in two adaptations of Beauty and the Beast's fairy tale. Angela Carter's "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon" and Snow Patrol's "Absolute Gravity" are both

concerned with transformation, monsters and palimpsests lingering in the skin and showing up in the surface/depth play, the 'sous-faces,' as well as the connections between bodies and texts, bodies as texts. Songwriter Lightbody redirects Carter's already 'palimpsestuous' story by means of music and lyrics, so that alternative pop, itself monstrous, becomes postmodern fairy tale. **Natalie Robinson** explains the cult success of Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series with the saga's popular reception as a fairy-tale romance. The excitement of predominantly young female fans generated by associations with the animal-groom tale eclipses the danger that surrounds the heroine and disguises potent notions of self-loathing, violence, and self-sacrifice in Meyer's discourse. The 'bestly choices' of heroine Bella Swan, take her down the dark fairy-tale path fraught with danger and desire; her trajectory of perceived empowerment leads towards victimization and death through transformation, thus becoming a reflection of her beloved, an irrevocably altered version of herself. Serious questions are raised about the power and purpose of fairy tales in contemporary literature for young adults. **Sabine Coelsch-Foisner** explores Angela Carter's "Overture and Incidental Music for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*" in terms of an experimental meditation infused with postmodernist strategies of permutation, disruption, and mythopoetic meta-discourse. Carter's text is neither a re-telling nor continuation of Shakespeare's 'tale,' but a celebration of its dense metamorphic texture in the manner of a pornographic fantasy charged with wordplay, critical comment, and parodistic intertextuality. Toying with critical musicology, Rushdie's concept of a 'fugue' is employed to show how Carter challenges mythic versions of femininity and masculinity – as Shakespeare had already done.

Section four concentrates on postmodernist re-imaginings of the body: fantasies of anatomized corporeality, monstrous skins and hybrid identity, speculative fictional cyborg bodies' simulations, and

fairy-tale fashionista embodiments. **Attila Kiss** relies on philosopher Jacques Derrida's idea of the "carno-phallogocentric" order of our civilization in order to investigate how the dissemination of corporeal representations in postmodern culture functions as a practice that is much more than a simple *commodification of the fantastic*. This postmodern anatomico-corporeal affinity – foregrounded by the revived tradition of the anatomy theatre – carries an epistemological stake, and anatomy as an endlessly mediatized and disseminated representation and testing of our fantasies of corporeality urges the subject to come to terms with the radically Other within him- or herself. **Jeana Jorgensen** adopts a poststructuralist feminist theoretical stance, including a performative view of identity, to make sense of monstrous skins and hybrid identities in Catherynne M. Valente's *The Orphan's Tales* at the intersection of folklore and the fantastic. In postmodern fairy tales skin remains a catalyst for metamorphosis but not an index of beauty and value; correspondences between exterior appearance and interior moral worth are complicated. Skin, instead of identifying one as good or bad, maps a life story, suggesting an intriguing explanation for *why* this Witch is ugly and bitter. Combinations of beasts and women explore alternate viewpoints by excavating layers of identity written upon and within skins. **Katarína Labudova** discusses how Margaret Atwood's speculative fiction (2003 *Oryx and Crake* and 2009 *The Year of the Flood*) explores *what if* the scientific biotechnological experimentation and environmental destruction were to culminate in their logically catastrophic consequences. Questions discussed include: the renegotiation of troubled relationships between nature and society, human and non-human, natural and technological; the conflict of the real and the fictional/ virtual as theorised in Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulations*; the possibility of defining 'humanity' in biological or cultural terms, and of remaining 'human' in a post-apocalyptic world of cyborgs and transgenic creatures.

Susan Small explores the connections between fairy tale and fashion, studying Angela Carter's fashion journalism, specifically her review of Roland Barthes' *The Fashion System* and the various items of clothing worn by the protagonist in her short story, "Wolf-Alice." In the same way as Carter subverts the norms of the fairy tale she rewrites in *The Bloody Chamber*, she destabilizes those articulated in *The Fashion System* through a systematic dislocation of the conventional signifier/signified relationship which she situates within a social structure operating not by the rules of convention but rather by those of fantasy.

Section five revolves around the creation, the credibility and the psychogeography of fictional realities' make-believe realms, locating the faerial/fantastic within computer adventure games' ludic environments, post-/trans-human sci-fi virtual reality's transitional sites, fictitious myths' mise-en-abyme, and the indefinite magical sur/realist psychopathology-fantasy borderline. **Péter Kristóf Makai** relies on game-theory and cognitive neuroscience to study fairy tales in ludic environments and ludic simulation in the virtual reality of computer games. While in the mid-1970s, cybertextual adventures have been made possible by advances in mainframe computing, since 1975-76, the creation of *Adventure*, millions of people have embarked upon Tolkienesque journeys. The analysis concerns: the conception of virtual reality as a possible space for fairy-tale adventures, the way such fantasy is transformed as it becomes a computer game, the postmodernist subversions of the written fantasy tradition on the computer which create a playable one in the process. **Sarah Herbe** examines how contemporary science fiction, Paul McAuley's *Fairyland* and Brian Stableford's *The Omega Expedition*, render the unimaginable imaginable by, paradoxically, taking recourse to topoi of fairy tales. In both novels, virtual fairylands are employed at sites of transition between humanity and post- or transhumanity. Criteria gained from Eugene Thacker's distinction

between extropianism and critical posthumanism aid in exploring whether a view of critical posthumanism can be fictionally reached, whether the traditional repertoire of fairy-tale imagery only perpetuates humanist ideals to promote a transhumanist stance of posthumanism, or rather sci-fi fairyland's point is to reveal the inherent contradictions and paradoxes in posthumanist and transhumanist thinking. **Gergely Nagy** embarks on an innovative revisiting of canonised high fantasy. Scrutinizing fictitious fairy tales, he examines how Frodo, the fictitious narrator of *The Lord of the Rings*, manipulates the representation of Sam to show parallels to several mythical-legendary stories inside the fiction. Among Tolkien's metafictional devices, his subtle incorporation of the principles and meanings that govern the fictional narrator's fictionalizing another figure is a less studied instance of how stories fare in culture, going from the status of fairy-stories through history and life as lived, finally ending up as 'unbelievable' fairy-story again as the hobbits return to the Shire. **Jacqueline Ford** explores the tensions between psychopathology and fantasy in relation with the Freudian uncanny in Guillermo del Toro's 2006 film *Pan's Labyrinth*. In contrast with the lack of readerly hesitation concerning fantasy and reality in traditional fairy tales where in terms of the story it all 'really happens,' Del Toro's magical sur/realist fictional universe inhabited by a fantasist girl-heroine teases with the ambiguity of the real-unreal divide. Ofelia pursued by the monstrous pale-man with eyes in the palms of his hands recalls the Batailleian horrific attraction by the organ of seeing, the Freudian uncanny's primal themes/scenes of seduction, castration, sacrifice, and provides a metacommentary on the spectatorial hide and seek.

The sixth section addresses narratological novelties emerging in postmodern repurposings of fairy tales and fantasies. The theoretically-informed chapters' topics include: the transmedial narratological reading of racialized and colonial sexual fantasies in a

graphic novel, the affective narratological study of the emotional politics of reading, the post-surrealist feminist stylistics of *écriture féminine*, and the corporeal narratological interfacing of body in text and text on body. **Ida Yoshinaga** deploys a transmedial narratological strategy towards the multi-panel sequences in the erotic graphic novel *Lost Girls*, evaluating the racial politics of pornographic pleasure within the double narrative of the comic-book medium, in order to recommend that Western sexualized storytelling directly engage empire and colonialism. A close reading of the contrasting verbal and visual narrative dimensions exposes ruptures between the political art of comics recontextualizing tales of iconic fantasy characters into real historical and material conditions, and the more universalist approach to erotic illustration, representating the racial “other,” beyond verbal narrative, with satirical flashes of exotic, colonized (is)lands, or of brown sex partners who remain imaginary, unnamed, and voiceless. **Catriona Fay McAra** re-reads (post-)Surrealism through Dorothea Tanning’s 2004 novel *Chasm* with a focus on the text’s feminist stylistics, especially the key-figure of the *femme-enfant* who curiously tears through more traditional narrative structures from within. The analysis of this “magical Sadean nursery rhyme” relies on feminist theorists from Carter to Cixous, Kristeva and Mulvey to problematise concepts of *écriture féminine*, abjection, sadism, polymorphous identity, epistemophilia, and narratives of ‘straight’ or reproductive sexuality. Multiple perversions take place in the little girl’s ‘anti-nursery’ or abject memory box, in the governess’ bedroom hoard of fetishes, in the false father’s ominous, sex ‘laboratory’ or even in the gaping, vagina-like desert chasm itself. **Caroline Webb** takes a feminist affective narratological approach to Jeanette Winterson’s postmodernist rewrite of the Grimms’ “The Twelve Dancing Princesses,” examining how the deployment of allusion and narrative voice influence the emotional politics of reading, and how affective reactions encourage a

conscious revisiting of the traditional popular form of the fairy tale. By assigning the redaction of the Story's events primarily to the princesses themselves, Winterson recasts the impersonal quality of many fairy tales as a kind of moral or emotional deficiency in her characters that requires a response from the reader, as the first person inserts an expectation not only of individuality but of moral agency into the tale. **Anna Kérchy** introduces a *corpusemiotical analytical method* – interfacing fantastic bodies in the text with fantastic texts on/by the bodies – with the aim to argue that in Terry Gilliam's film *Tideland*, as in contemporary rewritings of Lewis Carroll's Alice-tales the revisited Wonderland, provides a particularly appropriate meta-fictional terrain to foreground the postmodernist epistemological crisis. The confusion of meanings becomes curiously enacted upon liminal bodily surfaces, revealed as metamorphing depths of linguistic and imaginative confusion, peaking in the embodied experience of 'tongue-twisting,' 'tongue-in-cheek' nonsense.

Contributors are international scholars affiliated with art faculties of prestigious universities worldwide (including the Universities of Alberta, Angers, Antwerp, California State, Edge Hill, Glasgow, Hawaii, Indiana, Kanagawa, München, Newcastle, Ruzomberok, Salzburg, Szeged, Toronto, Western Ontario). They are specialized in the study of fantasies, fairy tales, myth and folklore, many of them are regular contributors to esteemed academic journals of the field (such as *Marvels and Tales*, *Children's Literature*, or *The Journal of Mythic Arts*, *The Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*), and are editors or authors of book-length studies on topics pertinent to the volume, or founding members of significant organizations dedicated to arts rooted in tales (like The Endicott Studio, The Hungarian Tolkien Association, or the Salzburg-based Interdisciplinary Research Centre of Metamorphic Changes in the Arts). The collection's prospective readership includes graduate and

postgraduate students, researchers, and academics with an interest in contemporary literature and arts, children's literature, fantasy, fairy tale, myth, cultural and literary criticism, multimedia studies, postmodern aesthetics and semiotics, as well as any of the current genres, styles, or theoretical trends analysed in the studies.

Although the chapters cover a wide range of distinct research fields, instead of a succession of separate, monologic, authoritative voices, the volume is permeated by a sense of dynamic dialogism, an endless, passionate critical discussion. Past and present, originals and rewrites, texts, intertexts and metatexts (co-)respond to each other, just like individual authors do, whether they occasionally elaborate on fellow-contributors' ideas, or systematically re- and revision in different lights recurring key concepts and crucial theoreticians of fairy tale, fantasy and postmodern scholarship, ranging from the Freudian "uncanny" and the Todorovian "fantastic" to the Kristevian "abject" and Walton's "imaginative resistance," from Jack Zipes on folklore, rewriting and the cultural industry to Cristina Bacchilega or Donald Haase on fairy tales, ideology and feminism, Marina Warner on imagination's creative powers, and Stephen Benson on contemporary fiction, the faerial and otherness within. Beyond the first two sections specifically consecrated to the analysis of new media and genres, generic and medial issues re-occur throughout the volume – often in connection with gendered representational, stylistic, performative dilemmas.

Angela Carter proves to be major point of reference in several studies of the volume. Firstly, because of her influential creative legacy urging new (critical/ feminist) re-readings of (fairy tales') old texts, marvellously encapsulated by her metaphor of "putting new wine in old bottles until the pressure of new wine makes the old bottles explode" – a line particularly relevant for a volume on postmodern repurposings. Secondly, because several contributors had the chance to participate at the wonderful *Fairy Tale After Angela*

Carter conference at the University of East Anglia in 2009, where they gathered to assess the current state of the fairy tale and fairy-tale studies thirty years after the publication of Carter's rewritten tales *The Bloody Chamber*, and first presented earlier version of their papers published in the present volume.

Since the very idea of this collection of essays practically came to being as a result of the thought-provoking discussions and challenging open-ended questions emerging at this conference, the editor expresses her deepest gratitude to Stephen Benson, an outstanding expert of the interrelations of contemporary fictions and fairy tales, for the organization of this most inspiring conference and his encouraging words concerning this project. Heartful editorial thanks go to Cristina Bacchilega for her kind support and suggestions for contributors, Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère for the instructive and friendly conversations that revealed for me the versatility of the fairy tale tradition and the crucial role it plays in (understanding) postmodern phenomenon, and Attila Kiss, head of the English department at the University of Szeged who provided space in the curriculum to engage with fairy tale and fantasy genres. The volume could not have gained its current form without Mayako Murai who offered invaluable help in negotiations with Tomoko Konoike with regards her marvelous painting *Wolf-girl* that features as the volume's cover-art piece, artists Terry Gilliam, Alan Moore and Melinda Gebbie, Tom Motley, John Ross, Julia Brigante, and Attila Szantner for generously respecting the academic purposes of the volume on providing permissions to reprint their artwork, and Patricia Schultz from the Edwin Mellen Press who kindly assisted the manuscript's formatting.

SECTION ONE: NEW MEDIA LITERACY

HYPERREAD, NEW LITERACY, E-TEXT

Dorothy G. Clark: Hyperread. Repurposing Children's Literature and Digital Storytelling

When Steve Jobs presented the iPad, combining the e-book format with multimedia capabilities, “books” and “reading” were alleged to have changed. But this “change” is already occurring in the world of children’s new media adaptations. Take the “change” when a child boots up *The Baby-sitters’ Club Friendship Kit* CD-ROM (1996), the digital adaptation of the Ann M. Martin series. The child is taken into a storyspace where the pleasures of reading are left behind for something new. The child finds herself in the chief babysitter’s bedroom, inside the Baby-sitters’ Club’s world. She is “living” in the club about which she once read. This series’ digitalized adaptation foregrounds the literary problematics arising when print text is adapted to digital format. There does not seem to be a story at all – at least not in any traditional sense of narrative – and the reader is now part of this new “story.” Digital storytelling is a common occurrence for an ever-increasing number of young people. The MIT Comparative Media Studies website refers to this “generation coming of age in the 21st century “[as] ‘generation.com’” (“Generation.org”).

While Generation.com may translate one medium into another, adaptation to new media can be unfamiliar and disquieting. We have long taken for granted that a story can change shapes; because “old” media do not challenge traditional linear plot structure, character development, or point of view, adaptation of print narrative into audio and video/film formats poses fewer problems. While film can fracture a traditional plot’s linearity, narrative deconstruction is not a *necessary* effect. New media technology, however, challenges

traditional linear narrative from the ground up. The adaptation(s) of print text to digital media transforms storytelling conventions into forms alien to familiar understanding of story: reading and literacy *appear* to be displaced.

However, as Charles Hatfield notes, “different types of text must be approached with different reading schemata.” (97) Understanding digital adaptations and texts requires a new framework. This essay suggests the lineaments of new reading schemata, providing a theoretical understanding of the material features of new media and how these affect story, narrative conventions, and the reading experience. Our focus is not on the user/reader/player, but on the *phenomenology* of the medium itself and its relationship to literary features – how the materiality of the medium influences content and reception. Echoing Marshall McLuhan’s “The Medium Is the Message,” Marie-Laure Ryan notes that “the different media filter different aspects of narrative meaning [...] the shape imposed on the message by the configuration of the pipeline affects in a crucial way the construction of the receiver’s mental image” (3). With this idea as guide, we focus on how the material properties of the medium affect content and its reception to explore what adaptation means. Story cannot be separated from its medium, for it is a function of the technology in which it is conveyed. This idea is axiomatic and results in changes in the narrative text, the role of reader, and the reading experience itself.

This analysis of children’s new media texts examines four features of digital technology: hyperlink, hypermedia, interactivity, and Lanham’s concept “bi-stable oscillation” (25). These features provide a gateway to understanding how the medium is challenging and transforming children’s narrative – in particular, their affect on plot, point of view, and character. The study focuses on the adaptation process of three popular children’s print texts to interactive CD-ROM format: *Aesop’s Fables*, *The Berenstain Bears*,

and *The Baby-sitters' Club*. Sidewalk Studio, a Philips Media development group, constructed these adaptations in the 1990s with the collaboration of their print text authors for educational purposes. Beginning with digital texts reflecting traditional narrative structures (e.g. e-books), we move to a more open-ended, nonlinear, interactive mode and end with the *Baby-sitters' Club* adaptation in which the problematics of the apparent disappearance of traditional narrative conventions are understood within the context of the material demands of the new medium.

From E-Book to Cyberdrama: A New Media Journey

The electronic book represents a first attempt to adapt old “content” to the new environment by putting print text on the screen. Essentially print on a screen – on a monitor or handheld device like the Kindle – electronic books make little use of the new medium’s capabilities. This limitation of electronic book format, with its total reliance on old technology, is captured by a student’s comment in Margaret Mackey’s *Literacies across Media*, ““The pictures don’t do anything? It’s just, like, the story book on the computer?”” (99) Students exploring this format, notes Mackey, wanted audio and video capabilities, seeing little reason to discard the print text for a format that seemed redundant.

Key features of this new medium – hypertext, hypermedia, and the resulting interactivity – would have changed these children’s experience. Reviewing these basics helps to understand changes in the textual presentation and reading experience. Hypertext, the way information is organized and presented, creates the most common and significant changes in how we read. While print text’s structure is fixed, linear, and two-dimensional, hypertext’s surface is dynamic, elastic, and flexible. Ideas and images open to multiple levels. The familiar hypertext organization is presented through the other fundamental structure of electronic text, hypermedia. Hypermedia

denotes the use of multiple media: text, graphics, animation, video, sound, a format we are accustomed to seeing on our “windowed” computer screens. This “windowed”/collage design is constructed by borrowing one type of media “property” into another – what the entertainment industry calls “repurposing” (Bolter and Grusin 45). By radically changing the linearity of print text, hypertext and hypermedia change the nature of narrative as well as the relationship of reader to text.

Both hypertext and hypermedia produce the third distinguishing feature of digital texts: interactivity – in which the reader-now-become-user/player has control over the narrative outcome of his experience and the story. What is experienced as interactivity is a function of databases, best described by Janet Murray’s distinction between procedural authorship and interactor (the reader/user); the interactor has “agency” but not authorship and plays “a creative role within an authored environment” (152, 153) – one that is created by computer programmers. While not “authoring” the text, reader/player’s agency decenters traditional ideas of text and author, reshaping the reading experience through its influence on plot, narrative point of view, and character.

Interacting with the text produces another aspect of the electronic reading experience that Lanham describes as “bi-stable oscillation.” Lanham uses the rhetorical concepts of transparency and opacity to demonstrate the unique experience of “reading” electronic print. Unlike the “unintermediated thought” of “transparency”, the “textual surface” of the electronic screen – its windowed surface – is like the “self-conscious,” “opaque” style, of the shape of letters, words, and tropes (4). But this awareness is not stable; instead, Lanham perceptively suggests we experience “bi-stable oscillation,” because “The textual surface has become permanently bi-stable. We are looking first AT it and then THROUGH it” (5). This bi-stable

oscillation (or bifurcated consciousness) characterizes our experience with electronic print.

These characteristics suggest the beginning of “different reading schemata” that grow from and conform to the properties of electronic print: interactive, no longer dominated by the sequential imperative of print text or traditional narrative, and held in a perceptual and conceptual tension (bi-stable oscillation), which, unlike traditional print text reading, privileges play. Play for many theorists has become a distinguishing feature of electronic print; as Lanham notes, “[I]nteractive text[s] . . . above all . . . [turn] purpose to play and games” (50). “Play” may well describe the aesthetic experience of this new medium.

With these new media characteristics in mind, we turn to the electronic book format’s adaptation of children’s literature texts – a format, which as Mackey’s students noted, makes limited use of the new technologies.

“Click and See”

Electronic book adaptations evolved a standardized model called an “engine.” According to Rebecca Newman (Sidewalk Studio’s General Manager), the format was considered appropriate for all picture books. The original print versions’ text and illustrations were scanned, “cleaned up” with electronic graphic tools and enhanced with animated “gags,” cartoon-like visual jokes, like a starfish giggling when “clicked.” The audio track read the text aloud, allowing readers to hear and view entire sentences or single words (Interviews). This “engine” allows any picture book to be translated into electronic format. *The Living Books* series by Broderbund most successfully exemplifies this approach.

Although these formats offer interactivity employing the audio and video capabilities of CD-ROMs, they are primarily animated

storybooks. *Living Books'* titles emphasize the close and privileged relationship of print to the digital format by typically packing the CD-ROM adaptation with a paperback print text. Broderbund's Dr. Seuss adaptation *Living Books' Dr. Seuss' Green Eggs and Ham* (1996) provides an example of this format. This CD-ROM opens with music and graphics. An animated Sam-I-Am greets the reader, introduces the story, and offers two choices: "Read to Me" or "Let Me Play." "Read to Me" combines text with animation; the story is performed in an animation as different colors highlight words and phrases being read. In this mode, there is no interactivity; however, an options link on the initial interface allows readers to choose a particular page on which to play. Play amounts to clicking on different elements on the page for repeated "surprises;" e.g., clicking on the image of "green eggs and ham" makes the food drawing dance. Although the production values are high (graphics, sound, actors), the media's range of possibilities is narrow. Playing amounts to a "click and see" process, simply initiating the visual jokes with no opportunity for reader "agency." The electronic reading experience of "bi-stable oscillation" and its component of "play" are minimally present; the experience is more like "interactive" picture books in which the reader opens windows or pulls levers to view similar "visual" surprises. The Broderbund *Living Books* do not exploit the power of the new medium.

Sidewalk Studios, Serendipity, and the Making of Edutainment

Sidewalk Studios' digital adaptations of children's print text took advantage of the new medium's capabilities. Between 1989 and 1996 Sidewalk specialized in children's titles, bringing traditional storytelling and a professional level of animation and sound into the digital world. Sidewalk's new media team worked with the print authors and a team of educators to exploit the convergence of computers, entertainment, and education. They created CD-I¹ and CD-ROM adaptations exploring the pedagogical and aesthetic

implications of moving children's stories into the digital realm. The result was one of the first constructions of *edutainment*: a digital genre combining the pleasure and entertainment of traditional storytelling and the playfulness of games with educational elements.

The Sidewalk Studio team wanted to open up the print-text to deliver its fictional world, taking advantage of the possibilities afforded by the computer's power and the audiovisual display capabilities of the CD-ROM format. Newman recalls critical issues affecting this new storytelling adaptation: How does one "adapt" plot conventions of beginning, middle, and ending to an interactive medium? Since there is no single plot trajectory – the user experiencing multiple story outcomes – how does one maintain dramatic tension when the creator/author is no longer the one in charge? Further, if the user can leave the program after three or twenty-five choices of actions, what constitutes a satisfying ending? (see Newman Interviews 2002-2003)

The three print-text adaptations discussed below grapple with these structural and aesthetic concerns. Each adaptation explores alternative ways of establishing a convincing fictional world in CD-ROM format. Sidewalk's adaptation of Aesop's *Fables*, *The Dark Tales of Aesop* (1992), the most print-like, offers a point of departure for discussing the nature of digital adaptation. Despite its familiar format, it was intended to illustrate the benefits of random access over videotape.

Aesop, Fables, Games, and All That Jazz

Sidewalk Studio's *The Dark Tales of Aesop* exemplifies edutainment. The disc presents twenty-four fables using a multicultural theme, historically contextualizing Aesop as a black slave living in Greece. Creative Director Gary Drucker cast Danny Glover as Aesop and added a jazz score by Ron Carter. Hypermedia is at a minimum; the disc uses audio narratives with slide-like illustrations resembling

wood-cuts and a low-level of interactivity. The beginning is a simple animation featuring Aesop entering the “Temple of Scrolls,” unfurling the scroll of the fables, revealing an array of illustrations, one for each story and activity. Aesop’s choice initiates the presentation of the disc’s limited interactive features – the screen “unscrolls” revealing the hyperlink structure for the reader/user.

The Dark Tales of Aesop offers a menu of five choices: “All the Fables,” “Choose a Fable,” “Games and Mazes,” “About Aesop,” and “The History of the Fables.” In the first two links, the reader/user has the familiar experience of being read a story, listening to Glover’s narration while watching a sequence of illustrations. “Choosing a fable” brings up three more options: “Hear the Story,” “Learn the Moral,” “View the Pictures.” The first option lets the reader/user hear the tale read as she views still pictures. The second link explicates the moral; a brief animated sequence shows how a sentence can sum up the teaching of a whole story. Finally, the third option, the pictures-only link, lets the child retell the fable in her own words as she flips through the pictures.

“About Aesop” and “The History of the Fables” further evidence the educational intention. Like illustrated audio-lectures, these links discuss what history knows about Aesop and how the stories were transmitted from oral recounting to printed texts and ultimately to electronic versions. To balance this strong didactic quality, Sidewalk Studio added a final link dedicated to play. “Games and Mazes” includes simple interactive games, like character-based mazes, as rewards for exploring the fables.

Despite the menu links and games, the narrative structure of this program remains traditional, a picture book composed of several fables. With the exception of the “lecture links,” this disc resembles the Broderbund *Living Books* series. Like them, this adaptation doesn’t challenge our expectations of narrative structure, reader role,

or narrative point of view. The program uses hypermedia's capabilities to create a program akin to annotated stories. The narrative point of view is in traditional third-person with the reader/user a listener in conventional storytelling fashion. Although the fracturing of the narrative is less evident than in the other adaptations, this program lets us see the transition from print to digital text in its rudimentary use of hypermedia and hyperlink.

Ursine Edutainment: Adapting the Berenstain Bears

Sidewalk Studio's adaptation of the Berenstain Bears moves further into the digital medium, challenging narrative conventions. This adaptation grew from a collaboration with authors Stan and Jan Berenstain, children, and teachers. Unlike the *Aesop* annotated stories, the plot-centered narrative was opened up to create the spatialized storyspace typical of the digital medium. This disc incorporates traditional narrative with an interactive dimension using the medium's hypermedia capabilities. Negroponte's architectural metaphor of the theme park captures the experience of this new medium. The "reader" is transformed into a navigator, engaged in "spatial wandering" (72). *A world evoked* takes the place of dramatic tension – a digital poetic informing the adaptation of children's print-texts to CD-ROMs. Digital storytelling draws readers into a world that the reader/user understands spatially and explores – navigates – according to hyperlinks and media objects.

These structural phenomena are integral to the Berenstain Bears' adaptation. To "evoke" the Berenstain Bears' world, Drucker identified an informing central theme: the reader finds family-based solutions for many first-time experiences, like starting school. The disc offers the opportunity to enter the Berenstain Bears' world and become like the bear cubs. The disc's title makes this intention clear: *The Berenstain Bears on Their Own and You on Your Own*. The design team created two parallel parts of Bear Country: A traditional

narrative animation and a “map” of Bear Country – providing the interactive part of the program, the “interface” to the multiple hyperlink entrances. The reader/user can move back and forth between the story and its corresponding activities; Drucker calls the effect “an overarching structure of a world that had both stories and games within it” (see 2003 Interview).

The disc initially privileges narrative in a fifteen-minute animation, which introduces the story’s theme of becoming responsible. To go to the school fair by themselves, the Bear Cubs must prove to their parents that they are old enough to go “on their own” by completing a number of chores and helpful activities. After the animation, the program presents the map of Bear Country, showing locations of the animated story. The “map” allows the reader/user to enter Bear Country and, by modeling the actions of the Bear Cubs, go to the fair too. The reader/user enters the animated narrative and moves into “second person” to navigate through the links; each is a “stage set” in which the child/user becomes the Bear Cubs, learning to be responsible.

The most significant change to character and point of view, as well as to the relationship of the reader/user to text and author, is embodied in the idea of second person and the “avatar” phenomenon. With first or third person narrative, the reader/user identifies with a character not herself. Second person in new media aesthetics means not only narrative point of view, but also the conflation of the reader/user with the story’s protagonist and its narratee so that, as Drucker explains, “It is almost like yourself walking through things and reacting” (2003). For theorists, the concept of the avatar conveys this notion of second person. Murray points to the Greeks’ dramatic use of the mask: “In digital environments, we can put on a mask by acting through an avatar. [...] a graphical figure like a character in a videogame” (112). Through interactivity, the reader/user enters the digital storyspace and becomes the protagonist. For Manovich, this

digital storytelling trait means the “user represented as an avatar exist[s] literally ‘inside’ the narrative space” (82); from the perspective of digital technology “*new media turn most images into image-interfaces and image instruments*” (183). Intrinsic to digital storytelling is the readers/users’ power of choice as her “protagonist-avatar-you” navigates these “image-interfaces.” The reader/user stands inside and outside the storyspace, confounding intra- and extradiegetic roles. The protagonist fractures into three distinct persons – the narratee (the “you” to whom the “story” is addressed), the author/narrator (the “you” who makes choices), and the story-protagonist/avatar (the “you” who navigates the storyspace).

Although plot has a beginning and ending, it is a function of the choices of the reader/user. This is the world of digital storytelling – *a world in which narrative and games converge*. This disc illustrates how “adaptation” to the digital realm means the evocation of the print-text’s world and the spatialization of narrative through hyperlink and hypermedia so that the reader/user takes part in the narrative space, in the digital construction of “second person,” the “you” in the storyspace. Reading becomes navigation and game playing, replicating the thematic core of the adapted text; and “reading” involves the experience of embodiment, the avatar, and that doubleness of awareness – “bi-stable oscillation” – intrinsic to the digital experience in which one *looks at* (manipulates links) and *looks through* (becomes immersed in the narrative) the text.

Digitally Adapting: Fantasy Friendship in *The Baby-sitters’ Club*

In its radical departure from traditional narrative structure, Sidewalk Studio’s adaptation of *The Baby-sitters’ Club*, by Ann M. Martin, into the CD-ROM *The Baby-sitters’ Club Friendship Kit* demonstrates digital storytelling principles, providing the clearest example of an adaptation from print-text sensitive to the properties of digital media. Assuming the reader/user is familiar with the print-

texts, this adaptation has no reference to any familiarizing narrative. Upon signing in and supplying a password, readers/users immediately find themselves in the world of the Baby-sitters' Club; traditional linear narrative is replaced by the spatialization of links typical of digital media. The reader/user engages in an interactive experience in which the second-person point of view dominates, effecting the confounding of protagonist, narratee, and author typifying digital media.

The first step for the design team was to understand The Baby-sitters' Club's world and central themes. The series presents a group of eight friends of middle school age who organize babysitting in their community. Collaborating with the series' author and her editors, the design team concluded that at the series' heart were the wish to grow up and the desire for autonomy and responsibility. Newman recalls, "We saw an interesting mix of traditional and feminist attributes" (see 2002-2003 Interviews). The girls are feminist in their creative entrepreneur ventures and traditional in feelings and relationships.

The challenge was to construct a world evoking these characteristics. After surveying girls in the target age group, the design team determined the young reader's fantasy was to become a member of the Baby-sitters' Club. Building on this fantasy and the developmental need to be a part of a group, the team used joining the Baby-sitters' Club as the entry point into the program, converting the print-text's literary themes into an "interactive theme," making the reader/user the ninth member of the club. The introductory interface presents a graphic of Claudia's bedroom, where the Baby-sitters' Club meets every week, and begins the reader/user's storytelling experience: a visit to a fantasy place *without a plot line*. Instead of reading or watching a narrative, the reader/user *becomes* a babysitter by participating in activities that reflect the actions of the fictional Baby-sitters.

Using hypermedia, this interface engages the reader/user, combining video clips, mini-narratives, and “theme park” hyperlinks. Claudia welcomes the reader/user in a brief video, inviting her to sign in and “join the club.” The reader/user becomes a part of the Baby-sitters’ Club world. For example, a shared journal with contributions from both the user and Babysitter Club characters features entries that change daily, replicating the experiences of the fictional characters who write about their babysitting experiences; users (with a secret password) have the opportunity to write their own journal entries. The program takes the underlying theme of the Baby-sitters’ Club – the importance of girls’ friendship and how they help one another to mature and be responsible – and provides activities ranging from a calendar that tracks babysitting appointments to producing their own business cards.

The Baby-sitters’ Club Friendship Kit shows what occurs when a print-text adaptation to CD-ROM format exploits the properties of new media. Although this adaptation abandons traditional linear narrative, its values, fantasy, and themes are rooted in the original print text now transmuted into interactive modalities. Plot becomes spatialized. The interface of Claudia’s room presents the reader/user with hyperlink choices and an offer to enter this world as a character; the reader/user is given “agency” as she navigates through hyperlinks becoming a participant in the story. Because these links, through video clips and narrative insertions, provide readers/users with traditional narratives, they are also placed in the familiar narratee role. However, the absence of linear narrative structure challenges our understanding of adaptation and take us into new territory – unlike adaptation of print-text into the “old media,” which do not challenge the aesthetic integrity of narrative. These changes instruct us about the different meaning of adaptation of familiar narrative elements into new media illustrating the principle that a story is a function of the technology in which it is conveyed.

Future Links

New media adaptations create a different kind of storytelling – inseparable from its parent text, demanding a different relationship to story. Although this new aesthetic’s ramifications remain unclear, we can affirm certain themes. Computer technology and the current generation are deeply linked; children overwhelmingly prefer the “interactive/game” versions of adapted texts to the simple transfer-to-the-screen of print-texts, as in Broderbund’s *Living Books* series. Publishers using the new iPad² technology point to advances in children’s digital storytelling. New media has also created powerful changes in the reading experience by promoting a child reader’s autonomy. Children are able to read without adult participation and enter an adult-free world into which they can escape for education and entertainment. And, the experience of play and pleasure inherent in new media – entertainment rather than didacticism – may be even more important than the sense of mastery and autonomy offered by computer literacy.

New media’s centrality in the lives of children has implications for the classroom and pedagogy. Research indicates that new media does not mean the end of traditional notions of literacy; children may be acquiring a deep sense of narrative as they “play” computer games (Green, Reid, and Bigun 26-37). Other researchers observe that new technocultural conditions may be affecting children’s cognition, creating a new view toward learning that orients the reader/user to play, not work; to entertainment, not traditional education; and to experience and pleasure, not passive ingesting of information. Rounding out this new vision is Marsha Kinder’s idea of a media-informed construction of the child who “actively collaborates in the production and negotiation of cultural meanings” (26). We are on the edge of a new world with practical and theoretical implications involving new media, storytelling, education, and childhood.³

Notes

1. The CD-I machine was a dedicated electronic box with a proprietary operating system. As CD-ROM drives became standard on PC computers, these eclipsed the CD-I as well as provided different options. The CD-I is still used in Asia and Europe.
2. Penguin has advertised these new “book” possibilities on YouTube <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jdExukJVUGI&feature=player_embedded>
3. An earlier version of this paper was published under the title “Hyperread: Children’s Literature, CD-ROMs, and the New Literacy” in *The Lion and the Unicorn*. 2006. 30. 3: 337-359.

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CYBER-SALONS, PARTICIPATORY CULTURE

Helen Pilinovsky. *Salon des Fées*, Cyber Salon: Re-Coding the Commodified Fairy Tale

Deviating sharply from its traditional roots of proto-feminist social and political commentary during the time of the *contes des fées*, under the auspices of Walt Disney the fairy tale was commodified. The 'conventional' form of the fairy tale now served a very different set of conventions: fiduciary, as well as behavioral. The subsequent development of what some now term the Princess Industrial Complex (PIC), the marketing of goods associated with popular/conventional fairy tales, was well under way by the 1960s, and is now, fifty years later, in its heyday.

One of the most explosive/experimental forms of revision currently in play is the kind that is not commodified in any sense of the word, as in, no one is paying for it (aside from the readers and fans who contribute, and contribute generously, of their own volition). Not Hollywood producers (with all due apologies to Pixar, subversive as it is), nor Broadway producers (adapting from Disney's roster) ... nor even august literary publishers. One might call it orature at its finest: I choose to term it the cyber-salon. This medium hearkens back to the earliest salons of the *contes des fées*, when the purpose of the tales was to entertain the tellers, to provide an outlet for their frustrations, and secondary and tertiary to that, to establish a new genre and a new hunger for its content among eager consumers.

Building upon the work that had been done by writers and critics such as Angela Carter and Jane Yolen, author and editor Terri Windling had perhaps more of a role in the renaissance of the fairy tale than any other individual in establishing a *market* (a term not to be taken lightly) for the sale of fairy tale retellings: with the numerous anthologies and novel-length retellings which she commissioned and sold, she successfully demonstrated the ongoing

commercial appeal of fairy tales for adults. However, it might have been in her incarnation as the founder and editor of the *Endicott Studio Journal of the Mythic in the Arts* (JotMA 1997-2008) that we saw one of the greatest nascent shifts in the transmission of the fairy tale's new form, for the content? Was *free*. Discussed eagerly on then excitingly-new message boards, such as the now-venerable *Surlalune Fairy-Tale* website, its content helped to create a framework for a new kind of a fairy tale community: *the cyber-salon*.

Fairy tale and fantastic ... fan-fiction¹ ... as it might be called, created by artists such as Mia Nutick, Seanan McGuire, S.J. Tucker, and Catherine Valente, exemplifies the vigor of the experimental artists of the 1960s and 1970s who retold the fairy tale while adapting it for a new generation of enthusiasts and scholars. These artists employ newly available technological and social strategies for reclaiming elements of the tales that have been occluded by convention and commodification, strategies which are more akin to the salons of yore than they are dependant upon the auspices and approvals of any commercial agency.

Grounded in a fundamental misunderstanding of the fairy tale, PIC takes what had been a communal process of story telling and identity formation and reconfigures it into an easily consumable product. Although there is much debate over the oral roots of the fairy tale (see, for example, Ruth Bottigheimer's controversial *Fairy Tales: A New History* (2009), in which she argues that the fairy tale is primarily a literary genre), its communal origins are undeniable. The literary fairy tale began in 17th century France with the tradition of the *contes des fées*, the tales of the fairies, which addressed the issues which were of primary concern to women. As Terri Windling phrases it, the authors of the *contes des fées* used their stories to critique the "social matters of immediate concern to their class: marriage, love, financial and physical independence, and access to education ... [conventions under which] arranged marriages were the norm,

divorce virtually unheard of, birth control methods primitive, and death by childbirth common.” (“Les Contes de Fées”) Their authors, more than 2/3 of them female, were as concerned with providing solutions for one another’s concerns and entertainments to earn one another’s company as they were with selling their tales. That dynamic changed drastically over the intervening years, culminating with the efforts of Walt Disney & co.

Disney, perfected the process of the homogenization of fairy tales that continues to this day. As Jack Zipes says in “Once Upon a Time beyond Disney,” “Most important for Disney and other producers of fairy-tale films was the manner in which they could ‘hook’ children as consumers not because they believed their films had artistic merit and could contribute to children’s cultural development, but because they wanted to control children’s aesthetic and consumer tastes.” (91) That control is currently predicated upon the PIC the system whereby the ideological basis of the persona of the heroine of the commodified fairy tale, the princess, is used, first, to reinforce heteronormative social values, and second (not necessarily in this order), to sell products associated with them, beginning with the tales themselves, and continuing through their trappings and accessories. The Disney corporation has recently branched out from its empire of fairy-tale products for children to provide both a line of engagement rings and a line of wedding dresses, thus bringing us full circle to the Disney bassinet, and, again, then, to the indoctrination of child consumers.

Disney currently pursues an audience composed almost exclusively of children – female children, and the women that they will become. However, the *product* that is being sold to their child audience is not a natural fit: is it aspirational. It proffers a relatable vision of adulthood to a powerless juvenile audience.

From the first, Disney has emphasized the connections between their tales and *tradition*; the majority of their princess *oeuvre* is introduced by the (literal) book, the book form framing the cinematic narrative and implying a fundamental resemblance. However, the tradition in question evolves visibly from one Disney movie to the next: the *volken* dwarves of 1937's *Snow White* are seen again in the peasant costumes of *Cinderella*'s mice; the shape-shifting fairies on 1959's *Sleeping Beauty* are a visible amalgam of the 1950's Godmother of *Cinderella* and the 1953 Tinkerbell of *Peter Pan*, and from movie to movie, our princesses *dream*. They dream that "Someday, my prince will come ..." (*Snow White* 1937), because "In dreams you will lose your heartache, whatever you wish for, you keep ..." (*Cinderella* 1950), and, having "danced with [him] once upon a dream" (*Sleeping Beauty* 1959), a neat tautology of sorts is established. The passivity of the Disney princess is passivity of the "active dreaming" variety, and eminently plausible in light of the precise commodity being sold – the mass-produced, one-size fits all, happily-ever-after brand of the fairy tale.

The Disney princess is not intended to be a role model: she is intended to be a product, and a carrier of products. In movie after movie, the helper figures (and, occasionally, the prince) are heroic, while the princesses are charming mannequins, pretty dolls; consider the conclusion to *Sleeping Beauty*, as our godmothers zap her ballgown – pink! blue! pink! blue! Little girls aren't intended to aspire to *be* the princess, but to very literally *play* with her (pink! blue!). The problem is, little girls grow up; and their play becomes their template, the Princess Industrial Complex becomes the Wedding Industrial Complex; and they become the playthings.

If there is an alternative, it lies in the newest of toys, the internet, and in the variety of interactions which it allows, leading to the creation of a new kind of community, one which hearkens back to

the purpose and structure of the original *salons des fées*: the cyber-salon.

Terri Windling can quite accurately be deemed the most recent ‘godmother’ of the fairy tale, like Mary Catherine d’Aulnoy before her, updated for the 20th century. Born in 1958, Windling’s career in fantasy publishing began in 1979: Windling had moved through the ranks at Ace Books rapidly enough to make executive editor after only five years. Windling was largely responsible for creating the Ace Fantasy imprint: there, Windling discovered many of the mainstays of contemporary fantasy, including, but not limited to writers like Pamela Dean, Charles de Lint, Gregory Frost, Ellen Kushner, and Delia Sherman. Moving to Tor Books in 1986, Windling created groundbreaking series that were deeply rooted in the tradition of telling and retelling: from the trope of the fairies’ departure and subsequent return in the *Borderlands* series to the more straightforward anthologizing of contemporary fairy tales in the *Snow White, Blood Red* series to the full immersion of the *Fairy Tales Series*, which featured novel-length retellings by authors such as Patricia McKillip and Tanith Lee. Active as a writer and artist in her own right, Windling’s Boston home gave rise to the artists community Endicott Studio (located on Endicott Street), also loaning its name to her website, *Endicott Studio: the Journal of the Mythic in the Arts*. Co-edited with Midori Snyder and featuring the art and fiction, poetry and criticism of the fairy tale field’s cutting edge artists, Endicott Studio/JotMA operated from 1997 to 2008, during the heyday of the internet. Winner of the World Fantasy Award seven times over, in 2003 Windling wrote:

While there are excellent print journals that focus specifically on mythology and fairy tales (such as *Parabola* and *Marvels and Tales*), I’ve long wished for a magazine combining articles on myth (for the general reader rather than the specialist) with a

look at how myth and folklore are used by contemporary writers and artists. Tom Canty once told me (with a world-weary sigh), “You know, sometime when you want to sit down you just have to build the chair first.” Since there’s no magazine out there precisely of the kind I’m looking for, we’re building one here at the Endicott Studio in the form of this on-line *Journal of Mythic Arts* – more of a stool at this point than a full-fledged chair, but it’s a beginning [...] and perhaps one day we’ll see many such chairs drawn up to the great table of Story. (Windling 2003)

To continue that metaphor, it seems like what Windling provided was, not just content or a place to sit and read it, but an effective set of blue-prints for DIY chairs: while JotMA initially mimicked the top-down approach familiar from the world of publishing, with an editor accepting, rejecting, and perfecting the work of contributors, generational shift produced a very interesting result. The first generation of Windling’s readers contributed through conventional channels, accepting the hierarchy of editor and edited, platform and content: the second, in turn, has adopted a more ‘open source’ strategy which dovetails neatly with the antecedents of the fairy tale and the original *salon des fées*.

As many a teacher attempting to explain plagiarism to a generation acclimated to the notion that information wants to be free has recently observed, we are witnessing a paradigm shift in terms of how we relate to information and its ownership. Observing the recent spate of cover songs and remade movies, we see that the ‘open source’ attitude has its antecedents in the days of the authorless oral fairy story, when the important thing was the *performance* of the tale, and less the tale itself. Each retelling of a movie or remix of a song is less a new thing or a faithful one, more a case of a new production than anything else. But each production needs an audience, and in this new tribe-culture, each small subsection is creator and audience

alike, in a remix that uses people for its elements as much as their stories. Thus, the cyber-salon.

There are two elements behind the nature of the cyber-salon: the nature of the fantasy, and its application. Today, the ‘happy ending’ no longer ends in marriage: instead, a largely female group of writers are examining alternatives, community first and foremost, in fact as well as fiction. Endicott Studio acted as a locus for fairy-tale fanatics of all sorts and all stripes. In concert with what we might call other first-generation fantastical internet phenomena like *The Green Man Review* and *Surlalune Fairy Tales*: the key difference is that Endicott published essays and fiction as well as reviews and annotations, inspiring readers to experiment with their own formats and presentations. The result? Today, there is a thriving online community of poets and critics and writers working in unison to weave a collectively acceptable and accessible message, asking no fee and giving no edict but opinion. Online magazines like *Cabinet des Fées* and *Goblin Fruit* provide a loose confederation, but it is less of a hierarchy and more of a collective. Even more important, the destabilization of authority makes every producer of content – author, artist, musician, or other (Other?) – into an equal-opportunity source of inspiration and creation.

Consider, for example, Seanan McGuire’s song “Wicked Girls Saving Ourselves.” Inspired by one of Mia Nutick’s pendants (Nutick is a poet and writer herself, author of the collection *Wicked Fairy Apologist* and creator of mixed-media pieces of jewelry which incorporate text from old books of fairy tales), “Wicked Girls” began as a bit of filk on the internet, a song-poem intended for the entertainment of speculative fandom. McGuire is a very popular budding writer who began her career with fanfiction: astoundingly prolific, shortly after acquiring an agent, McGuire sold three series, two of which are currently in print. She has over 20 “pendant prompt” songs now online, “Wicked Girls” being the best example

by dint of its astonishing popularity. Although McGuire looks at endogamous children's stories as opposed to exogamous fairy tales in this particular poem, the message pervades her work and certainly applies equally to both disciplines. She writes:

Dorothy, Alice and Wendy and Jane,
Susan and Lucy, we're calling your names,
All the Lost Girls who came out of the rain
And chose to go back on the shelf.
Tinker Bell says, and I find I agree
You have to break rules if you want to break free.
So do as you like – we're determined to be
Wicked girls saving ourselves. (McGuire 2008)

McGuire is currently working on a further collaboration of this piece with indie singer-songwriter S.J. Tucker, whose work is much in the same vein, and it is safe to say that its message applies to the community as a whole: in refusing to conform to the paradigm of the princess and embracing the role of the rebel, not just as a lone figure but as a member of a movement, they are normalizing the position, expanding it, and developing it to produce a valid alternative. The plural is crucial.

Of Tucker, Phil Brucato writes: "As digital DIY demolishes the traditional music biz, artists like Tucker define themselves on their own terms. Snubbing the status quo, such artists tour heavily, press their own discs, distribute through the internet and produce their albums on portable computers" ("Pixie in Overdrive," 20). Brucato defines this movement as an outgrowth of *neotribalism*, a movement consisting of loosely defined self-made communities: "Linked by festivals, alternative lifestyles, expansive spirituality, and the internet, these tribes fuse geek chic, polyethnic fashions and radical philosophy with a fierce rejection of mainstream society" (23). While

the movement is deliberately resistant to labeling and conformity, it does seem to run parallel to our observations of the socially-motivated work of the cyber-salon. Tucker has produced five albums in approximately fifteen months, much of them inspired by the mainstream publications of author Catherynne M. Valente, with whom she has a dual-current relationship: each, in turn, inspires the other. Describing one of her songs, she says

My friend Catherynne M. Valente, author of *The Orphan's Tales*, saw me spin fire and wrote me into one of her stories as a feisty young girl who wishes more than anything that she could dance in the flames with her foster father, the firebird who raised her. After reading the story, I composed and recorded 'Firebird's Child' ...” (24)

Specifically, Tucker credits the Scheherezade-like feminism of *The Orphan's Tales: In the Night Garden* (2006) and *The Orphan's Tales: In the Cities of Coin and Spice* (2007), and Valente's cult-classic tale of a sexually transmitted city, *Palimpsest* (2009).

Palimpsest tells the story of four people who cross the border into a true shared-world fantasy on the same night, when each of them separately sleeps with a person marked as belonging to the city, and dreams of being within its precincts. The result is a novel-length commentary on the nature of community, insularity, and dreaming, of both the desirous and the lucid varieties. Topically applicable to the culture of neotribalism, *Palimpsest* garnered tremendous support from the fan community, inspiring trailers, songs, art, and a full-fledged tour. One character, and a very unusual set of circumstances, inspired something more: a highly idiosyncratic, highly successful, multiple-award-winning novel-within-a-novel, soon to become a novel in its own right.

Valente's *The Girl Who Circumnavigated Fairyland in a Ship of Her Own Making* is perhaps one of the most interesting extant examples of the application and enactment of cyber-community tale-telling. It began as the favorite novel of a character within *Palimpsest*. Recalling her childhood, one of our four protagonists – fantastical November, who alone of her quartet has no last name, and who is, arguably, our primary heroine – considers her introduction to the narrative upon which she consciously models herself. We read:

006.332 *The Girl Who Circumnavigated Fairyland in a Ship of Her Own Making*. H.F. Weckweet, 1923. Gleiss and Schafandre: New York.

The book was small, in a brown leather cover embossed faintly with a little girl standing naked on a raft, straight as a mast, her stance determined, holding up her dress as a sail.

November had read it exactly 217 times, not counting unfinished perusals... The girl in the book was named September, and she had known this was meant for her, a message from Hortense Francis Weckweet and her father. Perhaps if the girl had not been called September, November would not have read it 217 times. "*I am not brave,*" she thought, "*but I do have a dress. I have that. A dress like a sail.*" (124-5)

The sail is a metaphor for agency, autonomy, and the means to enact one's will: it is a talisman that November clutches at, often, a credo that comforts her in her travails. As for the dress which it references? Taking place over the course of days, November's garb changes, but its function as armor and vehicle and standard alike does not. Later we read:

I will stand upon my raft until the Green Wind comes for me," November said gravely. "My dress; my sail."

“That’s lovely. Scripture?”

“Yes,” November answers with fervency: clasped hands, wet eyes. “Hortense Weckweet.”

“How marvelous! Her daughter Lydia was such a fine sculpter” November gapes as the carriage clatters on, and Carimira offers nothing more. (204)

Maintaining the mystery, indeed, neither does Valente – except for the introductory paragraph of *Fairyland*, a paragraph which then serves as the jumping-off point for the novel itself. (220-221) We are left with the uneasy sense that reality has crossed back upon itself: that two (or more) realities have intersected with one another, echoed one another, interacted with one another in a fashion that is left deliberately veiled. Has November’s heroine come before her? Has her author? That resonance is deliberately heightened in Valente’s next piece of work: *Fairyland* itself.

Like so many, in the summer of 2009, Valente found herself in dire financial straits. Unlike many, she proposed a novel solution (if you will pardon the expression): to write the novel-within-a-novel mentioned in *Palimpsest* which had inspired so much interest and post it online, for the perusal and judgment of the marketplace. On June 11th, 2009 in her online journal she wrote:

I can’t bear to simply put up a donate button. It’s not in me. I don’t want charity – I want to keep us afloat. I want to trade something wonderful for a way to keep us alive. And last night I had a thought, a bolt of lightning thought. What I can do is this. Over the course of the *Palimpsest* tour, people asked me one thing more than anything else. *What about The Girl Who Circumnavigated Fairyland? Is it a real book? Will you write it?*

And I said no. It’s impossible, a YA book that is a book-within-a-book in a deeply non-YA novel. I even said no to a very

sweet six year old. Starting Monday, I will start posting chapters of a full-length novel version of *The Girl Who Circumnavigated Fairyland in a Ship of Her Own Making*. I will be writing it in real time, posting every Monday. It will be free to read – but please know that the sheer calories to make my brain create it require funding, and I would very much appreciate your support. Pay whatever you like for it, whatever you think it's worth. (Valente 2009b)

For the next five months, Valente updated *Fairyland* like clockwork. And on the 19th of October, she publicized the news that *Fairyland* had been chosen for publication by a traditional and prestigious press: Feiwel & Friends, the young adult imprint of publishing giant Macmillan. She wrote: “it strikes me as wonderful and astonishing that something so very, very Web 2.0, born and bred and thriving online, can be so embraced by the traditional publishing world, can become a hybrid of the old world and the new, so very like *Fairyland* itself.” (Valente 2009b) What, then, is the nature of Valente's *Fairyland*?

Fairyland is in many ways a more polished revision of *Palimpsest*, returning to its themes and demonstrating how September could have been a template for November, how November was in point of fact a template for September in a very postmodern Ouroboros of metatextuality. Although *Fairyland* does not directly reference *Palimpsest*, the similarities between the two are marked: from the green hair and commanding personalities of Casimira and her child-sized *Fairyland* counterpart, the Marquess, to the nature of dreams in their worlds, and, not least of all, the overall moral of the tale. As one character puts it,

“It's getting very late, November,” said a young man ...

“My name is September...” she said softly. Her voice was weak, as it often is in dreams.

“Of course, October,” said the young man. “You must speak twice as loudly just to be heard in the land of dreams. It is something to do with physicks [sic]. But then, what isn’t?” (Ch. 13)

That young man is, in reality (or, at least, *Fairyland*) the Wyverary, offspring of a wyvern and a library, specializing to the early letters of the alphabet, and September’s boon companion. Though he may be a specialist of sorts on dreams, given that they fall within his purview, he is also speaking to the fact that in a culture of community, it is one’s companions who will, paradoxically, help one to find one’s voice.

Our heroine, September, is enticed away from a boring afternoon of washing pink-and-yellow teacups in Omaha by the tricky and charming Green Wind under the Persephone Clause of Fairyland. Feeling abandoned by her soldier father and subject to what might be termed the benign neglect of her strong and wonderful mechanic mother, September is susceptible to the allure of an adventure and the opportunity to leave them in return, even as she is shaped by their good examples. When the Green Wind tells her that the price of entry to Fairyland requires a lie, September bites her lip and says: “I want to go home.” (Ch.1)

September is initially deeply concerned with the concept of having been chosen for her adventure, with having been judged *worthy* of her position: as they come closer and closer to Fairyland proper, she asks the Green Wind if he comes here often (“here” being Omaha, to abduct little girls). While the green Wind coyly dodges her question, his Leopard reassures her: “We came for you....Just you” (Ch. 2). September’s specific adventures, as enchanting as they are, are not necessarily the point of this examination: what is, as is so

frequently the case, the lesson that she learns along the way. After numerous adventures, not yet at the climax of her journey, she is told:

No one is chosen. Not ever. Not in the real world. [...] You are not the chosen one, September. Fairyland did not choose you – you chose yourself. You could have had a lovely holiday in Fairyland and never met the Marquess, never worried yourself with local politics, had a romp with a few brownies and gone home with enough memories for a lifetime’s worth of novels. But you didn’t. You chose. You chose it all. Just like you chose your path on the beach: to lose your heart is not a path for the faint and fainting. (Ch. 17)

Thus, Fairyland the realm and *Fairyland* the text become apt metaphors for the neo-tribal cyber-salon. The invitation may be direct, or oblique, but it is the choices made along the way and the quality of the contributions as judged by one’s self and one’s peers that deem one fit for continuing participation, an ongoing process of literary natural selection. Since its publication in 2009, prior to its print publication, *Fairyland* has won awards as varied as the Best Web Fiction category in *CultureGeek*’s online competition ahead of both “Dr Horrible’s Sing-A-Long Blog” and webcomic *XKCD*, and the prestigious Andre Norton Award for Best Young Adult Science Fiction and Fantasy. Not too shabby for a novel-within-a-novel that might never have been written if not for a recession and a group of dedicated friends and compatriots ...

Like the original authors of the *contes des fées*, the individuals who participate in the *cyber de fée* use their medium to produce subversive social commentary which would not be able to find expression through more conventional channels. Much like their 17th century predecessors, in producing their content, they create their own audience, and their own successors, in a cycle that is as magical

as anything in the tales could be: fairy godmother after fairy godmother passing the torch (or wand ... or pen, as the case might be). Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy would be proud.

Notes

1. It is important to note that this medium differs significantly from both original fairy tales, and retellings created for profit, hence the use of the term “fan-fiction,” which, in contemporaneity, is perhaps the closest relative of the salon.

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PRODUCTION DESIGN

Andrea Wright. Imagining the Fairy Tale: Production Design in Neil Jordan's *The Company of Wolves* and Ridley Scott's *Legend*

The three-dimensional visualisation of the space of fantasy and the animation of characters is the fundamental difference between the literary and screen fairy tale and is the most significant contribution the moving image has made to the genre. But, as David Butler recognises, there are unique challenges that face the fantasy filmmaker. Not only do they have to construct “alternative worlds with different landscapes and architecture to our own,” but they also have to “create a sense that it is a functioning world not just limited to isolated set-pieces.” (79) The cinematic fairy tale must provide simultaneously a satisfactory and convincing interpretation of the fantasy space. It is the recognition of this concern that provides an opportunity to go beyond simply assessing how successful the screen fairy tale is as a translation of the oral or written tradition, to engage with broader questions regarding the role of design in cinema.

Léon Barsacq, in his chronological history of production design, has noted that although the moving image borrowed from the theatre in its early years, it soon began to distance itself from theatrical conventions of set decoration and static backdrops “toward a certain form of realism, toward authenticity” and in doing so created a new aesthetic particular to cinematic forms. Barsacq distils this discussion into a succinct observation, that “one of the fundamental requirements of cinema [is] to give the impression of having photographed real objects.” (7) ‘Real objects’ in this sense refers to the impression of being made material and tangible rather than being a slavish reproduction of the quotidian, and the application of this basic premise is relevant to all genres and is necessary in consolidating the moving image and the experience of the spectator. C.S. Tashiro develops Barsacq’s thesis by observing that

[t]he tie between film and spatial reality gives the medium an immediate hold on our imaginations. It also narrows expression to the external, visual, material, and spectacular and in the process puts filmmakers in an uneasy power relationship with reality. As filmmakers serve the script, they shape reality to fictional ends. The production designer sits at this conjunction between the world outside the story and the story's needs (4).

The medium's use of spatial reality, depth and three-dimensionality, instantly creates parity between the film image and quotidian reality through comparison and recognition. The function of production design, therefore, is to maintain the link between the fictional world of the screen and the lived experience of the audience. As Charles Affron and Mirella Jona Affron point out, "[d]ecor, in fact, roots the fiction in the tangible world necessary to the performance of the unreal" (123). Richard Allen's discussion of "projective illusion" perhaps makes this relationship clearer, he writes that although "the cinematic image provides an *impression* of reality; it is actually an image and not the reality it appears to be" (2). To a degree, persuasive deception is a requirement of the medium or, as Allen describes, "the form of illusion central to our experience of the cinema is one in which while we know what we are seeing is only a film, we nevertheless experience that film as a fully realised world" (4). It is not so much suspension of disbelief, therefore, that is the essential condition of becoming immersed in visual fantasy, but rather the opportunity to be apprehended by the image. Conversely, some productions create fictional worlds and at the same time deliberately expose their construction. This has been a feature of metafictional screen fairy tales such as *The Princess Bride* (1987), the *Shrek* series (2001-2010) and *Enchanted* (2007). Such an approach, as Patricia Waugh writes, "breaks down the distinctions between 'creation' and 'criticism' and merges them into the concepts of 'interpretation' and 'deconstruction' (1984, 6). However, many fairy

tale films, certainly those considered in detail here, are not as consciously self-reflexive.

One of the means by which the spectator's experience of this projective illusion can be sustained is through the use of genre. Allen suggests that Hollywood in particular is reliant on audience's expectations of film texts. He argues that

[g]enres mitigate the difficulty of understanding a given text by providing a framework of expectations within which that text can be understood. Genres specify in advance the content of the narrative. Any given genre film, such as the western or horror film, draws on themes and images from other texts (the generic intertext) that blur the boundaries of the individual text. Because the generic intertext already forms a part of the spectator's stock knowledge, the individual genre film simply taps into a reservoir of themes and images already possessed by the spectator (115).

In the case of the screen fairy tale, the "stock knowledge" of the spectator is based on previous cinematic contributions to the genre, the descriptive qualities of the literary texts, and the broad dissemination of fairy-tale motifs throughout popular culture. It is because of this, as Zipes argues, "[j]ust as we know – almost intuitively – that a particular narrative is a fairy tale when we read it, we seem to know immediately that a particular film is a fairy tale when we see it." (1997, 61) Setting aside for a moment the anticipated narrative development and progression, audiences have preconceived impressions of princes, princesses, evil queens, enchanted castles and forbidden forests that assist in forming their expectations of a cogent ocular fairy tale and allow them to become immersed in fantastical worlds. As Farah Mendlesohn observes, "[t]he immersive fantasy is set in a world built so that it functions on

all levels as a complete world. In order to do this, the world must act as if it is impervious to external influence; this immunity is most essential in its relationship with the reader [or viewer]" (2008, 59). It is the role of the screen designer, therefore, to meet and exceed expectations and provide a cinematic 'reality' that has texture, depth and dimension, whilst also ensuring fidelity to the fairy-tale genre in all its forms.

For Barsacq, the apparent neglect of production design is influenced by the fact that in the audience's register of discernible components of cinematic texts, design is one of the least noted and one of the hardest to examine. The set is certainly vital to the overall production but at the same time, inconspicuous, or as Barsacq puts it, "[t]aken in its broadest sense, the film set is a discreet but ever-present character, the director's most faithful accomplice" (122). In *Sets in Motion: Art Direction and Film Narrative*, Affron and Affron state that it is their aim to isolate the role of the set designer and give credit to these key contributors to the moving image who are regularly eclipsed by stars, directors and cinematographers. The most important contribution to the study of set design that the Affrons have provided is a useful schema through which to categorise the function of the set within a film. According to their system, the set can be classified as belonging to one of five levels: "Set as Denotation," "Set as Punctuation," "Set as Embellishment," "Sets as Artifice," "Set as Narrative" (Affron and Affron 1995). Fundamentally, these range from pedestrian backdrops through to the set itself *becoming* the narrative. In some respects, however, the Affrons' taxonomy is limited in that it is concerned with the set and location only and does not take into account the other elements of design crucial to the performance space such as furniture, props and costume.

Tashiro attempts to address this omission by using Christian Norberg-Schulz's discussion of existence, space and architecture (1971). Norberg-Schulz describes architecture and space as series of

circles that extend from the human subject, which includes graspable objects, furniture, the house, the street and landscape. Tashiro adapts this methodology to describe the elements of design that extend from the screen characters (18). Costume, jewellery and make-up are the first circle from the human body as they have the closest proximity to the subject. The second circle is “objects,” a broad category that encompasses props that range from weapons or tableware handled by the protagonists to vases and pictures that dress an interior. The third circle is comprised of furniture. The fourth circle is the “livable”, or the places that the characters inhabit (29). This is followed by the “walkable” streets and landscapes. He concludes with “cosmic space” which he describes as transcendental space that is removed from the everyday world and is incurred through religious or spiritual experience primarily in science fiction narratives such as *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) (36-7).

The work of the Affrons and Tashiro provide a useful starting point for a detailed discussion of design within the screen fairy tale and augment the need to foreground this neglected area. Within the genre, there are two distinct modes of visual foundation. While characters often share similarities and the stories borrow from established narrative patterns, it is the setting or location that can provide the most significant differences. For one group of films, the fantasy space is created through the use of the studio or soundstage, which allows for a constructed and controlled environment, key examples are *The Dark Crystal* (1982), *The NeverEnding Story* (1984) *The Company of Wolves* (1985), *Legend* (1985), and *Labyrinth* (1986), the other group of films, which, *The Princess Bride* and *Willow* (1988), utilise extensive location shooting and a natural landscape. It is the former that is of particular interest here.

It would be possible to regard all screen fairy tales produced under studio conditions as effectively sharing similar concerns. For example, they could predominantly be understood as conforming to

what the Affrons describe as “sets as artifice” in that they utilise an artificial backdrop that is both elaborate and central to creation of the fantasy space. Choosing to create an environment for the narrative eliminates the potentially problematic nature of location shooting. As Jane Barnwell writes, “often designers prefer to build, because they can control exactly what the setting will include, whereas in existing locations there is often a conflict of imagery that can confuse and detract from the overall design concept” (19). But, it is perhaps more productive to explore them further by considering the way in which they approach the relationship between the narrative and design. In some instances, design is developed in accordance with the needs of the story, but the screen fairy tale also presents examples of design leading the narrative and so is at odds with the supposition that the set and props service the story.

The Company of Wolves provides an example of a film that was developed directly from a literary source. Director Neil Jordan describes in an interview in the *Monthly Film Bulletin* how the movie came from Angela Carter’s script adaptation of her own story that was originally intended as a short film for the British television broadcaster Channel 4. (Taylor and Jenkins 265) After funding for a feature film was secured by producer Stephen Woolley it was the script that was developed first and the look of the film evolved later. The sense that the narrative was central to the project is present throughout Jordan’s discussion of the filmmaking process, particularly as he emphasises that whilst the design of the set and the special effects had to be something that would surprise and delight audiences, these elements had to be supported by the story. As Jordan puts it,

[t]he effects had to be hugely satisfying, and they had to be things you had not seen before. And the sets and the feeling of

the forest had to be immense and full of wonder. But if it didn't work as a story, there was something wrong. (266)

Besides a limited number of exteriors, including the opening shots of the family car approaching Rosaleen's (Sarah Patterson) home, the brief exchange between her father, mother and sister on the doorstep of the house, and later in the narrative when the villagers congregate in a small church, the film was entirely filmed at Shepperton Studios, Middlesex. The set, designed by Anton Furst, is largely comprised of woodland but is intercut with scenes inside various cottages: Rosaleen's home, her grandmother's and that of the peasant girl who inadvertently marries a wolf. The colour pallet is dominated by muted browns, blues, greens and greys which makes the intermittent flashes of red, Rosaleen's cloak and lipstick, and the flowers at her sister's grave, even more striking. Likewise, colour and texture distinguish the Huntsman (Micha Bergese) who wears a heavily embroidered rich blue jacket that sets him apart from the dowdy villagers, while Rosaleen's eighteenth century inspired story of a witch's revenge on her former lover is marked by its pastel shades of pink, blue and white and elaborately decorated costumes. The woodland and village set is heavily stylised, the trees are gnarled and their branches bare, and the vaguely medieval cottages, comprised of stone, wood and straw, seem to be an organic extension of the landscape. There is an overriding sense that the environment is infertile, cold and forbidding and that the vibrant and curious Rosaleen is at odds with her surroundings.

It should be emphasised that the majority of this story is contained within the dream of an adolescent girl and therefore its primary purpose is not verisimilitude. This, the Affrons suggest, is an advantage of the studio constructed set as "[a]rtificial sets mediate the narrative relationships between the material and the emotional; they objectify a nexus between exterior and interior, between physical and

the psychological universe” (115). The environments of *The Company of Wolves* are the expression of Rosaleen’s fantasy: the giant replicas of her toys that make her sister’s flight through the forest even more nightmarish, the stylised fairy-tale woodland and village and the dominance of the colour red that mirrors the bright scarlet lipstick she wears as she sleeps. These elements are reflective of her troubled psychological condition as she makes the transition from childhood to womanhood. Her dream-state effectively legitimises the unreality of her vision and at the same time recalls common fairy tale motifs that allow the audience to comprehend the fantasy space. Jordan confirms that “[w]e tried to build each set so that it reminded you of something you had seen before, like Hansel and Gretel’s cottage. In that sense, I wanted the culmination of the film to be the recognition that this is the story of Little Red Riding Hood” (Taylor and Jenkins 265). This link also pronounces the film’s literary origins and supports the omnipresent narrative voice that is constant within the diegesis. *The Company of Wolves* is a series of illustrated short stories contained within Rosaleen’s dream, which in itself provides an overarching narrative framework, and the production design elaborates and embellishes the details meaning that the story(ies) and their fairy tale origins, that Jordan wanted to preserve, inform the aesthetic.

The basic premise offered by the Affrons “that it all starts with a script” seems to accurately describe the filmmaking process that was employed during the making of *The Company of Wolves*. However, it does not appear to be an accurate description of the practice that culminated in *Legend*. Director Ridley Scott, in a number of interviews published around the time the film was released, acknowledged that he had been planning for some time to make a movie that referenced the mythological or the fairy tale. (Brown 21 and Jones 22-7) As preparation, he reports having read a broad selection of classic stories from both of these genres, but soon

rejected an adaptation of a well-known tale because, “[i]t was far easier to design a story to fit the medium of cinema than bend the medium for an established story” (Jones 22). It is clear that Scott’s approach from the outset was to create a narrative that had visual and cinematic possibilities, making his choice of expression here particularly telling. He goes on to explain that the fundamental nature of this quest-centred story, which was eventually written by Scott and author William Hjortsberg, meant that ocular elaboration was critical, he stresses that “[t]his visual interest was necessary to carry the basic simplistic story” (24). By conceding that the narrative is elementary, Scott places greater emphasis on design, in that it must be spectacular enough alone to distinguish the film. This methodology contradicts the basic rules of set design put forward by Barsacq who argues that

[i]t must never be forgotten that sets enter a film as background, while actors occupy the foreground. The spectator has no time to analyse his sensations; therefore such settings must be characterised without any equivocation. (125)

Working in opposition to these ‘rules’ is distinctive of Scott’s films besides *Legend*. He is often described as a ‘visualist’ and accused of a preoccupation with the aesthetic and stylistic qualities of his movies rather than the narrative structure or characterisation. Scott was trained as a graphic designer at the Royal College of Art, London, and early in his career worked for the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) as a set designer. He has cited this artistic training as providing him with a desire and ability to oversee all aspects of design within his cinematic work. (Johnston 6) This is a mode of filmmaking that is concerned, above all, with preserving a creative vision, but for some critics, his obsession with breathtaking imagery has incurred an inequity between story and depiction. Geoff Andrew writes that “Scott perhaps is a victim of his own advertising

background; an erratic, often clumsy storyteller, all too prone to settle for a cheap and facile visual coup” (262).

Despite this censure, Scott’s challenge to conventional approaches to production design has made *Legend* a remarkable film. The elaborate environments, designed by Leslie Dilley and Assheton Gorton and overseen by Scott, propel the set and décor from the position of background and force the spectator to dwell on their intricacies. Far from dissolving the illusion of the cinematic experience the sets draw attention to themselves and the design detail ensures the fantasy screen world appears complete and pervasive. At times the actors, particularly Tom Cruise and Mia Sara as Jack and Lili respectively, seem lost in the splendour of their surroundings, and whilst Tim Curry is memorable as Darkness, his prominence is owed largely to his spectacular costume and makeup which renders him part of the mise-en-scène.

Like *The Company of Wolves*, this production, which was filmed almost entirely on a sound stage, can be succinctly divided into sections that are each characterised by distinct design and colour pallet. The first is in the forest before the capture of the unicorns. These opening sequences provide an image of an Edenic land comprising of tall, imposing trees, sunlit glades, lush greenery and delicate flowers. It seems that no detail has been overlooked, even to the extent that in the hazy pale golden glow that illuminates the woodland, particles that perhaps denote insects or tiny falling leaves catch the light as they float in the air. The camera moves slowly and lingers on this beautifully constructed environment. The colours that dominate these scenes are light and bright, a spectrum of greens and subtle shades of blue and yellow. The only exceptions to this pastel pallet are the goblins, whose dark tones and bold and exaggerated features disrupt the pervading harmony of this soft focus visual hyperbole.

The second section shows the same woodland setting transformed by snow and ice as a consequence of the theft of a unicorn's horn. The vibrancy of the opening shots is replaced by cold, muted blues, greys and a harsh white with the occasional flashes of orange and gold from firelight and Jack's suit of armour. The mystical atmosphere is maintained once again through detail and expressive lighting. When Lili discovers the ailing male unicorn with the restless mare watching over him, the animals are lit from below giving them an eerie ethereal glow. It is these touches in both sections which underline that the purpose of this painstaking attention to detail was to augment the creation of a supra-real world, that is, a world that is above and beyond the real in its ability to arrest and engage the viewer.

The third section of the film is played out in Darkness' subterranean domain. The dominant colours here are black, greys, dark browns, reds, the amber glow of flames with the occasional use of golds and stark white/silver to emphasise characters or objects. One of the pivotal sequences of this section is when Darkness attempts to seduce Lili. At the beginning of the scene, Lili runs through a vast columned room closely followed by the fairy Oona (Annabelle Lanyon). Both Lili and Oona appear tiny beside the huge graphite-coloured structures dominating the screen. The dark set with its low key lighting and areas accentuated and highlighted by back and under lighting is reminiscent of the chiaroscuro effect – strong contrast between light and dark – employed in some of Scott's earlier work, particularly the early stages of *Alien* (1979). Eventually, Lili reaches two embossed bronze doors decorated with the heads of two stern guardians that slam behind her as she passes through them. Once on the other side, Lili is confined to Darkness' cavernous chamber which is filled with strange furniture and objects and an imposing, ornate fireplace.

As Lili cautiously explores the unfamiliar surroundings she is drawn towards a large silver box on what appears to be a dressing table. Evoking references to Pandora of Greek mythology, she tentatively opens the lid, her eyes widening as the box reveals its secrets. Slowly she takes out a sparkling crystal necklace and holds it up admiringly. The ornament, the box and numerous trinkets that litter the table radiate a white luminescent glow that seems to come from the objects themselves rather than from an external light source. They are vibrant and shimmering to convey to the spectators why Lili is drawn to them. As Tashiro observes, the audience cannot touch them and so “[t]o compensate, filmmakers must embellish visually to suggest olfactory or tactile appeal” (20).

The mise-en-scène of *Legend* succinctly conveys the story. Design, lighting and colour are employed to give weight to a sparse narrative and ultimately it is dependent on the audience knowing what a fairy tale *should* look like. David Sylvester, in a discussion the design of cityscapes, notes that, “[t]here is something about the medium of film that enables it to implant images in the mind that are more real than the real world; to stage manage our perception of the facts of everyday life” (Barnwell 32). In the case of fantasy cinema this process operates on a somewhat different level, with film having the power to ‘make real’ the make-believe. The images do not supplant audience perceptions of their own realities, but they give fantasy a temporary material being.

Although *The Company of Wolves* and *Legend* are both studio-made films it is evident that the approach of Jordan and Scott in respect to the balance between story and design was significantly different. What they do have in common, however, is the extent to which they are dependent on references to other films of a fantastic nature. Generic intertextuality, as Allen points out, is a way in which films provide “a framework of expectations within which that text can be understood,” but intertextuality in relation to border cinematic

history and other cultural forms has also become a distinct feature of post-classical cinema (115). For example, Thomas Elsaesser's discussion of *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992) claims that Francis Ford Coppola's text makes reference to some sixty films while also alluding to the history of cinema technology. He argues that steeped in visual excess, the film "poses as a kind of palimpsest of a hundred years of movie history" (197-8). This reusing, or perhaps even reforming, of cinema's history is combined with references to literature and painting to create a film that is a patchwork of visual and narrative quotations.

While this citation of forms may include narrative devices or motivations, character types or sound references, it seems that post-classical cinema most commonly borrows aspects of visual design. In the instance of *The Company of Wolves* Jordan suggested that it was his intention to create fairy tale imagery that recalled earlier representations of fantasy stories; he wanted audiences to have the feeling that they had seen what they were witnessing in this film somewhere before. At the time of the film's initial release he cited Disney films, *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), *Night of the Hunter* (1955) and Grimm's fairy tales as stimulus. (Taylor and Jenkins 265) On the commentary of the 2005 release of the DVD he expands on his list of inspirations to include German Expressionist painting and film, Universal and Hammer horrors, and the illustrations of Gustave Doré. (*The Company of Wolves*. DVD. 37115/20193. 2005) Similarly Scott, discussing his film, explained that at the first meeting between himself and author Hjortsberg that occurred before the writing of the script commenced he screened Jean Cocteau's *La Belle et la Bête* as the film's magical imagery was what he envisaged capturing in *Legend*. At this point, he recalls, there was no story just a sense of what the film should look like. (*Legend: Ultimate Edition*. DVD. 21775. 2002) He also mentions illustrator Arthur Rackham and Disney films, in particular, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937),

Fantasia (1940), and *Pinocchio* (1940) as offering the family orientated fairy tale imagery that he was trying to achieve with *Legend*. (Jones 23 and Sammon 79)

Production design has the ability to re-present the quotidian, embellish and extend the real, synthesise multiple, recognisable cultural signs, and make tangible the realms of imagination. Whatever its relationship to the film narrative, the set and decor are intrinsic to the realisation of the screen fairy tale. As *Legend* designer Gorton has commented, it is the background that can speak to the subconscious, and without the endeavours of the art department, “[t]here is a whole language missing” (Tuson 369).

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CRITICAL DANCE STUDIES

Dorothy Morrissey. Having a Ball: Intertextuality and the Performance of Feminine Identity in Maguy Marin's Dance Work, *Cinderella*

This study analyses the use of multitextual references in the performance of feminine identity in French choreographer, Maguy Marin's dance work *Cinderella* (*Cendrillon*). Marin, a French choreographer with her own dance company, *Compagnie Maguy Marin*, was commissioned by Lyon Opera Ballet to create *Cinderella* in 1985 (Canton 85). The production referred to in this text is Lyon Opera Ballet's 1987 film version of the dance work. It is based on Charles Perrault's seventeenth century literary fairy tale and is identified in the film's opening credits as a ballet (85). It is, therefore, aligned with two distinct, though not mutually exclusive, traditions: the tradition of the literary fairy tale and the tradition of ballet or classical dance. For the purposes of this study images, movements, sounds, written text and other representations are considered as 'texts' offering, as Adshead suggests, "a multiplicity of routes" (20) through the dance work. All such texts are considered to be performative or composed of what Schechner calls "restored behaviour," learnt behaviour or codes authored by "tradition" (34-35). Butler argues that gender too is a "performative accomplishment" instituted by "the tacit collective agreement to perform" a "*stylized repetition of acts*" (2003, 520; 1999, 178-179). It is, she asserts, a "cultural fiction obscured by the credibility of its own production" and achieved "through the cultivation of bodies into discrete sexes with 'natural' appearances and natural heterosexual dispositions" (2003, 522, 524). Thus, transformed from history to nature, gender is mythologised, as its ideological dominance is obscured and maintained (Barthes 1972, 129). Butler argues that since gender is a performative accomplishment achieved through "specific corporeal acts" (2003, 521), it can be transformed through

such acts. In much the same way, Schechner argues that every text “invites being remade into new texts” (227). In *Cinderella* Marin combines several codes to perform new meanings from single elements and combinations of elements. The principal focus of this study is to investigate how Marin uses multitextual references and other “corporeal acts” in the demythologisation of gender identity, and feminine identity in particular, in *Cinderella*. The study thus examines performances of femininity in the literary fairy tale tradition, the classical dance tradition and in various other texts to which the dance work refers. The socio-historical relationship between the literary fairy tale tradition and the classical dance tradition is explored as is their relationship in the postmodern context in which Marin’s dance work is positioned. The performance in Marin’s *Cinderella* of Bettelheim’s psychoanalytic representation of feminine identity is also investigated. In her combination of various texts Marin refuses to confer mythic status on any one of them, including the notion of a fixed, ‘natural’ feminine identity. It is argued that, in the postmodern context, *Cinderella*’s multitextual references generate multiple possible meanings and, thereby, multiple possible understandings of femininity.

The literary fairy tale and the performance of feminine identity

Charles Perrault, by the twentieth century, had become acclaimed by canon as the most influential writer of fairy tales for children. Perrault, a member of the court of Louis XIV, began writing his tales for an adult audience. They were subsequently appropriated, and directed, towards the exertion of a civilising influence on the children of the upper classes (Zipes 1991, 14). Perrault’s version of “Cinderella” is the one in which the tale finds what Warner calls “its Western canonical form” (203), or what Zipes might call its mythic status (to employ the concept proposed by Barthes and applied to the literary fairy tale by Zipes 1994 and Bacchilega 1997). Thus, mythologised, the literary fairy tale is presented (and received) as

“natural”, universal or atemporal. Zipes contends that cultural ideologies – among them ideologies of gender – are performed, in tales such as “Cinderella” so that they also appear as non-ideological or natural (1988, 148). In this way, the performance of the ideal upper class woman as beautiful, polite, graceful, submissive, domesticated and industrious becomes naturalised. The subordination of her will to that of the patriarchal order is also naturalised. Performing conformity to this ideal is rewarded with marriage to a prince, and any alternative performance of femininity, particularly any involving feminine will or agency, is punished. This is exemplified in the failure of Cinderella’s stepsisters to win the princely prize and in their mother’s failure to achieve the social validation that would result from a royal marriage for one of her daughters (Duggan 152). Perrault’s mythologised ideal or natural upper class man (including the Prince in “Cinderella”), is performed as an agent of his own destiny; proactive in his quest for the ideal woman. As the fairy tales have been mythologised, the ideologies of gender they perform have also been mythologised and these myths continue to play what Bacchilega calls a “privileged role” (10) in the construction of gender identity in Western culture.

France, Russia and the construction of feminine identity in nineteenth-century ballet

The reign of Louis XIV in France was the period in which the French court ballet was at its peak. Indeed, Louis XIV’s nick name, “The Sun King,” derived from a role he had danced in a ballet. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, ballet in France was in decline and this period marked the golden age of ballet in Russia. It was a Frenchman, Marius Petipa, who was, at this time, the principal choreographer of the Imperial Russian Ballet. It was a time of political struggle for Russia, both nationally and internationally, and in 1893 Russia entered a military alliance with France. Banes refers to the then Tsar, Alexander Romanov, as “a francophobe and Russian

nationalist” (1980, 43). Two of the Petipa ballets performed for the Tsar, *The Sleeping Beauty* (1890) and *Cinderella* (1893), were based on Perrault’s tales (*Cinderella* was created with his assistant Lev Ivanov and Italian dancer/choreographer Enrico Cechetti). Both ballets, in the splendour of their stage settings, in their spectacle and in their costumes, also evoked the French court of Louis XIV.

The performance of femininity in *The Sleeping Beauty* and *Cinderella* ballets, while congruent with Perrault’s ideals, is underscored with a limited amount of feminine agency, as displayed in the physicality, strength, speed and force of the female dancers’ technique (Banes 1980, 49). However, in the Petipa ballets the female dancer, while displaying virtuosity and having more roles available to her than the male dancer, becomes what Canton calls “a virtuosic object of beauty” (68) to be manipulated by her male counterpart. Under Petipa the literary fairy tale was established as what Banes calls the “exemplary narrative form of the nineteenth century ballet” (1994, 281) and, after Petipa, it became paradigmatic as a thematic source for the ballet and its displays of virtuosity worldwide. Petipa’s notions of ballet became, to employ Barthes’s concept again, “mythicised” (Canton 69). In this way, they provide, as Leigh Foster asserts, “a seemingly neutral *techne*” (435) in which ideologies, among them ideologies of gender identity, are concealed. Within the ballet, Leigh Foster argues, *his* body and *her* body are constructed as “two unequivalent forms of presence”

Her personhood is eclipsed by the attention *she* receives, by the need for her to dance in front of everyone. Just as *he* conveys her, *she* conveys desire. *She* exists as a demonstration of that which is desired but is not real. *Her* body flames with the charged wantings of so many eyes, yet like a flame it has no substance. *She* is, in a word, the phallus, and *he* embodies the forces that pursue, guide and manipulate it. (435)

The performance of feminine identity is thus determined and manipulated by the force of the “male gaze”; the source of masculine will and agency (Mulvey 43). The mythological performance of gender identity in the fairy-tale ballet, therefore, echoes that of the literary fairy tale. In the ballet, however, the performance is given visual, aural, corporeal and kinetic form.

The postmodern literary fairy tale and dance in the 1980s

In the 1970s several writers had begun to question the mythic status of the literary fairy tales of Perrault and others. In 1979, Jack Zipes published his socio-historical critique of fairy tales, *Breaking the Magic Spell* in an attempt to break their mythic “spell.” Books such as Anne Sexton’s *Transformations* (1971) and Angela Carter’s *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979) sought to redefine and transform the genre by using traditional fairy tales to create new ones. These writers, challenging the mythic status of the fairy tales, also challenged the naturalised ideologies of subjectivities, gender and narrative they perform. Carter’s heroines, as Simpson writes, struggle out of the strait-jackets of history, ideology and biological essentialism (xii). Carter, while convinced of humanity’s potential for transformation, is acutely aware of the precariousness of binary oppositions in any alternative performances of femininity (Bacchilega 29). The influence of Carter’s *Bloody Chamber* pervades subsequent fairy tale experiments, among them Marin’s *Cinderella*. Since 1980, such experiments have extended beyond the literary field to encompass cultural fields as diverse as theatre, opera, musical, film, art, ballet, television, publicity, cartoons, illustration and the Internet (Zipes 2009, 121-122).

In the 1980s avant garde choreographers (including Marin) reengaged with the literary fairy tale in ways which were quite different to its “univocal” treatment (the music, the scenery, the costumes and the dance steps all telling the same story) in the

nineteenth century (Banes 1994, 283). Like their postmodern counterparts in other art forms, these choreographers employed pastiche, irony, playfulness, intertextuality and socio-historical themes. They diffused the boundaries between dance and other art forms and they fostered new relationships between artist and audience.

Marin's *Cinderella*

Marin sets her dance work to a score originally composed in 1945, by Russian composer Sergei Prokofiev, for a Russian classical dance production of the fairy tale. In 1948, Frederick Ashton, also to Prokofiev's score, choreographed his first full-length ballet, *Cinderella*, which he conceived as a tribute to Petipa and the classical dance tradition. Since the time of Perrault, *Cinderella* has been repeatedly reworked (for adults and children alike) in, and outside, the classical dance tradition. Marin's *Cinderella* is thus situated within a cultural heritage of multiple literary and theatrical intertexts as well as within what Canton refers to as "a long line of other ballet productions" (83). Marin aligns her dance work with the classical dance tradition, by calling it a ballet and by repeating aspects of that tradition. She also reworks it by combining it with a variety of other dance and non-dance styles. In addition, she repeats and reworks aspects of the classical music tradition and the traditional fairy tale narrative and she combines elements of the traditional and the avant garde in her costumes, lighting and setting. By repeating, recombining, reworking and disrupting aspects of the classical dance tradition Marin subverts its ideologies and mythic status while, at the same time, acknowledging its contribution to the development of alternative performances of dance. She, likewise, recognises the role of various other traditions and discourses in the development of alternative performances of femininity and other ideologies. Like Carter, Marin appreciates the precarious nature of solutions based on binary oppositions and while she unsettles the terms of established

traditions she apprehends them in what Trinh calls their “hybrid dynamics” (1999, 23) as she provokes alternative possibilities.

Setting the scene

In the opening credits Marin aligns her dance work musically, stylistically and in subject matter (fairy tale) with the classical (Franco-Russian) dance tradition. *Cinderella* opens by focusing on a female child confined to bed, surrounded by dolls and leafing through a book. The girl’s gaze shifts between the book (with illustrations of a young woman with a broom) and a doll’s house (divided into compartments corresponding to the locations in which the dance work takes place). Recalling the literary fairy tale’s domesticated performances of femininity (as referred to in the book’s illustrations), Cinderella comes to life, and takes up her broom, in the doll’s house. Wearing a blonde wig and a porcelain doll’s mask, her appearance, however, evokes that of a feminine icon, not usually linked with domesticity: the Barbie doll. Unlike Barbie, however, Cinderella’s torso is padded, rendering the curves with which Barbie is usually endowed conspicuously absent. At the outset of her dance work Marin, thus, repeats, combines and plays with two familiar performances of femininity – the feminine domestic (Cinderella) and the feminine sexual object (Barbie) – while rendering both strange. As the girl-child shifts her gaze from the illustrations of feminine domesticity in her book to Cinderella’s dance in the doll’s house she shifts from a (restrictive) cultural script for the performance of femininity to an imagined – familiar, yet strange – alternative. Then, concentrating her gaze on Cinderella, the girl-child becomes identified with the dancing doll. Her gaze, the source of her identification with Cinderella, also invites the audience to identify with the girl-child and to view the dance in the doll’s house through her/Cinderella’s eyes. In this way, her gaze counters the objectifying “male gaze” (in narrative cinema and in the classical dance tradition) which determines performances of femininity by projecting “its

fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly” (Mulvey 48). So, eschewing the male gaze and the objectified performances of femininity determined by it, and refusing to adopt the domestic performance of femininity as the only possible alternative, Marin invites her audience to actively identify with the girl-child/Cinderella as she/they/we imagine (gaze at) alternative performances of femininity. For, as Greene puts it, “of all our cognitive capacities, imagination is the one that permits us to give credence to alternative realities” (3) or performances; derived, as Marin demonstrates, from an intertextual web of ‘bits of previously behaved behaviours’ (Schechner 35).

Dressing the dolls

All the characters in the dance work wear doll-like masks and many are, like Cinderella, padded. In this way Marin refers to the tradition of carnival and spectacle in which mask, costume and disguise are used to overturn traditional hierarchies (Stewart 71). Cinderella’s stepmother and her stepsisters perform, in travesty, a grotesque femininity. Their performances refer to the pantomime tradition – incorporated into classical nineteenth century dance works – where such performances served to remind the audience of the dire consequences of feminine agency exercised outside of approved limits. In a self-ironic reference to the impossibility of escaping from tradition, the prince and the fairy godmother are similarly dressed in ‘space suits’ resembling the costume of male dancers in the classical tradition. That their costumes are unpadded and that their movements are similar subverts the traditional unequivocal performance of gender in the classical dance tradition, as described earlier. The transformation of the fairy godmother from her initial incarnation as a flaccid rag doll to that of the powerful sword wielding figure at the end of the dance work suggests the possibility of a performance of femininity which exhibits both passivity (she needs to be released from her trunk by Cinderella and she is lifted at the prince’s party),

and agency (she enables Cinderella to attend the prince's party and she presides over their marriage ceremony). Marin thus combines traditional performances of femininity with traditional performances of masculinity to generate the possibility of more fluid performances of gender in which aspects of the traditional are conserved. Old and new, past and future also feature in the juxtaposition of the space suits (worn by the godmother and the prince) and the classical tutus (worn by the godmother's attendants), as well as in the splicing of Prokofiev's score with the electronic sounds of children gurgling and crying. Furthermore, the lack of padding on the prince and the fairy godmother reveals their classically trained bodies, which prove no barrier to competency in a variety of other dance and non-dance styles. All of this suggests that grounding in particular traditions or discourses, does not preclude transformation. Indeed, it would appear to offer the only possible basis for transformation and innovation.

Subverting the classical dance tradition

In *Cinderella* Marin maintains many of the stylised movements of the classical dance tradition while subversively combining them with contemporary dance technique, children's play, stylised gestures derived from children's physical behaviour as well as with styles that cannot be easily categorised. In a parody of classical dance and its teachers – performed by the fairy godmother's attendants – Cinderella is depicted as being at pains to learn classical technique in preparation for the prince's party. Here she struggles to replicate the perfect lines of the classical tradition as she falls and is picked up and supported by her teachers. In the broom *pas de deux*, she walks on her heels and inverts the classical turned out position of the feet. She also employs a version of Graham's contraction and release technique developed, in the 1930s, as an antidote to classical dance's "prettiness" and lack of emotional expression (Au 119).¹ In a parody of Ashton's *Cinderella* (1948) in which Cinderella dances a *pas de deux* with a small neat broom, Marin's Cinderella wrestles with a

broom that is too big for her. In a further parody of Ashton's dance work where Cinderella descends the stairs *en pointe*, Marin's Cinderella descends the stairs on her bottom. Marin's parody of Ashton's tribute to Petipa and the classical dance tradition disrupts this tradition, demythologises it, and subverts its authority. Its authority, as it relates to the performance of femininity, is challenged by the feminine agency of the fairy godmother. It is also subverted by the feminine agency of Cinderella who releases the fairy godmother from the trunk given to her by her father. Her opening of the trunk (womb) – after which she drives herself in a toy car to the prince's party – establishes Cinderella's agency in her own sexual awakening. And, in her playful physical contact with the rag doll, she becomes the agent of its transformation into a powerful fairy godmother. It is as if Cinderella gives birth to herself, albeit within the confines of the traditional narrative and the dolls' house, as well as to her fairy godmother. In their duets, Cinderella and the prince subvert the strict codified form of the classical duet and in displays of spontaneity and playfulness, neither exhibits dominance and neither is manipulated. Cinderella also performs such unexpected moves as climbing on the prince's shoulders and sitting on his knees in a relationship that evokes the "freedom and spontaneity of children not watched by adults" (Canton 99).

Marin, like Cinderella, performs (as choreographer) within the confines of Perrault's narrative and the doll's house, and of Prokofiev's score (which she, nonetheless, edits and splices). Classically trained, Marin's movement vocabulary is firmly grounded in the classical dance tradition. She, however, uses images, sounds and bodies adept in a range of movement vocabularies, to subvert this heritage. It would appear that for Marin the transformation of the classical dance tradition, or indeed of any tradition or myth, requires an acknowledgement of its influence, power and significance. This is also apparent in the performance of the fairy godmother who at the

end of the dance work dissociates herself from the mythic “happily ever after” ending in marriage by moving away from Cinderella and the prince. Facing them, she ascends the stairs backwards (in a further reference to Ashton’s *Cinderella*) and points her sword/wand towards them in a symbolic blessing of their marriage (an activity more usually associated with men in Western culture). It is as if her awareness and understanding of the myths which have been central to the performance of her identity, enables her to move beyond them to generate a performance of feminine identity, which contains elements of these myths, but is not confined by them.

“Cinderella” and the psychoanalytic text

Thus far, I have referred to the literary tale, the classical dance tradition, Ashton’s dance work, various other dance traditions, the Barbie doll, Prokofiev’s score and 1980s postmodern performances of fairy tales as texts to which Marin’s dance work directly or indirectly refers. Marin’s ballet could also be construed as a (subversive) performance in dance of Bettelheim’s (1978) psychoanalytic interpretation of the “Cinderella” tale. Marin herself, however, has stated (on at least two occasions) that she did not want to write a psychoanalytic story (Canton 86; Kisselgoff 1987). Canton asserts that Marin was, nonetheless, familiar with Bettelheim’s work, which provides an analysis of “Cinderella” (albeit of a later version of the literary fairy tale by the Grimm brothers), and other fairy tales, from a psychoanalytic (Freudian) perspective (86).

In the opening scene of *Cinderella* the girl-child, identified with the doll-like Cinderella, watches her dolls as they come to life, exhibiting childlike gestures and movements and playing children’s games. The lighting changes from blue to green to yellow to purple to pink to orange creating a surreal quality. It is as if what is happening in the doll’s house is not really happening; that, as already iterated, the child is imagining it. Mackrell (1) maintains that Marin’s dance

work shows “the dark places in children’s imaginations” while Poesio (150) suggests that the dance work is a “psychological investigation” into “a child’s world.” The world inhabited by the child is dangerous and cruel and Cinderella is subjected to the systematic cruelty of her stepmother and stepsisters. Their cruelty culminates in their deliberate tripping of the heroine as she plays a skipping game at the prince’s birthday party. Such sibling rivalry is identified by Bettelheim (236), as being the principal concern of most versions of “Cinderella”. Bettelheim (276) argues that the child, nonetheless, learns from “Cinderella” “that to gain *his* kingdom, *he* must be ready to undergo a ‘Cinderella’ existence for a time” (my italics). The use here of masculine pronouns to connote boy and girl children reflects the tendency in Western patriarchal culture to privilege – and thereby, normalise – the masculine perspective. This naturalised masculinisation of the subject proves to be particularly problematic in psychoanalysis where Freud (who developed its key concepts) conceived, what he termed, the “castration complex” to explain (heterosexual) gender differentiation. For Freud, girl and boy children begin their lives in “an undifferentiated relationship with their mother” (Rose 106). Then the father intervenes, threatening the boy with castration if he does not relinquish intimacy with the mother who is “his” (a threat made effective by the mother’s “lack” of a penis). The girl child, already seeing herself as “lacking” or “castrated” also transfers her attachment to her father. Freud’s account of the “castration complex” has been rejected by feminists, as well as by gay and lesbian theorists, on the grounds that it naturalises or mythologises both heterosexuality and “the inferiority of girls or women by affirming them as lacking on biological grounds” (106). Another problem with the “castration complex” is the assumption, as Rose puts it, “that all babies feel to have a penis is normal” (107), and important. The (normalised) significance of the penis is, Rose asserts, “emphasised by the concept of the phallus” (107). In classical dance

this is embodied in the performance of, what Leigh Foster (436) calls “the ballerina-as-phallus.” In Freudian terms, such a performance assuages the male spectator’s fear of castration by identifying the otherwise “castrated” woman with the phallus. Challenging the equation of ballerina and phallus, Cinderella – in Marin’s dance work – stumbles and falls many times before being able to rise into a “phallic” pose. Such struggle, concealed in performances of classical dance, also reveals the exertion and training required to achieve such a pose. Cinderella’s performance, therefore, refuses to pander to the male spectator as Marin invites the audience (via the gaze of the female child), to view *Cinderella* from the female child/Cinderella’s perspective. Marin’s ironic interpretation of Bettelheim’s psychoanalytic reading of the literary fairy tale is a further subversion of the privileging of the masculine in psychoanalytic theory. As well as sibling rivalry, Bettelheim identifies “sexual rivalry” (or the female desire for a phallus and the male fear of castration) as an integral part of the literary fairy tale and an unconscious concern of the child (266). In *Cinderella*, Marin plays with this idea and in Cinderella’s first solo, and its subsequent variation, the phallus is the too big broom with which she dances a *pas de deux*. This indicates, in Bettelheim’s terms, that Cinderella is not yet ready for sexual awakening. Then, having learnt to perform as “ballerina-as-phallus” she drives herself to the prince’s party – in a toy car. But at the party the playful manipulation of the candy sticks derides their function as (phallic) symbols of Cinderella’s sexual awakening (and the girl child’s unconscious) sexual desire. Marin also plays with the prince’s “castration anxiety.” On his travels around the world to find the owner of Cinderella’s slipper, many women, including Cinderella’s stepsisters, attempt, with exaggerated thrusting staccato movements, to fit their “phallic” feet into the “vaginal” slipper (Bettelheim, 271). In contrast, Cinderella fits her foot into the slipper with one precise, small, movement. She thus spectacularly becomes what Bettelheim

calls “the uncastrated woman” who “relieves the prince of his castration anxiety” (271). In Bettelheim’s terms, Cinderella and her prince have come of age, yet their “fruitful” union is represented humorously by numerous pink and blue (compulsively engendered) dolls that accompany them on their (not so) ideal journey through marriage prescribed by the heterosexual romance scenario.

Marin’s ironic interpretation of Bettelheim’s psychoanalytic text is achieved through the use of repetition and difference. In *Cinderella* Marin combines Bettelheim’s text with other texts, discourses and traditions to produce a multi-layered work, which resolutely refuses to confer authority onto any one text, discourse or tradition.

Conclusion

Marin’s *Cinderella* is essentially a multi-layered text and thus generates the possibility of multiple readings. It is very much of the genre of 1980s dance works described by Banes as “conjoining the infantile polymorphous pleasure, focused on the body, with the adult pleasure of analysis focused on the text” (1994, 290). Marin’s dance work, like *The Nutcracker*, refuses to forge clear distinctions between child and adult, animate and inanimate (child and doll). It also refuses to forge clear distinctions between past and future, masculine and feminine, tradition and innovation. While, as in the literary fairy tale and the classical dance tradition, Cinderella’s transformation is achieved through marriage with a prince, the conventions of these traditions are parodied, subverted and destabilised. Mythologised performances of femininity within these traditions are also destabilised, as are mythologised performances of femininity in Western culture. In a dance work that is traditional and *avant garde* Marin employs ballet conventions and other dance styles, holding them in dialectical tension with each other to create an innovative dance work which she calls a ballet. In a parody of the fairy tale’s

'happily ever after' marriage plot, Cinderella and the prince are followed by an apparently unending line of blue and pink dolls; a warning, perhaps, that continued naturalisation of the fairy tale and its ideologies will continue to reproduce constricted performances of masculinity and femininity. The agency with which Cinderella is conferred, however, suggests that Cinderella herself has the potential to transform these performances. Interestingly, like Carter's heroines in *The Bloody Chamber*, Cinderella (though active and desiring) gets what she desires within the confines of traditional constructs (and within the frame of the doll's house). The fairy godmother, however, posits the possibility of a more fluid performance of feminine identity in which it is possible, as in the construction of the dance work itself, to hold binary opposites in dialectical tension with each other.

Notes

1. Developed by dancer/choreographer, Martha Graham, this technique harnesses the breath to tense and release the dancer's muscles. This form of muscle control gave Graham's dancers and her (dramatic) dances an angular look which was initially considered strange.

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Illustration

Plate 1. Scene from Maguy Marin's *Cinderella*. Photograph is copyright © John Ross, <ballet.co.uk>. Reprinted with permission of the artist.

SECTION TWO: EMERGING GENRES

URBAN FANTASY

Adam Zolcover. *King Rat to Coraline: Faerie and Fairy Tale in British Urban Fantasy*

So often, we tend to find fantasy literature's debt to fairy tales in the genre's distance from our everyday lives. We place fantasy in realms discreet from ours like J. R. R. Tolkien's Middle Earth, or in realms that touch ours only at a tangent like Guy Gavriel Kay's Fionavar (Tolkien 2001a; 2001b; Kay 2001). So much of the appeal of fantasy is that it generates the perception of being "more life-like and believable than 'realism'" – more vivid – by creating "artificial worlds" that suggest exotic geographies, far-away lands, and distant epochs (Rustin and Rustin 1986, 60). And it is in that distance that we see the influence of fairy-tale discourse most clearly. It is present, as Maria Nikolajeva writes, in the "superficial attributes" common to both genres – in "wizards, witches, genies, dragons, talking animals, flying horses and flying carpets, invisibility mantles, magic wands, swords, lanterns, magic food and drink." (140) And it is present in our sense of being transported. Folklorist William Bascom suggests that folktales "may be set in any time and any place, and in this sense they are almost timeless and placeless." (4) But for fairy tales, widely considered a subset of the larger folktale genre, that is not quite the case.¹ Fairy tales are specific in their non-specificity, occurring 'once upon a time' or 'far far away.' Their settings are rarely named, but they are clearly located Elsewhere.

This is not the case in Neil Gaiman's novels *Neverwhere* and *Coraline*, nor in China Miéville's *King Rat*. As Mark Bould points out specifically of Miéville, these works fit into a different model of fantasy literature – what Brian Attebery calls "indigenous fantasy." As Attebery writes, indigenous fantasy exists within a fundamental

logical contradiction: it takes place, on the one hand, “in the ordinary world accessible to our senses,” but it simultaneously includes elements “contrary to all sensory evidence and experience” (Bould 307; Attebery 129).² Within this framework, Gaiman and Miéville play a kind of trick of perspective with regard to fairy-tale discourse, embracing its structure, but not its scope. Like fairy tales, and like much other fantasy, they are largely Proppian in structure, beginning with a lack or act of villainy, which forces the protagonists to leave home in search of a remedy. They include donor sequences, difficult tasks, struggles with and eventual victories over villains (Propp 1968). And as Bengt Holbeck suggests in *The Interpretation of Fairy Tales*, the protagonists rise in maturity and status (Holbeck 347; see also Maranda & Kongas Maranda 23).³ But where other fantasy – Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*, for example, or Robert Jordan’s *The Wheel of Time* – is predicated on an outbound quest, an adventure that takes characters there and back again, into the world and far from home, these novels are different. *Neverwhere*, *Coraline*, and *King Rat* are stark in the degree to which they remain domestic.

This is certainly the case for Richard Mayhew, protagonist of Gaiman’s *Neverwhere*. Forced into London Below – a realm of “the dispossessed,” of those, “who live below and between, who live in the cracks” – Richard must negotiate the dangers of a supernatural society as he attempts to aid the imperiled Lady Door (97). But his fairy tale eschews forgotten dusty roads, taking him instead *from* London *to* London via a network of sewers and abandoned tube stations that are alien, perhaps, but also right next door. True too for *King Rat*’s protagonist Saul: wrongly accused of patricide, Saul finds a donor figure in the vicious and manipulative King Rat, the erstwhile monarch whose rodent subjects have all but deposed him; he struggles with the villainous Pete the Pied Piper and seeks to save his friends from the villain’s thrall; but his journey is over London’s rooftops and through its sewers, all of about ten miles, southeast from

Willesden to Brixton. And Coraline's journey is shortest of all, entirely doing away with outside locales. Like Lewis Carroll's Alice, she finds herself down a rabbit hole – she climbs through a dusty door in a forgotten corner of the flat where she lives with her mother and father. But instead of Wonderland, Coraline finds an enchanted, distorted version of where she began: doppelgängers of the mouse circus upstairs and the former actresses downstairs, and an Other mother laying in wait to sew buttons onto her eyes.

These novels, we might say, map fairy-tale structures onto the vertical axis rather than the horizontal, onto the experiential rather than the spatial. In a monologue as relevant to Gaiman's writing as it is to Miéville's, *King Rat*'s eponymous character, a half-mythical rodent in human guise, an unlikely donor, a rapist and murderer, describes an urban landscape that is both ours and not ours, a kind of Faerie transposed over present-day London. He suggests an expansion of space predicated not on changes to the physical features of the world, but to the perspective from which we are made to understand it. Your walls," he says, "are my ceilings and my floors."

I spill like mercury over the lip of a building and slither down drainpipes to the alley fifty feet below. I slide silently through piles of rubbish in the sepia lamplight and crack the seal on the sewers, pulling the metal cover out of the street without a sound.

Now I am in the darkness, but I can still see. I can hear the growling of the water through the tunnels. I am up to my waist in your shit, I can feel it tugging at me, I can smell it. I know my way through these passages (11).

There is no new space in this London – no Middle Earth, no Wonderland, no mythical realm, no alien planet. *King Rat*'s city is not even New Crobuzon, the thinly veiled alternate London of

Miéville's Bas-Lag books (2003; 2004; 2005). Instead, it is a London of mundane spaces, our spaces, made alien as we are alienated from them, forced to view them at rat level, to travel the interstices of our own edifices, where humans rarely go.

These are novels, in other words, of the uncanny. Richard Gooding suggests as much of *Coraline*, but it is no less true for *Neverwhere* and *King Rat* (2008; see also Schweitzer 2007; Parsons et al. 2008). As Freud writes, the uncanny, *(Un)heimlich*, is the familiar, the comfortable, made sly or thievish or dangerous. *Heimlich*, he writes, can mean "familiar, tame, intimate, comfortable, homely", "friendly," or "companionable;" but "among its different shades of meaning, [it] exhibits one which is identical with its opposite, *unheimlich*." It "develops towards an ambivalence" (371-75). Freudian understandings of its causes aside, it is the feeling that "what is most intimately known and familiar ... is always already divided within by something potentially alien and threatening" (Lydenberg 1073). It calls into question our sense of ontological certainty about the world through the seeming appearance of phenomena that we *know* cannot exist, or the disappearance of phenomena that we *know* must. It is the seeming confirmation of "animism, magic and witchcraft, the omnipotence of thoughts," or in this case, the presence of fairy folk, of malicious spirits, of creatures from folklore living just beneath our feet (Freud 396).

In order for the uncanny to function effectively, these novels must exist within an essentially realist discourse. The London of *King Rat* or *Neverwhere*, or Coraline's house, may be an impressionistic realism, a nod to everyday life, but signs must point not only to the mundane, but *our* mundane. So we have *Neverwhere*'s Richard Mayhew in that most real of realist workplaces, the financial industry. He works on "the Wandsworth report," protesting to the nagging secretary Sylvia that he needs "five minutes.... I just have to attach the P&L Projection" (13). And we have *King Rat*'s Saul,

whom we first meet as he returns to London by train “at the end of a day in October,” stopping for “takeaway” and eating “as he walked, moving slowly to avoid spilling soy sauce and vegetables down himself” (16, 18). The details are meaningless to the overall plot – these are the throwaway scenes, antecedent action – except that they are signifiers that point toward a confluence between their worlds and the world of everyday life.

Coraline is more complex in this regard, in part because it is nominally a children’s book, told from a child’s perspective, and representing the peculiarities of her character. So we have details like the “very cold Summer,” and Coraline’s boredom on “the day it rained.” There is the fact that she “had watched all the videos. She was bored with her toys, and she’d read all her books;” there was nothing on television “but men in suits talking about the stock market”; and not only do both of her parents work, but they do “things on computers” (6-7).⁴ The surfaces of *Coraline*’s world are more surreal, more whimsical, than *Neverwhere* or *King Rat*. It has Miss Spink and Miss Forcible, the cartoonishly baroque retired actresses who read Coraline’s tea leaves and give her a seeing stone. And it has Mr. Bobinsky, whose “mice will only play *toodle oodle*” when they should “go *oompah oompah*” (6-7). But the principle is the same. Her reality is strange, a child’s view of her neighbors and her life, but it is recognizably contiguous with ours.

And this makes it all the more horrifying when the familiar turns alien. Human-created spaces, their identifiability, layout, and consistency, provide a kind of stability – a constant connection to the real world, even as the characters seem farthest from it. But they also prove to be gateways, openings onto the uncanny, pinions around which the worlds of enchantment and disenchantment revolve. In *Coraline*, the first sense we have that she has stumbled into the Beldam’s trap is in the scenery. Gaiman writes:

Coraline walked down the corridor uneasily. There was something very familiar about it.

The carpet beneath her feet was the same carpet they had in her flat. The wallpaper was the same wallpaper they had. The picture hanging in the hall was the same that they had hanging in their hallway at home.

She knew where she was: she was in her own home. She hadn't left.

She shook her head, confused.

She stared at the picture hanging on the wall: no, it wasn't exactly the same. The picture they had in their own hallway showed a boy in old-fashioned clothes staring at some bubbles. But now the expression on his face was different – he was looking at the bubbles as if he was planning to do something very nasty indeed to them. And there was something peculiar about his eyes (27).

The narrative reality of Coraline's house, her life, is an anchor here. This is Coraline's space. But that familiarity also allows for a kind of slippage. The fact that it is hers, that she unambiguously knows it, is a necessary prerequisite for a situation in which, when her perspective is altered, those things that are most comfortable, most tame, become alien and dangerous.

We see a similar kind of slippage in *King Rat*. Like *Coraline*, our first sense of a move toward enchantment, of human geography as a gateway to the uncanny, is in the scenery. But Miéville primarily uses auditory rather than visual cues to accomplish it. Accused of murdering his father, Saul sits alone in a jail cell. It is not a familiar place – not home – but it remains well within the parameters of a realist discourse. Listening to the bustle of the police station, Saul finds sounds of the familiar: he can “hear the tattoo of feet in the corridor”, the “muffled conversations of men and women,” the “laughter” sounding “from another part of the building” (29). And then, having fallen asleep, he awakens to a soundscape that is both

the same and different. “Saul,” Miéville writes, “could still make out everything he had heard before, but it was ebbing away into two dimensions.” It was “like the curious echoes and shrieks which fill swimming pools” – “sounds were clear and audible, but empty” (29). The ambient noise of the police station is Saul’s anchor to reality. And when his sonic landscape rearranges itself, or when his experience of it shifts, he feels “like a cut-out pasted ineptly into the world” (29). Sound becomes a door to a space of ambiguity – a liminal moment caught between our domestic reality and something wholly alien.

In a sense, what is happening here is what Gaiman, in *Neverwhere*, calls “an associative house” (81). Door, the female protagonist of *Neverwhere*, comes from a family of openers -- folk whose special gift it is to open portals and locks. As such, the entry hall to her house is “a huge white room” in which “every wall was covered in pictures.” Its other rooms are “scattered all over the Underside,” and to travel between them within the house, she must open a passage from the picture to the place (81). By relying so heavily on real-world geographies, this is what Gaiman and Miéville are creating: they map realist space as a series of signifiers, of pictures, that open onto the features of the world of enchantment. Or as Alice Jenkins writes, they move from “physical geography ... to a kind of hypertextual geography” (41). Islington and Knightsbridge, the Earls Court and Blackfriars tube stations, and Harrods department store are all real landmarks. But in *Neverwhere*, they are also a villainous angel, a ravenous darkness, a mobile (senile) seat of power, a monastery, and the locus of a floating goblin market. Willesden and Brixton, Ladbroke Grove, and the Westway are all real too. But in *King Rat*, they become the geography of the fantastic, the settings for conflict between Pete the Pied Piper on the one hand, and King Rat, Loplop the bird superior, and Anansi the king of spiders on the other.

The impact of the supernatural – of Islington as angel or the Blackfriars as mendicants – is only powerful because it both is and is not what we expect. Like Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*, or perhaps more aptly, like Thomas Pynchon's urban fantasy, *The Crying of Lot 49*, the details of these works sit just on the edge of plausibility. The strength with which these stories are anchored to a realist geography, and the way that enchantment seems always already present, leaves a persistent question as to the reality of the characters' experience. This is most obvious, if perhaps least effective, in the Blackfriars' test of Richard in *Neverwhere*. In order to obtain the key that will unleash Islington the angel, Richard Mayhew must endure an "ordeal" – an extended hallucination in which the boundaries of what he knows seem to unravel. Richard comes to believe that he is "standing on the Blackfriars Station, in the middle of the rush hour" – that his friends from London Above are speaking to him, telling him that his experience of enchantment is "ridiculous," that he "had some kind of nervous breakdown," that this is "the closest to reality" he has been "in a week" (244-45). For Richard, if not for the reader, this suggests a question of ontology: is his belief in the boundaries of a scientifically explicable world – a belief he has presumably held his entire life – justified? Or can he allow his experience of enchantment to dictate the scope of reality?

This is not, generally speaking, the sort of question that fairy tales ask. Fairy tales, as Tzvetan Todorov suggests, are narratives of the "exotic-marvelous." In them, "supernatural events" are *de rigueur*. Because readers, he writes, are "ignorant of the regions where they take place," because those places, as William Bascom might say, are hardly concrete places at all, there is "no reason for calling [the supernatural] into question" (Todorov 55). The supernatural in fairy tales, then, is not uncanny, but rather the opposite.⁵ It is part of the fabric of the logic of the world. To use Susan Stewart's terminology, fairy tales exist in their own "universe

of discourse” – they are subject to their own “internally consistent” logic that is sensible, but separate from what we might consider the logic of realism, or the logic of everyday life (15). As such, those things that might border on unbelievable in a realist discourse, we take for granted in fairy tales. For confirmation, one need only consider the fact that in Hansel and Grettel (ATU 327), we never bother to ask why the witch, a woman with an obvious surfeit of gingerbread, would choose to use it as building material, and choose instead to eat children, who are a much less plentiful resource. We do not ask because the answer is apparent: it is a fairy tale.

That said, questions of ontology are central to a neighboring genre of folk narrative: the legend. Legends function as ready-made challenges to the limits of knowledge. Elliot Oring writes that they purport to take place within the realm of everyday life, making “claims about the truth of an event.” Because statements that are “obviously true generate little commentary,” legends more often situate themselves at the periphery of believability, employing a “rhetoric of truth” to substantiate “what are perceived to be extraordinary claims” (128-29). As such, among other fantastic themes and events, legends tend to deal with an array of supernatural creatures: fairies, elves, ghosts, trolls, deities, and demonic creatures, just to name a few. Modern fantasists have often integrated these creatures into their fairy-tale narratives. Drawing, in part, on the Victorian literary tradition of *Kunstmärchen* like those of Charles Kingsley, Oscar Wilde, John Ruskin, and William Morris, they have used such creatures to reinforce a sense of the exotic-marvelous, to lend depth to their worlds by positing complex societies of other ‘races’ (see Kingsley 1885; Zipes 1987). Gaiman and Miéville draw on them as well. But they use these creatures, and legendary discourse in general, as a strategy to undermine the exotic-marvelous – to collapse the distance between fairy-tale and realist narrative.

And it is in this technique that we see the most effective breakdown of ontological certainty. The confirmation of legendary motifs works to establish a contiguity between the protagonists' experience of enchantment and the world of everyday life; but they also work to create a uncanny discomfort with that contiguity, confirming the presence of elements in the world that we thought we knew could not exist. In *Neverwhere*, for example, the beast living in London's sewers – “some kind of boar” which the protagonists must slay as part of their quest – seems to confirm an early version of the “alligators in the sewers” legend. The beast, it seems, is descended from a herd of wild pigs which, in the 1860s, were rumored to be living in the sewers beneath the well-to-do neighborhood of Hampstead (Ingemark 157-158).⁶ Likewise, Islington the Angel confirms the existence, or at least former existence, of the lost city of Atlantis: he gives Richard Mayhew and the Lady Door Atlantean wine; and we learn at the end of the novel that his incarceration in London Below is the result of having been the celestial bureaucrat who presided over the continent's demise (200, 322). And in *King Rat*, the presence of Anansi, the king of spiders, confirms the existence of the arachnoid trickster who appears extensively in Caribbean and West African folk narrative.⁷ All of these cases suggest a kind of drawing-together of the elements of different universes of discourse; and that agglomeration leaves open a sense of uncertainty about the limits of real-world logic.

Because of the nature of the story and the style of its narration, this technique is, if anything, even more effective in *Coraline*. In Coraline's encounter with her Other Mother – with the Beldam – we have a sense that she has entered a dangerous space, one that both is and is not her house. But the specifics of that danger, and its real-world imminence, are fleshed out through legendary tropes. The Other Mother, for example, is not unlike a traditional fairy – she is almost like Coraline's real mother, only “taller and thinner,” “only

her fingers [are] too long,” only she is beautiful and horrible and predatory. The Other Mother serves Coraline a sumptuous meal, “the best chicken that Coraline had ever eaten,” suggesting a danger of enchantment or disease akin to ML5080, “Food From the Fairies,” which warns that taking food from the fairy folk, whether eaten or not, poses a threat (Gaiman 2003, 28-29; Christiansen 95-96). And Coraline is able to wager for her parents’ freedom, a motif not only common to interactions with the fairy folk, but with the Devil himself (Thompson motif numbers K216; H543). Even Gaiman’s use of the name Beldam, a reference to supernatural hags and witches as well as, no doubt, to the malevolent title character of Keats’ “*La Belle Dame Sans Merci*,” suggests a kind of ominous, ambiguous supernatural. Legends, especially about fairies, have a kind of realist weight drawn from their rhetoric, and their history, of belief; but at the same time, the enactment of legend poses a situation that we thought we knew could not be. It suggests a kind of liminal world that is ours and not ours, natural and supernatural.

Stephen Benson, in his introduction to the 2008 *Contemporary Fiction and the Fairy Tale*, writes that contemporary literature is interested in “the collapsing of barriers,” the “admittance of otherness, or at least the uncovering of an otherness already working within” (3). And in these three works, through a kind of generic syncretism, that is exactly what Gaiman and Miéville do. Both authors rewrite spaces, to quote Italo Calvino, as dreams, puzzles, rebuses “made from desires and fears, even if the thread of their discourse is secret, their rules are absurd, their perspectives deceitful, and everything conceals something else” (44). Like Calvino in *Invisible Cities*, both of these authors weave a sort of alternative realism that reflects fear and desire through the unveiling of secret discourse and concealed space. As do many modern fantasists, they draw heavily on fairy-tale discourses to accomplish this. But they do not accomplish it through fairy tales alone. Theirs are trans-genre

narratives, ensnared in an intertextual web, deploying a combination of history, literature, prior fantasy, and legends in order to populate a landscape at the border between fantastic and uncanny. And through that combination, *Neverwhere*, *Coraline*, and *King Rat* each function as a kind of Janus mirror of everyday life: they reflect human worlds both as we hope they might be, and as we fear that they might become.

Notes

1. Bascom suggests that folk and fairy tale may be considered synonymous. But generally, folklorists consider fairy tales to be a sub-genre under the broader aegis of folktales. They are generally considered be types 300 through 749 in Antti Aarne, Stith Thompson, and Hans-Jörg Uther's *Types of International Folktales* (Uther 2004).
2. I choose to use Attebery's notion of indigenous fantasy here rather than the more common term – urban fantasy – for two reasons. First, while the word urban applies well to both *Neverwhere* and *King Rat*, it does not apply to *Coraline*, which takes place in our reality, but is of indeterminate urbanity. Second, the question of a text's urbanity does not adequately characterize the features of that text that distinguishes it from Tolkienian high fantasy. Though it is imperfect, Attebery's distinction between "other world" and "indigenous" fantasy at least cuts to the heart of that generic difference.
3. Holbeck, in *The Interpretation of Fairy Tales*, and Maranda and Maranda in *Structural Models in Folklore and Transformational Essays*, in fact assert that fairy tales are transformational along three axes: characters rise in maturity, they move from low to high social status, and narratives resolve the male-female binary through marriage, and sometimes a shift in perspective from male to female, or vice versa. The third transformation, however, is less obviously relevant to fantasy literature. Nikolajeva writes that "fantasy rarely ends in marriage and enthronement." In fact, if the third axis is relevant at all, it is in the degree to which fantasy "allows much freedom and experimentation with gender transgression" (Nikolajeva 2003, 140).

4. In their 2008 article, "The Other Mother: Neil Gaiman's Postfeminist Fairytales," Elizabeth Parsons, Naarah Sawers, and Kate McNally notably interpret Gaiman's portrayal of Coraline's relationship with her mother as subtly undermining the gains made by materialist feminism. Gaiman, they write, undercuts the notion of a "feminist balance of labor distribution" by contrasting Coraline's fond memories of time spent with her father with memories of her mother's well-meaning neglect (375-376).
5. Freud confirms this in "The Uncanny," writing that though fairy tales "adopt the animistic standpoint of the omnipotence of thoughts and wishes," he "cannot think of any genuine fairy story which has anything uncanny about it" (400). He lists several examples of the animation of inanimate objects, only to dismiss their potential to create the uncanny effect.
6. It seems to be no coincidence that the most famous published report of pigs in the sewers appears in a book called *London Labour and the London Poor*, by one Henry Mayhew (Ingemark 157).
7. Anansi is not, strictly speaking, a denizen solely of legend. He appears both in fictional folktales, as well as those narratives considered to be non-fiction (Aldred 31). This, however, seems to recapitulate the sense of ontological ambiguity found throughout *King Rat*. If we consider Anansi to be fiction, the uncanny effect produced by the confirmation of his existence is all the more stark.

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STEAMPUNK

Mike Perschon. *Steampunk: Technofantasies in a Neo-Victorian Retrofuture*

Despite a growing popularity in books, film, games, fashion, and décor, a fixed definition for steampunk remains elusive. Debates in online forums seek to arrive at a cogent definition, ranging from narrowly restricting and exclusionary definitions, to uselessly inclusive *in*definitions. The difficulty in defining steampunk stems from the evolution of the term as a literary sub-genre of science fiction (SF) to a sub-culture of Goth fashion, Do-It-Yourself (DIY) arts and crafts movements, and more recently, as ideological counter-culture. Accordingly, defining steampunk unilaterally is challenged by what aspect of steampunk culture is being defined: the literature, the fashion, the bricolage artworks, or the politics?

Instead of defining steampunk as a genre, steampunk might be considered an expression of disparate elements, which when combined, constitute a *style* or aesthetic. As Victoria Nelson said when coining the idea of New Expressionism, “What I am identifying is not a school, or even a movement based in a few geographical locations: It is rather, a sensibility—an informal “family resemblance,” in Wittgenstein’s sense, lacking a true genealogy or traceable lines of influence” (214). Even the seminal steampunk texts of K.W. Jeter, Tim Powers, and James Blaylock lack strong affinities.¹ In his review of Tachyon’s *Steampunk* anthology, Rob Latham observes a “wide range of tonal and ideological possibilities” in the book’s twelve short stories and novellas originally published between 1985 and 2007 (347). Even when steampunk utilizes shared subject matter, such as the zombies in George Mann’s *The Affinity Bridge* (2009) and Cherie Priest’s *Boneshaker* (2009), the setting, characters, and pacing of the books are stark contrasts. What they share are a fantastic aesthetic that separates steampunk from being

simply neo-Victorian or alternate history. If steampunk is a genre, it is the variety that causes genre theorists to squirm: all this without stepping outside the boundaries of books and film. An understanding of steampunk as an aesthetic permits the requisite flexibility to discuss its diverse expressions.

Employing an evidence-based approach to the study of steampunk, I have identified several aspects of this aesthetic broadly categorized as technofantasy and neo-Victorian retrofuturism.² Unlike attempts to list ostensibly common themes or archetypes of steampunk, or simply catalogue recurring motifs or settings (EvilEgg, Falksen, Nevins, Vick),³ these two concepts are found in the majority of steampunk works I examined. For the purposes of concision, I will restrict the investigation to literary and cinematic works, demonstrating how the concepts of technofantasy and neo-Victorian retrofuturism are best suited for defining steampunk, inclusively accommodating a variety of steampunk narratives while exclusively drawing boundaries to avoid rendering the term meaningless.

The Difficulty of Definition

I seek to define steampunk for the same reason Gary K. Wolfe gave concerning the nomenclature of SF in general: “if the field is ever to establish a coherent critical vocabulary, scholars, fans, and writers each need to know what the others are talking about” (13). Cory Gross noted that “[o]ne of the biggest, and perhaps oddest, bones of contention in the Steampunk community ... is the very name of the genre itself” (60). When K.W. Jeter inadvertently coined the term “steampunk” in a letter to *Locus* magazine in 1987, he was light-heartedly classifying the neo-Victorian writings he, Blaylock, and Powers were producing. Despite such flippant beginnings, the term has showed remarkable resilience, while simultaneously confounding etymological approaches to definition.

The “punk” suffix is the proverbial chestnut of steampunk culture, producing seemingly endless ruminations upon the absence or presence of a counter-cultural punk attitude. Both the first and most recent issues of *Steampunk Magazine* contained articles devoted to putting punk “back” into steampunk, as though it was present at the outset and subsequently disappeared. The prevalence of this misconception led Rebecca Onion to speculate an origin for it in “Reclaiming the Machine: An Introductory Look at Steampunk in Everyday Practice” (2008). She writes that “many of the people who participate in this subculture see reading, constructing, and writing about steam technology as a highly libratory countercultural practice” and then adds, “hence the addition of the word ‘punk’” (139). This mistakenly attributes an uncorroborated intentionality on Jeter’s part. Both Tim Powers and James Blaylock verified in personal conversation that Jeter was likely joking. Nevertheless, articles and forum threads continue to conflate the punk suffix with political activism (see Goh, Killjoy).⁴

Likewise, many articles and forum discussions are devoted to determining what constitutes the “steam” in steampunk, focusing on considerations of both historical and anachronistic technology: the advent and heyday of steam technology occurred in or around the nineteenth century, therefore steampunk must take place in the nineteenth century. Oddly, the inverse is also argued: because steampunk takes place in the nineteenth century, it must include steam technology to be steampunk. The trouble with this argument is that steampunk is often lacking in steam technology: steampunk writers and artists are more likely to rely on the technofantasy fuel sources of aether and phlogiston than coal and steam.

Others ignore the term altogether, hoping to coin a new one, in reaction to steampunk culture’s propensity for subsuming nearly every neo-Victorian work of speculative fiction since Jeter coined the term, while retroactively appropriating works to the extent that *The*

Encyclopedia of Fantasy (EF) lamented how “every fantasy which deals with the Gaslight Period is labelled steampunk” (Clute & Kaveny 390).⁵ The EF makes a distinction between steampunk and “gaslight romance” (390-91), but along with what Cory Gross calls a “plethora of terms ... Victorian Science Fiction, Scientific Romance, Industrial Age Science Fiction, Industrial Fantasy, Voyages Extraordinaires and Gaslamp Fantasy,” fails to replace steampunk, which continues to be “accepted by many ... simply by its popularity and the sheer weight of its use” (Gross 60).⁶

Appeals to etymology and attempts to replace the term have proved to be dead-ends. Despite being “inelegant, inaccurate and clunky” (Vick), steampunk continues as stubborn classifier for works combining technofantasy, and neo-Victorian retrofuturism. Some claim steampunk does not need a definition: we know steampunk “when we see it.” The question remains: what elements produce that recognition? I offer the following framework for the discussion of steampunk as something less confining and confusing than the oft-used definition of “Victorian science fiction” (Falksen “Steampunk 101”).

Neo-Victorian Retrofuture: an alternate world, not history

At its inception, steampunk could certainly be said to be neo-Victorian: Powers (1983), Jeter (1979), and Blaylock (1986) set their scientific romances in London around the Victorian period. Yet these seminal steampunk works strain the term neo-Victorian, given that Tim Powers’ *The Anubis Gates* takes place in Georgian England in 1801. Further, this is not the London of history, but rather, “London that Americans think about when they read fantasy” (Kelleghan 16).

In steampunk, London isn’t a city: it is *the* City. It has become steampunk archetype rather than historical setting. It is not the London of alternate history, as in *The Difference Engine*. It is

the London of Philip Pullman's *Golden Compass*, with its anbaric lights, alethiometers, and daemons all causing the reader to perhaps mutter, "I don't think we're in Cambridge anymore, Toto." It is the London of Philip Reeve's *Mortal Engines*, a seven-tiered, 2,000 foot high city on massive caterpillar tracks, in hot pursuit of other roving cities. (Perschon 43)

Yet this focus on London should not mislead us: conflating neo-Victorian and steampunk without qualification is misleading, since steampunk left London for the rest of the globe as early as Rudy Rucker's *The Hollow Earth* (1991).⁷ Beyond spaces in pseudo-historical versions of earth, steampunk settings increasingly include secondary worlds, such as China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station* (2000), Stephen Hunt's Jackelian series (2007), or Ekaterina Sedia's *The Alchemy of Stone* (2008). Clearly steampunk is no longer spatially confined to the British Empire.

As in Powers' *The Anubis Gates*, steampunk also blurs temporal limitations of the Victorian and Edwardian period: both Thomas Pynchon's *Against the Day* (2007) and Paul Guinan and Anina Bennet's *Boilerplate* (2009) take place between the Chicago World's Fair of 1893 and the aftermath of World War I. Some steampunk is set in the future of the Victorian era: Michael Moorcock's *Warlord of the Air* (1971) is set in an alternate version of 1973; Abaddon Books' *Pax Britannia* series (2007-9) imagines an alternate history where the British Empire and Nazi Germany survive into the 1990s; Neal Stephenson's *The Diamond Age* (1996) is set in the twenty-first century; and Theodore Judson's *Fitzpatrick's War* (2007) in a post-apocalyptic twenty-sixth century.

Accordingly, I am not using neo-Victorian restrictively: limiting the steampunk aesthetic to the British Empire or Victorian era ignores or excludes many important steampunk works. Instead, I

loosely employ neo-Victorian as “resembling, reviving, or reminiscent of, the Victorian era” (OED online), in the broadest sense possible. Steampunk utilizes a look and feel *evocative* of the period between 1800 and 1914, unencumbered by rigorous historical accuracy.

Common to all of these forms of expression is an understanding that there is no such thing as Victorianism – there are only interpretations of it. Consequently, questions about when exactly the Victorian period begins or ends, whether the term can be properly applied to countries other than England, or which figures define it most clearly or are in turn defined by it, fall under the jurisdiction of interpretive authority and its ideological agenda. (Hantke 247)

Steampunk neo-Victorianism differs from Dana Shiller’s defense of neo-Victorianism against Fredric Jameson’s critique of postmodern historical representations. Steampunk *is* the “random cannibalization of all the styles of the past” Jameson warned of. Focusing on aesthetics instead of specific political content or particular events, it is “nostalgia for the ‘look’ of the past without significant interest in its substance” (Shiller 538).

Some might argue that steampunk is not historical fiction because it is alternate history. While alternate history is sometimes an aspect of steampunk, steampunk is not always alternate history. A key difference exists between steampunk and alternate history: alternate history posits a moment of historical divergence, but does not abandon laws of the physical universe in the process. Steampunk occurs in an alternative world, not an alternate timeline, a space-time setting with different physical laws than our own (6). This difference between alternate history and the alternate worlds of steampunk may seem minimal, but I contend, as the EF does, that it is “crucial.”

If a story presents the alteration of some specific event as a premise from which to argue a new version of history ... then that story is likely to be sf. If, however, a story presents a different version of the history of Earth *without arguing the difference* – favorite differences include the significant, history-changing presence of magic, or of actively participating gods, or of Atlantis or other lost lands, or of crosshatches with otherworlds – then that story is likely to be fantasy. (Clute “Alternate Worlds” 21)

The inclusion of fantasy elements in a world resembling ours is an alternate world, not an alternate history. The inclusion of fantasy elements does not mean, as Clute states, that steampunk is only fantasy and not SF. Steampunk is neither SF nor fantasy, but an aesthetic both genres employ. Steampunk is most commonly conflated with fantasy and SF because, unlike most neo-Victorian expressions, steampunk’s style is fantastic, not quotidian. In utilizing retrofuturism, “the use of a style or aesthetic considered futuristic in an earlier era” (OED online), steampunk emulates Victorian SF. However, this emulation is simultaneously responsible for the presence of fantasy elements in steampunk. Rob Latham lists nostalgia and regret as “typical retrofuturist emotions” (341). Nostalgia is commonly considered a motivation for steampunk interest. Rebecca Onion, echoing a number of steampunk artists (see Smith in von Busack, Foglio, personal interview), states that “[s]teampunks see modern technology as offensively impermeable to the everyday person, and *desire to return to an age* when, they believe, machines were visible, human, fallible, and above all, accessible” (145, *italics mine*).

While this may be true of the “object-based work” Onion refers to, an attempt at reclaiming a “human connection” with a “perceived ‘lost’ mechanical world” (138-39), such accessibility in steampunk literature is illusory: though steampunk technology’s hidden

workings are accessible, it relies more on alchemical theories than real-world physical sciences.

Some might argue such alchemical theories are still SF because they seek to emulate the speculations of scientific romances in the nineteenth century. Yesterday's magic is often today's science, evidenced by the natural philosophers of the eighteenth century becoming the chemical scientists of the nineteenth; alchemy was considered science, not magic:

Unlike the more rigid, discipline-based, institutionalized science characteristic of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, nineteenth-century science is both chaotic and unregulated. In the first three decades of the century, science was still closely allied, at least in the public imagination, with magic, alchemy, and the occult. (Willis 10)

Rigorous experimentation, not dabbling with otherworld spirits was going to be the key to transmuting lead into gold. Richard Morris mentions Robert Boyle, "widely considered the founder of the science of chemistry," in the preface to *Last Sorcerers: The Path from Alchemy to the Periodic Table*: "But Boyle was an alchemist as well as a chemist, and he spent the greater part of his life seeking the Philosopher's Stone, the elusive substance that could supposedly transform base metals into gold" (2003, ix). Morris also refers to Gottfried Leibniz, "whose interest in alchemy eventually led to his involvement in the production of a new element, phosphorous, from human urine" (xi). If this constitutes science, many historical fantasies could be subsumed under the umbrella of SF.

Historically, the work of alchemy led to chemical discoveries that were considered as fantastic as the miraculous aether of Ian MacLeod's *The Light Ages* (1997). It is likely why alchemy is

steampunk's preferred magical system.⁸ Alchemy shares the *appearance* of modern scientific method, appearing less frivolous than high fantasy's inherently ambient magic. Despite appearances, steampunk employs many fantasy elements: discarded theoretical substances, such as phlogiston and aether, entirely fictional substances like the "hydrium" of Kenneth Oppel's *Airborn* (2004), or the gravity-canceling cavorite, of both *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (2000) and Xavier Mauméjean's *The League of Heroes* (2005), borrowed from H.G. Wells' *The First Men in the Moon* (1901). While aether and phlogiston are windows into the history of science, steampunk's use of these elements varies in adherence to their respective historical theories. In Ian R. MacLeod's *The Light Ages*, the description of aether mined from the ground like petroleum is far afield from the idea of "a material, mechanically structured substance ... which occupies even those regions we think of as being completely empty" (Dear 3). The following passage demonstrates how steampunk writers often attach a magical nature to their theoretical substances:

But aether is like no other element, and it shuns all physical rules. It is weightless, and notoriously difficult to contain ... Strangest of all, and yet most crucial to all the industries and livelihoods it helps sustain, aether responds to the will of the human spirit. (MacLeod 30)

With aether, England is able to accomplish miracles: "Boilers which would otherwise explode, pistons which would stutter, buildings and beams and bearings which would shatter and crumble, are born aloft from mere physics on the aether-fuelled bubbles of guildsmen's spells" (MacLeod 30). Without aether, steam engines would halt, "wyreglowing" telegraphs would fall silent, and architecture would collapse.

Beyond alchemy, pure magic rears its head in steampunk as well: the scholarly ‘thaumaturgy’ in China Miéville’s *Perdido Street Station*; the clockwork theurgy Hethor Jacques taps into in Jay Lake’s *Mainspring* (2007), so by “[setting] his mind to the wheels that lay hidden behind everything in the world” (283) he can perform miracles, transforming the frozen wasteland of the Antarctic into a “field of brilliant flowers...and all the things that bloomed in a New England spring” (291); steampunk automatons are rendered kabbalistic golems in Ted Chiang’s “Seventy-Two Letters” and Jay Lake’s “The God-Clown is Near” (in Vandermeer 2008); *Court of the Air* (2007) has “mechomancers” (31), “fey-folk” (174), and “world-singing sorcery” (138); and Thomas Pynchon employs mathematics as mathemagics to alter time and space in *Against the Day*. This is more than just Lavie Tidhar’s contention that steampunk technology is magical because it “transcends understanding.” This is a blatant use of fantasy magic masquerading as technology; due to a retrofuturist veneer, it is evocative of nineteenth century aesthetics: gears, cogs, levers, pistons, and boilers, all with brass and leather accents.

Technofantasy: the liminal space between faith and reason

Both *A Companion to Science Fiction* and *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* identify this blend of magic and science as “technological fantasy” or “technofantasies” to define steampunk (Bould 217, Clute & Kaveny 391).

In simplest terms, technofantasy is fantasy that has scientific/ technological trappings, or uses scientific/ technological tools: it is distinguished from science fiction in that there is no attempt to justify such use in scientific or quasiscientific terms (sometimes there is a bit of gobbledygook, but both creator and audience know this for what it is)... (Grant 935).

Technology is ostensibly central to the steampunk aesthetic. But unlike hard SF, the technology of steampunk is a matter of aesthetic form, not scientific function. But exposure is not explanation: when steampunk automatons are revealed to only be cogs and gears, it does not explain how the clockwork being has become self-actualized. Precedent does not increase performance: airships abound in steampunk, but were abandoned in reality, due not to unpopularity, but their impracticality. While steampunk concedes these problems, it rarely resorts to a scientific argument to solve them, choosing instead to imagine fantastic solutions:

Many steampunk gadgets and vehicles require some form of magical impulsion or cohesion to be rendered plausible. This merging of magic and technology not only permits the designs of DaVinci to be constructed, but to work; it permits safe airship travel at impossible speeds, using theoretical fuel sources such as aether or phlogiston; it permits clockwork automatons with emotions in a world where positronic explanations are unnecessary. (Perschon 43)

The most scientifically rigorous steampunk still tends toward soft SF, “science fiction in which there is little science or awareness of science at all” (Wolfe 21), and the most “gonzo” steampunk to be technofantasy. Regardless of nomenclature, the steampunk aesthetic clearly inhabits a space between fantasy and SF. Steampunk is science fantasy, that liminal fiction combining “elements or tropes of both science fiction and fantasy” (Prucher 170).

Rob Latham characterizes the fascination for “Yesterday’s Tomorrows” among retrofuturists as ambivalent. Steampunk exists in the space between science and magic, presented as near-allegory in *The Alchemy of Stone*, where a perfect dichotomy of technofantasy

exists in the conflict between the societies of Mechanics and Alchemists:

“The Dukes had always insisted that both alchemists and mechanics are represented in the government,” Mattie said. “They represent two aspects of creation – command of the spiritual and magical, and mastery of the physical. Together, we have the same aspects as the gargoyles who could shape the physical with their minds. (Sedia 69)

Accordingly, steampunk plays in the tension between the physical and spiritual, between science and faith: as the narrator of *The Kingdom of Ohio* self-reflexively states, “It is about science and faith, and the distance between the two” (Flaming 6). In *The Dream of Perpetual Motion* (2010), a steampunk novel-of-ideas, this “distance between” is symbolized by the Dynamo, “the desire to know,” and the Virgin, “the freedom not to know.” The Dynamo is logic, the “unstoppable engine,” while the Virgin is “faith and mysticism; miracle and instinct; art and randomness.” To the polemic these two contrasts represent, a solution is offered:

Instead of seeing these two kingdoms of force as diametric opposites, always in conflict, as this industrial age has taught us... we have to find a way to allow them to coexist. We have to find a way to marry the Virgin to the Dynamo. (Palmer 187)

Perhaps the steampunk aesthetic *is* this marriage, a unity of absurdity, a merging of opposites to create a ludicrous middle path. At its worst, steampunk is escapist fiction, meant only for narcotic reading. At its best, steampunk is the playful juxtaposition of knowledge and ignorance, rational and irrational, science and magic,

which “motivates an interplay, rather than a resolution, among the elements” (Gill 455).

By existing between polemics, steampunk remains an aesthetic of possibility, a utopian impulse. This is likely why steampunk writers do not draw upon an aesthetic toolbox beyond World War I, since the optimism of the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth was replaced by a dark pessimism born of the Great War’s atrocities. Nowhere is this clearer than in the adventures of the crew of the airship *Inconvenience in Against the Day*.

Flying Toward Grace: Steampunk and the Hole in the Sky

Pynchon introduces the *Inconvenience*’s “Chums of Chance” as wide-eyed youth filled with a love of high adventure: boy geniuses with a canine companion no less genius. They travel above, on, and even through the globe, paragons of duty to their High Command, and stalwart advocates of justice. Near the end of the book, the Chums investigate “an updraft over the deserts of Northern Africa unprecedented in size and intensity” (1018). The Chums find themselves traveling toward an alternate Earth, simultaneously rising above the one while descending towards the other. They avoid crashing into mountains “with the usual ‘inches to spare’” (1020), a self-reflexive, intertextual nod to the adventure stories Pynchon echoes. As they sail over the alternate-Earth, they witness trench warfare, with its atrocities alien to their experience.⁹

As they narrowly avoid artillery shells, one of the Chums declares, “We signed nothing that included any of this” (1026). This negative epiphany mirrors steampunk’s self-imposed limitation of inspiration beyond the Great War. World War I can be read as a signifier of the industrial West’s loss of innocence: the optimism prior to this loss is part of the attraction of steampunk. It evokes a time when technology had not yet produced the tank, or Mustard Gas, or the atom bomb. It evokes a time when frontiers, and therefore,

possibilities still existed, and were externalized in fantastic voyages like those Pynchon honors and lampoons with his Chums of Chance.

In the wake of their disillusionment, the Chums are cast adrift without fuel, only to be rescued by the Sodality of Ætheronauts, a sorority to match the Chums' fraternity, who fly on waves "passing through the Æther" on wings comprised of "thousands of perfectly-machined elliptical 'feathers'" (1030). The Chums find themselves not only smitten by this "wandering sisterhood," but somewhat chastened as well: "'Fumes are not the future,' declared Viridian. 'Burning dead dinosaurs and whatever they ate ain't the answer...'" (1031). At story's end, the Chums have updated the engineering of *Inconvenience*, utilizing light as a vaguely defined "source of motive power – though not exactly fuel – and as a carrying medium – though not exactly a vehicle" based upon the wings of the Ætheronauts, who are now paired with the Chums in matrimony (1084). The book closes with these enigmatic lines:

Inconvenience, once a vehicle of sky-pilgrimage, has transformed into its own destination, where any wish that can be made is at least addressed, if not always granted. For every wish to come true would mean that in the known Creation, good unsought and uncompensated would have evolved somehow, to become at least more accessible to us. No one aboard *Inconvenience* has yet observed any sign of this. They know – Miles is certain – it is there, like an approaching rainstorm, but invisible. Soon they will see the pressure-gauge begin to fall. They will feel the turn in the wind. They will put on smoked goggles for the glory of what is coming to part the sky. They fly toward grace. (1085)

The odd conflation of steampunk's nearly ubiquitous goggles and hinted-at parousia, an impending collision into grace echo the

“door in the sky” of Victoria Nelson’s *The Secret Life of Puppets* (2001). She argues that films like *The Truman Show*, *Dark City*, and *The Matrix* all contain a moment where the hero exits the current world to find another reality beyond it. Nelson believes this moment operates symbolically as an analogue for how postmodernism has rejected scientism, the “one-sided worldview” dominating Western culture in the past three hundred years. But rather than engaging a pendulum swing back to “a fundamentalist Dark Ages,” Nelson advises a more ambivalent middle-path, a mix of both “Platonism and Aristotelianism, idealism and empiricism, *gnosis* and *episteme*” (288). Quoting Cyril Connolly’s statement that it is erroneous to assume “we can either have a spiritual or a materialist view of life,” Nelson concludes that “[t]ruth does lie in recognizing both” (289).

Consequently, we could read the steampunk aesthetic as an expression of this ambivalent tension between empiricism and faith: on the denotative level, it is science and magic blended to make technofantasy; history and fantastic worlds blended to make a retrofuture; On the connotative level, it appears to be a reaction to the modernist imbalance that lauded hard facts over feeling, that “elevated one element of the Western dialectic at the expense of the other” (288), resulting in the problem Nelson explores throughout her book: the unspoken prohibition towards the religious impulse in the dominant Western intellectual culture resulting in the “ontological equivalent of a perversion caused by repression” (19). Steampunk enthusiasts claim that steampunk technology points to a time when the machine was understandable, when technology was something a person could take apart, manage, and put back together. What steampunk literature and film seem to suggest instead is that steampunk technology seeks to restore a sense of wonder to the perception of the world. Where cyberpunk sought to find the god in the machine, steampunk seems to have found it in the complicated balance between reason and belief.

But before we assume all steampunk ‘means’ this, remember where we began: attempting to construct parameters for the steampunk aesthetic. I am not prepared to say all steampunk is inherently about this tension. Some steampunk is very light on meaning: you would be hard-pressed to get Jonathan Green’s *Pax Britannia* series or George Mann’s *The Affinity Bridge* to come into conversation with *The Kingdom of Ohio* or *The Light Ages* on anything but a discussion of nineteenth-century fashion. They draw from the same aesthetic toolbox, not the same ideological one. Allegra Hawksmoor, editor of *Steampunk Magazine*, lamented the possibility that steampunk is an empty aesthetic. I see nothing negative in an empty vessel. The exterior of the cup might be the same, but it can hold either Thunderbird or Cabernet Sauvignon. Steampunk is political in Moorcock, and whimsical in Blaylock. The common ground of steampunk, what defines it, is not political position, cosplay carnivale, or nostalgic narratives, naïve or nihilistic: these are not steampunk per se, but rather what *become steampunked* when the aesthetic combining technofantasy and neo-Victorian retrofuturism are applied. The definition of steampunk will remain contestable insofar as the focus is on content rather than style. The glass being half-empty or half-full is not what steampunk is about – it is how the glass *looks*. What is placed inside the cup is up to the artist, and their application of the steampunk aesthetic.

Notes

1. Fast-forward to steampunk written in the past ten years and you have everything from romance in Katie MacAlister’s *Steamed* (2010), to horror in *The Marionette Unit* (2010), to young adult high adventure in Philip Reeve’s *Mortal Engines* (2005), to paranormal mystery in Gail Carriger’s *Soulless* (2009), to space opera in Toby Frost’s *Space Captain Smith* (2009), to dramatic thriller in *Franklyn* (2008), to novel of ideas in Dexter Palmer’s *The Dream of Perpetual Motion* (2010).

2. This approach included reading fifty steampunk novels, two anthologies, attending three major steampunk conventions, watching the limited number of existing steampunk films, and examining a selection of online steampunk art.
3. EvilEgg's list includes "retro-futurism" and "neo-Victorian," but contains over 70 "themes," including items as broad as "trains," and as narrow as "steam computers." Falksen's "Steampunk Style Test" lists "the Aristocrat, the Gadgeteer, the Scientist, the Explorer, the Officer, the Citizen, the Air Pirate, [and] the Ragamuffin." Nevins' "Victorian Archetypes in a Steampunk World" lists Adventuresses, Aliens, Anarchists, Edisonades, Future War, Great Detectives, Human Monsters, Human-made monsters, and Yellow Perils. Vick's "Steampunk Litmus Test" looks more broadly at the commonalities: settings, power sources, scenarios and elements of steampunk stories.
4. These articles often resort to literary foundations, citing Michael Moorcock and Alan Moore as examples of steampunk writers who espouse anarchism. By the same logic, one could argue steampunk as inherently Christian: Tim Powers is Catholic, James Blaylock admits Christian writers C.S. Lewis and Charles Williams as inspirations (2010), and Jeter's *Morlock Night* chronicles a battle to preserve Christendom.
5. Antecedents labeled as steampunk include Michael Moorcock's *Nomad of the Time Streams* (1995), Keith Roberts' *Pavane* (1982), the '60s television series *Wild, Wild West* (1965-9), and even the writings of H.G. Wells and Jules Verne.
6. The veracity of Gross' claim can be seen by how Phil and Kaja Foglio's *Girl Genius* web comic is frequently labelled steampunk, despite the authors' preference for the term "gaslamp fantasy."
7. A sampling includes the United States in two of the stories in Paul Di Filippo's *The Steampunk Trilogy* (1995), as well as Cherie Priest's *Boneshaker* (2009); Europe in Scott Westerfeld's *Leviathan* (2009); Mexico in Al Ewing's *El Sombre* (2007); Canada in Lisa Smedman's *The Apparition Trail* (2007); Japan in Joe Lansdale's *Zeppelins West* (2001) and Michael Moorcock's *The Warlord of the Air* (1971); and the skies above India, Australia, and Antarctica in Kenneth Oppel's *Airborn* (2004) and *Skybreaker* (2005).
8. Alchemy appears as a major element in Ekaterina Sedia's *The Alchemy of Stone* (2008), Gordon Dahlquist's *Glass Books of the*

Dream Eaters (2006), and steampunk anime *Full Metal Alchemist* (2001-3), to name just a few.

9. The entire section of their flight over the trenches underscores the loss of innocence the Great War represented to the optimism of the Victorian and Edwardian eras:

“All through the growing region now, the countryside is torn up with trenches.”

“Trenches,” Miles said, as if it were a foreign technical term...

“Those poor innocents,” he exclaimed in a stricken whisper, as if some blindness had abruptly healed itself, allowing him at last to see the horror transpiring on the ground. “Back at the beginning of this...they must have been boys, so much like us...They knew they were standing before a great chasm none could see to the bottom of. But they launched themselves into it anyway. Cheering and laughing. It was their own grand ‘Adventure.’ They were juvenile heroes of a World-Narrative--unreflective and free, they went on hurling themselves into those depths by tens of thousands until one day they awoke, those who were still alive, and instead of finding themselves posed nobly against some dramatic moral geography, they were down cringing in a mud trench swarming with rats and smelling of shit and death.” (1022-1024)

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FORENSIC CRIME FANTASY

Ingrida Povidisa and Anna Kérchy. Postmodern Fantasies of Salvation. Interfacing Forensic Crime Fiction and Fairy Tale in Tim Burton's *Corpse Bride*

“After all, here she was, almost perfectly preserved, just waiting to be found. Waiting to be identified. Waiting patiently to tell her story and ask for justice.” (Bass 2006, 41) These lines could easily apply to the pretty cadaver bride, Emily in Tim Burton's 2005 animated movie *Corpse Bride*. She lies in her shallow grave in the woods waiting for her true fiancé to release her from a spell that cast her in the in-between realm of the 'living-dead,' when a treacherous lover murdered her instead of marrying her. The tale reveals how Emily's redemption lies not in being united with her fiancé but in taking revenge by ruthlessly reconstructing the true story of her death, by means of a violent narratological course to eternal rest.

The initial quotation comes from the novel *Carved in Bone* (2006) by Jefferson Bass, “the world's top forensic anthropologist” according to the dust jacket.¹ One of the threads of this forensic crime story concerns the investigation of the murder of a young, pregnant woman, Leena Bonds, who was strangled and concealed in a cave, then found some decades later as a mummified figure still retaining traces of her former beauty. Investigator Brockton's unanswerable rhetorical question to the mute form of Leena “What's your story [...]?” (Bass 2006, 131) implies “a tragic tale of romance, passion, and murder most foul” (Burton 2005), the very story of the unfortunate Emily, as described by a singing skeleton in a *mise-en-abyme* cabaret-performance called “The Remains of the Day” in *Corpse Bride*. This leads us to the conjunction of fairy tale and forensic detective fiction we wish to analyse here.

According to Bruce Hallenbeck, the films of Tim Burton belong to the comedy horror genre (2009). Like his literary works in

The Melancholy Death of Oyster Boy and Other Stories (1997), his films are laced with disquieting sub-texts resembling the tales of the Brothers Grimm or Hans Christian Andersen: they play on childish fears, our very own, very human cultural traumas which take their course when the light goes out and we are left alone. The most prominent of these fears is that of death, that is compensated for and sublimated here by means of turning the fear into something that can be articulated, transformed into something laughable and lovable. Burton creates a macabre world with a conspiratorial wink, and maintains the hope in redemption.

The film begins with a scene in which Victor, Emily's future fiancé, draws a butterfly which flutters around, imprisoned beneath a glass bowl on a window seat. He raises the glass and the butterfly flies away into freedom. The film ends with a similar scene where Emily, following the punishment of her murderer, the evil Lord Barkis, comes out of the church with a smile on her lips, breathes in deeply, and dissolves into a swarm of butterflies. This apparently minor but significant scene reminds one of the investigations of Kathy Reichs' forensic detective novels, in which the figure of the committed, investigating anthropologist – like Victor, becoming Emily's collaborator and mediator, bound by the narrative-frame's butterfly – appears as a shadowy border-crosser driven by restlessness, and held captive involuntarily by the crime-case until it has been solved, bound to the victim by the impetus to justice and explanation.

Just like in detective stories, in forensic crime fiction the narrative of the investigation occupies a substantial part of the text. After predecessors, like Sherlock Holmes and Dr. John Evelyn Thorndike,² Kathy Reichs, a forensic anthropologist herself, created in her 1997 *Déjà Dead* followed by twelve more novels in the series, Temperance Brennan, a fictional alterego sharing her profession. The individual books usually narrate one case each, in which Brennan

becomes involved, only to find her own life in danger, too. Her motivation is increased by the insupportable fact that the victims were innocent and seem to have disappeared all of a sudden from the face of the Earth and from the memories of their fellow human beings. Her self-imposed 'mission' is to restore, with the help of her specialist skills, a name and a story to the violently murdered, as in her fourth novel, *Fatal Voyage*:

I want to serve both the living and the dead. The dead have a right to be identified. To have their stories drawn to a close and to take their places in our memories. If they died at the hands of another, they also have a right to have those hands brought to account. [...] It is for these victims and the mourners that I tease posthumous tales from bones. The dead will remain dead, whatever my efforts, but there have to be answers and accountability. We cannot live in a world that accepts the destruction of life with no explanations and no consequences. (Reichs 2001, 269)

Investigations involve ethical questions, since anonymous death is seen as the most profound violation of the dignity of a human being. The moment the truth is clarified, and the victim's story is properly remembered, the body is resurrected from being a 'no-body.' Perpetrators can be punished, but lives cannot be given back. However, 'giving back' the dead their names and stories helps the living overcome their grief. This fusion of empathy and therapy compensates for feelings of failure in the investigator's never-ending, self-imposed task, whereby "[t]he hunt continues" (Reichs 2005, 426) because only small instances of evil can be fought at a time.

Forensic crime fiction marks a shift from older sub-genres of crime fiction in so far as the central theme no longer focuses on identifying, finding and punishing the killer, but instead "more

consideration [is given] to what happened to the victim” (Weissmann 3), and more specifically to the victim’s body. In a clearly postmodernist vein, the victim’s body acquires a new significance as a sign embedded within a complex semiotic structure. This can be decoded by the main instrument of forensic science: the gaze, allowing for the visualisation of an otherwise invisible reality in human bodies’ signifying systems, and “instrumental mediations that make it intelligible in terms of forensic evidence” (Pugliese 368). Since the establishment of the autopsy in clinical practice as the main forensic methodology, the specialist “scientific gaze” – in Foucault, the “clinical gaze” (1973)³ – has been prioritised over the layperson’s “casual glance.” Due to the “scientific gaze’s” hermeneutic, language-bound character, the signs on/ from the body can be interpreted, reconstructed into a rational sequence, making up a ‘readable text.’

The crossover of the visual and the textual demands the production of a hermeneutics that is visual and textual if forensic pathology is to possess the power to be able to read the body in the dense plenitude of its medico-legal signifying potential. (Pugliese 368)

This shift in the crime fiction genre is illustrated by the television drama series *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, a most familiar example of popular forensics ‘reading’ the victim’s body. The corpse is still seen as “the most sickening of wastes” (Weissmann 4), repulsing and disgusting in the absence of religious or scientific discourses, as Julia Kristeva points out in her theory of abjection (1982). The effect of ravishing repulsion is increased by audible means, like the sounds of “thud, slurp and rupturing,” foregrounding “the fleshiness of the body” (Weissmann 26). Our initial gut-reaction at the sight of the dead or decaying body as a

useless, wasted organism is confronted, however, with the empathy of viewers and investigators who eventually identify their own bodily beings with the other's suffering and damaged human flesh. The body, as the actual locus where the truth of what happened can be read, "makes the confession of the perpetrator redundant" (Weissmann 17). The body becomes the very 'site' of crime.

Anthropological forensic crime fiction, such as Kathy Reichs' and Jefferson Bass', focuses on bodily remains, and particularly on bones, given that the body itself is not identifiable any longer by means of forensic pathology specialized in the examination of soft tissue and organs. The forensic anthropologist, as a specialist in human skeletons, gains all possible information about the victim from his bones and the site where they have been found. The 'experience' with and of the body includes the analysis of things like the soil and vegetation at the site, and maggots and other organisms in the body. The bones are often only fragments; the bodies are broken and fall apart, so that the process of the investigation involves just as much the reconstruction of the skeleton as the poetological constitution of the storyline: the story begins with an anonymous find of human bones and ends with the reconstitution of the name and the life story of a person.

Reichs' novels are exceptional because of their very detailed descriptions of the scientific aspects of the investigation, through which the life of the victim is reconstructed: who she (or he) was, where and with whom she lived, who is missing her, and of course why she died and who murdered her. In the detailed depiction of the investigation, scientific methods are shown, described and explained on a simplified level, by means of popular(ised) science. As a result, the so-called 'CSI effect' has emerged, whereby laypeople interpret forensic scientific knowledge, communicated within fictional frames/genres of popular media, as authentic documentary of accurate truth. (Fiction even risks gaining mastery over reality, and

hindering justice, on occasions when jury members find their TV-mediated pop science information-bits more credible and reliable than expert opinion testimony.⁴⁾

Such popular cultural manifestations of forensic crime fiction reveal new forms of knowledge-production, along with predominant postmodernist anxieties and desires, related to human being's mortality, its worth and taboos, representational limits and public/private confines.⁵ The enduring fascination with vulnerable corporeality and crime⁶ is dis/organised in *Corpse Bride* by the classic paradigm familiar from fairy tales and detective stories; focusing on themes of order disturbed and restored, crime and punishment of the evil, and the reward of the good, rounded off in a happy ending.

To summarise the story of *Corpse Bride* briefly: Victoria Everglot, daughter of impoverished aristocrats, is betrothed to Victor Van Dort, son of a *nouveau riche* family. After an embarrassing wedding rehearsal, Victor is walking alone in the forest near the village and practising his vows. He places his wedding ring inadvertently on a skeletal finger protruding from a shallow grave – that of the dead Emily who was murdered long ago by her groom she was waiting for in her bridal gown and glow. Thus Victor becomes a 'surrogate-groom,' accidentally married to Emily, and must follow her 'Downstairs.' Meanwhile, after Victor's disappearance, Victoria is promised to Lord Barkis, an opportunistic aristocrat, who turns out to be Emily's unfaithful groom and murderer. These two parallel and inter-connected story lines are resolved in a closing marriage scene in the church and end with the punishment of the murderer, and the salvation of Victor and Victoria, finally free to marry each other. More spectacular, however, is the salvation of Emily, the Corpse Bride. She enters the story as an anonymous corpse, then by and by we learn her name, character, desires, flaws, and in the end the details of her murder-case. As her story unfolds, justice is served, and she

can rest in peace, saved from the macabre reality of her rotting body, as her soul is set free – by means of a literalised metaphor – disappearing in a cloud of butterflies.

Corpse Bride narrates the meeting of two worlds the hero oscillates in-between: the colourless realm of the anaemic 'living dead' Victorian bourgeoisie Upstairs with shy Victoria and ticking clocks dictating a disciplined contemplation of passing time, and a carnivalesque netherworld of the lively deceased, absurdly celebrating corporeal delights, in an infinite joyous danse macabre, mocking death and life alike, Downstairs with the revengeful Emily.

Similar to the postmodernist generic-fusion of contemporary crime fiction mixing thriller, horror and detective story – evolved from earlier forms of mystery and Gothic literature (see Bloom 2008) – *Corpse Bride* combines fairy tale,⁷ myth, ghost-story and Gothic romance. However, the genres are embraced in a parodic way, constantly playing with the characters' and spectators' generic expectations. For example when in a magic scene, clearly reminiscent of a fairy tale, Elder Gutknecht, the old magician ominously brews a magic potion in his tower to facilitate the journey Upstairs, it turns out to be only a drink he prepares for himself. The primary aim of these parodically appropriated generic characteristics is to stress what Alison McMahan calls the film's "pataphysical" dimension: a capacity to "[m]ake fun of established systems of knowledge, especially academic and scientific," while "[f]ollowing an alternative narrative logic" and "[f]eaturing thin plots and thinly drawn characters, because the narrative relies more on intertextual, nondiegetic references to be understood." (McMahan 2005, 3)

The soap operatic "romance formula story" (Cawelti 1976) features a shifting love triangle involving two women, a *femme fatale* and a *femme ingénue*, an initially weak but increasingly self-confident young man (plus a decadent, avaricious scoundrel), as well

as a dark family-secret mysteriously unveiled. Fairy tale-like, the two contradictory worlds (of the dead and the living) coexist, overlap and enjoy an equal reality status, along with an equal amount of magical properties (for example, death is reversible in both realms). We are reminded of fairy tales, where death appears in the form of a transition, a state, or a person; yet the transitory figure of the Corpse Bride can also be interpreted as a parody of Sleeping Beauty's tale, twisted by the unwanted, and rather horroristic awakening of the decomposing beauty – a bride-double – from her eternal sleep. Considering that in Perrault's version, the fairy tale also addresses the dangers of marriage, as in *Bluebeard* (Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère 2010), we could speculate about Burton combining the two tales around this issue in *Corpse Bride*.

Death as sleep is a major Victorian topos, celebrated by the sophisticated aesthetics of the Victorian era's popular post-mortem photographs and funeral procedures, "intended both to remove the fear of death and to allow open expression of grief through a ritual[istic]" (Stearns/Knapp in Tarlow 2002, 89) beautification of the dead body. Death identified with Sleep becomes less frightening as a symbol of soothing silence, while the calm beauty of the corpse properly prepared for the burial conceals the lowliness of the corporeal corruption, and serves, via a veil of mystery, a fragile shield against the traumatising uncertainty of whatever happens after death. The faerial figure of Sleeping Beauty combines the desire to transcend mortality and to retain physical beauty against decay. Her figure resolves the riddle of death, while her story addressing these fears corresponds to the need to narrativise the insupportable and inevitable (mortality).

However, *Corpse Bride* evokes mythical and Victorian sleeping/dead beauties with clearly parodic, subversive purposes. For Emily is very far from the pure necrophiliac aesthetic of Millais's drowned Ophelia or Poe's dying Ligeia. Instead she looks like a real

corpse depicted with the brutally painful realism familiar from contemporary crime fiction. She has a bluish, bruised face with a wound showing the teeth in her jaw, an eye occasionally popping out of its socket, and limbs of rotting flesh and pale bones that tend to fall off from her decomposing skeletal frame. Yet her bodily (non)being provokes in a postmodern vein an ambiguous mixture of emotions: besides the repulsion at the sight of her putrefaction, one is ravished by her high-class, distanced elegance of a girlish Morticia Addams and her moonlit bridal gown associated with the iconography of ghosts and a sense of supernatural sublime. Moreover, her comic aside, the lively maggot in her skull renders her a sentimentally lovable character. Interestingly, this ironic self-awareness of the inseparability of bodily beauty and decay also appears in earlier detective fiction when Miss Marple in the BBC film adaptation of Agatha Christie's *Nemesis* refers to this impossible fusion by identifying a young, murdered bride with the very same figure of Sleeping Beauty: "You returned her to fairy land. And now, she's safe from many unsuitable princes. Sleeping beauty lies in the ruins and flowers grow around her. [...] No, Miss Bradbury-Scott, she's a rotting corpse and there is no one to kiss her awake" (1987).⁸

The concern with death, especially in connection with cultural/psychological taboos, remains a question of postmodernism. Television series, like *Six Feet Under* (HBO, 2001-2005) beyond where entertainment tackle serious existential philosophical questions: What happens in the limbo between death and burial? What transformations does the body experience? What happens within the immediate and the larger community? (see Akass 2005, Turnock 2005) Forensic crime fiction fulfils fairy tales' traditional, archaic function by creating stories to sooth the incomprehensibility of death.

Besides its parodic elements, *Corpse Bride* plays with nightmare discourses which evoke a certain mood or atmosphere (*Stimmung*): a "feeling [...], of being overwhelmed and almost

physically touched by the material stuff evoked in fiction” (Gumbrecht 2007), as mediation between sensuality and reason.⁹ The mood becomes the very representation of death. The nightmare experience is not created on the level of the action or plot, but via the discourse of death, Burton’s film deliberately plays with. Instead of providing an account of the investigation, the crime of Emily’s violent death rather organises the sequence and conclusion of events as a framework to the action, and vitally determines the visual themes and iconography of the entire film. The mood of/as death is always a liminal experience. As the words of Bonejangles, a film-character suggest – “Now when she opened her eyes she was dead as dust”. (Shaner/Salisbury 126) – while ‘being dead,’ just like in a nightmare, one reaches a liminal status, blurring the distinctions between wakefulness, dream and false-awakening, life, death and resurrection. As Victor learns, with a balancing act the transgression of the borderline to the land of the deceased can be repeated.¹⁰ ‘Being dead’ becomes a reversible condition, even if Death retains its fatally irreversible quality. (Emily revives as a corpse, and not as a flesh-and-blood girl.)

In a Gothic horror fashion, Emily and the other residents of Downstairs trespass to the realm of the living during the night, a time when borders and identity-categories turn fluid: their ‘being dead’ (their lack of or reduced physicality) makes them anonymous, but the people Above try to recognise them as living. Their transgressive visit creates a liminal phenomenological and epistemological space, that is a “dangerous place because the usual rules and codes governing our day-to-day experience suddenly become meaningless in the face of death.” (Turnock 2005, 40) The inhabitants are initially shocked on seeing skeletons and decomposing corpses wandering about their town. An ultimate moment of doubt follows when both parties stare at one another in silent incomprehension. Finally, when a little boy recognizes his

deceased grandfather among the dead, the fairy tale liminality is established, where an alternate reality is governed by its own, different rules of functioning. Even if there is no serious disjunction between the two worlds in *Corpse Bride*, vivacious physicality is constantly opposed to its negation in liminal space and time.

In Kathy Reichs' novels, the work *with* the dead, whether at the excavation of a newly discovered site or in her own psychological engagement with the victims' stories, is often described in terms of a fantastic nightmare. The novel *Fatal Voyage* begins with the depiction of a nightmarish scene:

I stared at the woman flying through the trees. Her head was forward, chin raised, arms flung backward like the tiny chrome goddess on the hood of a Rolls-Royce. But the tree lady was naked, and her body ended at the waist. Blood-coated leaves and branches imprisoned her lifeless torso. (Reichs 2001, 1)

What is most disturbing here is perhaps not the succeeding recognition that this horrific nightmare-site is that of an actual plane crash, but the fact that the realistic depiction of the catastrophic accident evokes associations with the fairy tale's safe *déjà vu* realm, through the image of the mythical, mysterious flying tree-lady, vaguely familiar from childhood bedtime stories and fantasies. The realistic and the mythical fuse on further levels, too. While in a challenging interpretive experience, readers are reminded of the disconcerting, banal fact of their own mortality, violent death by crime – since it results from the radical rejection or inhuman disrespect of universal human moral norms and values – also alludes to the mythological *Ur-crime*, the murder of one brother by the other, a wrongful act, an unintelligible inversion, that screams for explanation and illumination. Like Victor Van Dort in *Corpse Bride*,

Reich's committed, investigating anthropologist, and the readers themselves becomes shadowy border-crossers driven by the restless desire to solve the riddle of death. Both texts are of therapeutic effect in so far as they offer solutions to the crimes, while in real life many cases remain unsolved, as Reichs often points out in her afterwords.

Forensic crime fiction ends with the liberation of the defaced, disfigured victim who is finally given back her name, identity and story after tremendous undeserved suffering. But the investigator is also liberated: after the solution of the case she can clear both her office desk and her conscience – that symbolises the conscience of the whole society responsible for the production of the Evil she fights against. Paradoxically, communal purification, a 'rest in peace' and sweet forgetfulness can only be reached through remembering the dead. Investigators talk to/about the victims, the dead, mediating between two worlds, articulating unknown life-stories (or rather death-stories) of the deceased in prosopopoeiac acts. In the movie's finale, the Corpse Bride's ultimate, irreversible physical disintegration – instead of loathsome bodily decay or shameful punishment – marks a faerial metamorphosis into a swarm of butterflies whose flight promises post-mortem freedom and a lightness of being, enabled by the mediator-investigator. Burton's somewhat sentimental fantasy of salvation is rendered postmodern by the significance attributed to the story being shared by victim and investigator as a guarantee of mutual release from burdens of mortality and mourning. The poetological principle of Reichs' forensic anthropological novels resides in the fact that the investigation recuperating the victim's lost human body constitutes the story itself. We are reading a story about how bones are being read, about how a (life)story is prevented from being brought into full realisation, about how imagination must supersede reality to find out about the truth.

The fragile material body becomes a fantastic “visual medium.” (Balsamo 2002, 685) The television series *Bones* (FOX, 2005 – present), based on Reichs’ novels, uses 3-D imaging to authentically re-create physiological processes of/within the victim’s body. The computer-generated, simulated images always bear a touch of the unreal, and thus seem closer to free artistic interpretation than hard-core, scientifically-justified evidence. The visionary image of a person who is not there (anymore) is closer to creative construction than mimetic reconstruction. It is a simulacrum per se, as it convinces viewers of the presence of something nonexistent, absent or invisible. Paradoxically, the scientific laboratory as an institutionalized medical-technological space guarantees the reality status of 3-D simulations, but the infallibility of the technologically-advanced investigation also bears a science-*fictional* character. Real and impossible, presence and absence fuse in the ‘divine’ laboratory, where the dead awaken to tell their stories and then, after the revelation of the truth, lie down again and disappear in peace, waiting for the living to deliver justice.

Since actual physical death is never sweet like Emily’s speaking maggot, contemporary cultural traumas like terror attacks, genocide, or fatal online bullying must remain in a way ‘beyond imagination,’ distinguished from pure fairy-tale symbolism. However Burton, master of ambiguity, plays precisely with combining the incompatibles of fairy tale and forensic fiction to create a postmodern fantasy about the redemptive powers of storytelling.

Notes

1. The name Jefferson Bass in fact denotes two people: William Bass, the founder of the experimental investigation centre, the Body Farm, and Jon Jefferson, a science journalist, who has published with Bass books on forensic anthropology combining fact and fiction. See William M. Bass, *Death’s Acre* (2003), *Beyond the Body Farm*

(2007); and under the pen name Jefferson Bass: *Carved In Bone* (2006), *Flesh and Bone* (2007), *The Devil's Bones* (2008), *Bones of Betrayal* (2009), *The Bone Thief* (2010).

2. Forensic crime fiction genre is generally associated with the revival of the classic Sherlock Holmes-figure and his amateur scientist deductive methods of investigation entertaining readers from 1887 to 1927, and Dr. John Evelyn Thorndike, the first forensic scientist, created by Richard Austin Freeman in 1911. (Anderson 1134-9) As detective novels of the period attest, at the beginning of the 20th century with the development of police forces and their use of auxiliary disciplines, science and medicine still played a role in investigations. For a long time crime fiction has concentrated on depicting police procedures, and it is only from the 1990s that science, and particularly medicine, gain an increasingly prominent role in crime stories.

3. "[T]he gaze unfolds a domain of visibility that orders the examination of the sense-perceptible data of the body. In the process, the gaze must identify signs of pathology that stand in a bipolar relation to the normativity of the healthy body." (Pugliese 381) See also Palmer.

4. On the *CSI-Effect*, recent research publications include: Katherine Ramsland. *The C.S.I. Effect*. New York: Berkley Boulevard, 2006; Michele Byers. *The CSI Effect: Television, Crime, and Governance*. Lanham: Lexington, 2009; Simon A. Cole/ Rachel Dioso-Villa "CSI and its Effects: Media, Juries, and the Burden of Proof" In *New England Law Review*, 41.3. Spring 2007: 435-469; Simon A. Cole/Rachel Dioso-Villa. "Investigating the 'CSI Effect' Effect: Media and Litigation Crisis in Criminal Law" In *Stanford Law Review*, 61.6. 2009: 1335-1373; Gray Cavender/Sarah K. Deutsch. "CSI and Moral Authority: The Police and Science" In *Crime Media Culture*. 2007.3: 67-81; Monica L. P. Robbers "Blinded by Science: The Social Construction of Reality in Forensic Television Shows and its Effect on Criminal Jury Trials" In *Criminal Justice Policy Review* 2008.19: 84-103; Michael Mopas, "Examining the 'CSI effect' through an ANT lens" In *Crime Media Culture*. 2007.3: 110-117.

5. See exhibitions such as "Körperwelten/Bodyworlds" by Gunther von Hagens <<http://www.koerperwelten.com/de.html>>; or "Visible Proofs: Forensic Views of the Body" (February 2006-February 2008)

at the National Library of Medicine, Bethesda, MD
<<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/visibleproofs/>>

6. To date, many of these aspects have only been tackled marginally by research in the field. The study of forensic detective fiction is challenging because this immediately contemporary genre is still in the process of developing. Existing studies take an historical approach (Jermyn, Scaggs, Horsley), concentrate on prominent specimens of the genre (Allen, on the CSI series), or discuss postmodernist issues such as the body (Weissmann, Palmer, Lucas) or the gaze (Pugliese, Palmer).

7. "This movie is based on a nineteenth-century Russian folk tale that apparently has some basis in fact, as anti-Semitic gangs would often attack Jewish wedding parties, killing and burying the bride in her wedding gown." (McMahan 98) In interviews, Burton often speaks of how fairy tales have influenced his films. See also Edwin Page. *Gothic Fantasy: The Films of Tim Burton*. New York: Marion Boyer, 2006; Natascha Graf. *Düstere Bilder, skurille Gestalten und märchenhafte Welten – Drei Filme Tim Burtons im Vergleich*. Marburg: Tectum, 2009.

8. The apparent contradiction is in fact an indication of the transitory status currently characterising the representational conventions and discursive regulations surrounding the dead body. These words were uttered by Miss Marple (Joan Hickson) in the film adaptation "Nemesis" (BBC TV production based on the 1971 novel by Agatha Christie, starring Joan Hickson, directed by David Tucker in 1987).

9. See also Kerstin Thomas, Ed. 2010. "Stimmung. Ästhetische Kategorie und künstlerische Praxis." Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag.

10. The protagonist Victor's nightmarish act of repeatedly crossing the forbidden boundary, as a token of his character-development, evokes on a narratological plane Juri Lotman's concept of the "event:" "the crossing of that forbidden border which the plotless structure establishes" (238). The fictional world is governed by axioms expressed in the demarcation of semantic fields representing a semantically homogeneous topographical, pragmatic, ethical, psychological and cognitive space. These axioms are normative postulates but are called into question with the subject's (narrative) events, which challenge the order of the entire fictional world.

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Illustration:

Plate 2: *Corpse Bride Toy Project* by Szantner Attila, 2007.
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INTERMEDIAL TEXT/IMAGE. A GRAPHIC NOVEL?

Michelle Ryan-Sautour. The Intermedial/Inter-Authorial Dynamics of Text/Image in Rikki Ducornet's *The One Marvelous Thing* Decorated by T. Motley

Lars Elleström, in his introduction to *Media Borders: Multimodality and Intermediality* (2010), defines media and intermediality as follows. “The notion of a medium is fairly inclusive and offers a way to bring together scholarly efforts within a considerable number of disciplines. The phenomenon whereby the properties of all media partly intersect and the study of this phenomenon are called intermediality” (4). This “phenomenon” according to Irina O. Rajewsky indeed developed as “a ubiquitous catchword which came onto the scene in the 1990s with [...] striking success” (2005, 43), and has since undergone various revisions in the realm of scholarly debate. Although the study of the interaction between different media or arts is not new in itself, Rajewsky notes how “new aspects and problems have emerged, especially with respect to electronic and digital media” (44) that have fueled the surge of interest in intermediality, and thus implicitly recognizes an intertwining of contemporary aesthetic preoccupations and the development of what was originally classified under the narrower heading of “interarts studies” (44). This is strikingly present in the wide-ranging critical approaches and manifestations of fantasy and fairy tale in this collection. Fantasy modes inherently explore boundaries and challenge borders and are therefore also prime territory for the emergence of intermedial aesthetics. This is especially apparent in the collaborative interaction between fantasy text and image developed by Rikki Ducornet and Tom Motley in *The One Marvelous Thing* (2008).

Rikki Ducornet is the author of seven novels and three collections of short stories and has been Writer in Residence at The

University of Louisiana since 2007. An unusual, challenging writer, she has been characterized by Brian Evenson as one of those writers who is “deliberately out of pace with the literary lockstep” (2010) and her foregrounding of convulsive wonder in language is reminiscent of Lewis Carroll, Jorge Luis Borges, Robert Coover, and Angela Carter. She began as a painter, but was “taken by surprise to discover” she was a writer (Ducornet 2009). She wrote poetry and “flash fictions” but was “seized by the scruff of the neck” (Ducornet 2009) by her first novel, *The Stain* (1984), which opened the door to a tetralogy of novels based on the four elements.

The One Marvelous Thing (2008) marks a return to condensed narrative with stories qualified by Charles May as “fantastic prose poems” in which “she rips away that shield to show us that there is not just ‘one marvelous thing’ in the world but many” (May 2008). Magic indeed flickers in this collection as Ducornet infuses everyday situations with a sense of otherworldliness, creating an uneasy commingling of relationship narratives, parodies of the art world, indefinable, sometimes futuristic events, erotic encounters, and whimsical word games. “The anomalous deserves our attention” (May 2008) she says, and the bewilderment of Carroll’s Alice (“curiouser and curiouser” (Carroll 20)) comes to mind when interacting with Ducornet’s semantic and narrative incongruities.

The collection is “decorated,”¹ not illustrated, by graphic artist T. Motley whose images punctuate a series of stories which ultimately evolve into “The Butcher’s Comics,” that is comic strip versions of three stories previously published by Ducornet in her collection, *The Complete Butcher’s Tales* (Ducornet 1999a).² Tom Motley is a graphic artist who teaches cartooning and inking at The School of Visual Arts in New York. His work is informed by irony and “a sense of justice,” and he confesses to an interest in puns as they “remind us of the arbitrariness of language” (Motley 2010). Like Ducornet, brevity prevails in his *Tragic Strip*,³ essentially very short

stories, fragments of narratives that Motley “boils down” into a three or four image comic strip (Motley 2010). As co-founder of the comics cooperative, “Squid Works,” Motley has organized “comic jams,” that is comic strips to which different artists successively add drawings (Motley 2010). The collaborative spirit of such a jam appears in Ducornet’s collection, as her texts are added to, amplified, diminished, altered, by Motley’s images of hidden faces and objects, grotesque and ineffable figures, lewd and playful drawings, all of which foster a pervasive sense of perplexity in a collection of stories which defies definition. What first appears as a simple case of “decoration” or “illustration” is ultimately revealed to be an intricate dynamics of intermedial exchange. The marvelous forces of the letter in this hybrid space of text/image interplay open up to startling conceptual and linguistic transformations.

Rikki Ducornet’s collection of essays, *The Monstrous and the Marvelous* (1999), reveals an acute sensitivity to the metamorphic power of words which can change shape and twist violently out of the confinement of conventional language games. From an early age she was taken with the force of the letter, “I was infected with the venom of language in early childhood when, sitting in a room flooded with sunlight, I opened an alphabet book. B was a Brobdingnagian tiger-striped bumblebee, hovering over a crimson blossom, its stinger distinct” (Ducornet 1999c, 1). As a visual artist, Ducornet admits to an attraction to image that carries over into her fiction, explaining how her work was criticized in her youth because she writes like a painter⁴ (Ducornet 2009). She describes her books as “descriptive” and “painterly” (Ducornet 1999c, 3). It is therefore not surprising that the visual potency of her language should be reflected in the iconic dimension of the letter itself, reaching back to its original naming power; “In Eden, to see a thing Yahweh had dreamed and to say its name aloud was to bring it surging into the real. The letter B, so solid and threatening, *was* the bee; it was the embodiment of all its

potencies” (Ducornet 1999c, 1). *The One Marvelous Thing* reflects this spirit, particularly in the manipulation of the page layout, as it sets up a synergy between T. Motley’s images and the visual presentation of the letter.

Motley’s drawings sometimes frame the text, appearing at the beginning and the end, sometimes filling a whole page, sometimes half, often interspersed in varying ranges of size and scope. Presented in a variety of layouts, text is sometimes reduced to a few lines or scattered fragments. Not only do Motley’s drawings surge forth, but the text itself speaks as image. This is apparent in the visual character of typography and the profusion of italics, dashes, and dots. Ducornet and Motley’s “She Thinks Dots” [Fig. 1, 2, 3] – a short text accompanied by a comic strip portraying the creative *angst* of an artist and her painting of a figure that resembles an asterisk – metafictionally plays with the typographical mark as image and its relationship to language. The character even *speaks* dots when, in the end, the symbol appears in a speech bubble. Such marks break up story progression and underline discontinuity. Typographical blanks further accentuate the reader’s perception of the text as image, a phenomenon underlined by Liliane Louvel: “Typography and the spatial layout of the text produce the effect of image creating a rhythm of visual scansion in the text”⁵ (Louvel 2002, 161). It is such “scansion” in reading that defamiliarizes in this collection, an impulse that fuels Ducornet’s writing practice: “If fiction can be said to have a function, it is to release that primary fury of which language, even now, is miraculously capable – from the dry mud of daily use” (Ducornet 1999c, 3).

This is highlighted by Motley’s “illumination” of the first letter in “The Doorman’s Swellage” [Fig. 4] where the letter G of the first line, “Good day, sir!” is magnified to more than twenty times the size of the story text, and is occupied by a zany, grotesque creature, providing a Carrollian echo of the linguistic play in the story. The

Doorman tells of the “Perlmutter Building,” leading the reader, as narratee, on a tour that is as linguistic as it is visual, with its scattered malapropisms (“It was nice to *parsley*.”(25)) and incongruent narrative segments. Nonsense and the forces of affect in communication are metafictionally underlined:

Right now as we speak together, the air around us is disturbed. The sounds we make are elastic; like acrobats they bound about! [...] Even before we have the time to appreciate what is happening, our ears have averted us to the *fact* of conversation. The vibrations, dear sir, are accompanied by . . . an emotion.
(24)

Later in the collection the first letter “H” of the word “He,” also disproportionately sized, is occupied by the face of a parrot behind the bars of a cage at the beginning of “Because His Youth or the Parrot’s Spanish.” The reader finds him/herself eye to eye with a parrot in his erotically charged (“The parrot’s little black tongue, its eager eye and urgency caused his pulse to quicken.” (133)) face off with the main character, a formerly attractive, adulterous man coming to terms with the “torture” of “advancing age” (131) as a “monstrosity of nature.” The “eye” of his internally focalized crisis is shared by the reader through that first visual manipulation of the letter, the threshold to his/her staring into the “Hell” (131) of physical and mental decline. Ducornet’s foregrounding of the forces of language, down to the very image of the letter, enters into a dialogical exchange with Motley’s images, in a back-and-forth, even overlapping movement that challenges the reader’s reading eye. Ducornet has spoken of her search for “spaces which evoke a *sensation of strangeness*” (Ducornet 1999c) and describes the ideal museum as being one “that stimulates the eye, the imagining mind,

and the body all at once” (Ducornet 1999c). This collection functions like such a museum.

The image indeed extends well beyond the principle of illustration, as Motley’s images engage in dialogue with Ducornet’s texts. The parody of writing workshops (in which Ducornet often teaches⁶) in the first of the two “Koi”⁷ pieces, for example, orchestrates visual and verbal resonances. Affect laden graphic caricatures which hint at human form with exaggerated eyes and various appendages, march holding signs above the first line of the story and are mirrored on the following page. [Fig. 5] A disproportionate, swollen head of a department “chair” towers over the Summer Program Director, characterized as “mild as a goat.” The mysterious death of the resident poet, by consumption of koi from the fish pond, becomes the center of a “vortex” of workshop anarchy that eventually sucks the director’s wife Malva away as she becomes their new leader, “internationally notorious within the hour” (34). Upheaval is apparent in Motley’s figures (32, 33) whose discordant expressions of mockery, fear, aggression, anxiety, self-deprecation, etc. flicker across faces.

Ducornet’s exaggeration provides moments of dark hilarity when the programs director trips over the poet’s dead body, or when the body is returned to the workshop as an “installation” in the koi pool which has been “hastily emptied of water and fish, and filled with ice” (34). The shift of the decorative function of the fish to the body of the poet as a virtual work of art, laces the passage with an irony which persists until the end. In Motley’s final illustration, the summer director’s loneliness is placed in resonance with the image of a slightly enlarged Malva, the angry center of the band of “Anarcho-Dadaists,” while the body of the teeth-clenching-koi-eating poet is expelled upwards. The varying shades of humor, as well as the effervescence of the piece, are played upon and amplified by

Motley's illustrations in an interchange of complementary aesthetic effects.

Louvel speaks of how the reader's "horizon of expectations" on a micro-textual level is modified when the linearity of text is altered by such images, as they function as an implicit signal to the reader to engage in forms of enquiry that involve close deciphering⁸ (Louvel 2002, 161). The articulation of Ducornet's text with Motley's graphics harnesses this spirit in its exploitation and amplification of the oscillating reading eye. The reader is led to "read" the images, attempting to link them to Ducornet's text, while seeing/reading the text. In the second "Koi" piece, like the viewer in a museum, the reader's eye is allowed to wander between images meant to represent art in the main character's gallery, and the text describing her experiences. Images of art, presented as "fig 1-21" (although Fig 6, 8, 13, 17 seem to be "missing") are presented at the left and right in an alternating pattern. The text consequently winds its way through like a path in a gallery. This recalls techniques used by Lewis Carroll in his *Alice* stories (for example, "the mouse's tale"), identified by the editor Martin Gardner as "figured verse," or "art chirography" in reference to Charles Peirce, "the words formed so as to convey a visual impression of the poem's ideas" (Gardner 35).

Ronald Shusterman comments on the flickering effect that results from such "iconotexts" and underlines the irreconcilability of "seeing" and "reading," "We are growing closer to the question recently raised by Bernard Vouilloux in relation to Wittgenstein's famous 'duck rabbit.' It seems impossible to see the duck and rabbit at the same time, and it also seems impossible to read and see a character (or one of Tolstoi's sentences) simultaneously, at the same moment, as a tree or a facial feature" (Shusterman 2005, 80).⁹ David Carrier speaks of such tensions between reading and viewing as being typical of comics: "In their admixture of image and word, comics are in-between art — in scale, and so also in the relation they establish

between viewer and object” (Carrier 2000, 65). However, Carrier also insists “[w]hat defines narrative in the comic strip is that picture and text work together to tell *one* story” (Carrier 2000, 74). This might be the case in the typical comic strip or graphic novel where image dominates, and text is created by the cartoonist, but here the dominance of two different authorial productions often alternates. Susan Salter Reynolds, in a review of *The One Marvelous Thing*, observes how Motley’s illustrations “erode the text, and maybe that was the intention. We are so used to drawings enhancing prose that it wouldn’t surprise me if Ducornet and illustrator T. Motley had cooked up something different” (Salter Reynolds), an observation Motley responds to in his blog, “In fact, that’s what we did” (Motley 2009). The collection indeed fosters provocative shifts in emphasis and focus in the exchange between text (Ducornet) and image (Motley).

In “Koi,” humoristic ekphrasis brings this to the fore as the reader hovers between the description of Tyler Zip’s “120 pitbulls made out of umbrellas” (44) and Motley’s image of a umbrella shaped pitbull in “fig 1” (44), or hesitates between Jack Quicker’s “coffee-table size silicone cakes studded with plastic bonsai.” (45) and Motley’s cylindrical, plant covered image in “fig 9” (45). Some of Motley’s 17 images are out of sync with the corresponding description in the text, leading the reader to go back or read ahead. Some are not referred to in the text at all. The result is not only one of oscillation text/image, but also one of forward and backward movement, an act that further troubles the linearity of reading. The intense narrative accelerations in Ducornet’s text (30 years of the gallery owner’s career are glossed over in a three and a half page, present-tense narrative), coupled with the spatial stasis of Motley’s images and the organization of text, creates hybrid modes of reception, where the reader is caught “in-between” the simultaneity of image (and text as image) and the linear continuity of textual

engagement. Even the traditional, sequential modes of comics which inherently challenge the dichotomy of spatial vs. linear, disappear, as frames are often absent,¹⁰ thus enhancing the nuanced dynamics of primacy in the image/text relation. According to Louvel, such “percolation” between different media can produce a surplus of energy and reconfigure affect in a work.¹¹ The effect is volatile.

Text and image thus work as a tension filled tandem. Motley actually co-authors through shifting, playful images that intensify, minimize, or trouble meanings. Framing techniques amplify irony in stories such as “Poet,” with the text of 4 sentences about a poet funded by “the Fossil Fuel Foundation” to write about the causes of her insomnia in a book entitled, “The Greenhouse as Gas Chamber” (37). The textual layout exemplifies confinement, as it is surrounded on four sides by a looping arch of self-images and ghoulish faces over a busy freeway. The story “Painter” similarly subverts the image of a resident artist who shouts into giant ear sculptures created by his predecessor, and consequently succumbs to tinnitus. Humoristic absurdity is succinctly portrayed at the bottom right of the half-page text by the image of a man clutching his head, upside down in a giant ear. The Ducornet/Motley dynamic indeed privileges a mode of critical enquiry. In “Thumbtacks,” a short one page text about an arrogant American artist whose “pieces are made out of stainless steel” that will persist “long after the last puffin has laid the last egg,” the one-page text is mirrored by a full page image of a large, muscular man swelling forth and overflowing a rectangular frame, an obvious play on American imperialism.

“The visual imposes its temporal rhythm as a shift in the course of reading” Louvel states (168).¹² These images are not only juxtaposed with text, but are rather *part* of the text, part of the movement of the eye that is led to create a reading space where the potency of the letter meets the affect of image and challenges the confines of narrative. Ducornet insists on the importance of stretching

boundaries: “whenever I engage in a book I’m hoping to push ideas further or take on issues in new ways: find a new language, new ways of thinking about determinisms, subverting dogmatic thinking, received ideas” (Ducornet 2003). Here, her challenge to dogmatism extends into the domain of inter-authorial, intermedial dynamics, where her texts and Motley’s images exploit the oscillation of text/image to open up the transformative potential of the reader’s eye. In Ducornet’s novel, *The Fan-Maker’s Inquisition* (1999), the intimacy of the act of reading is discussed in a *mise-en-abyme* of the fictional experience, “Like the mind itself, a book is a private space. Within that space, anything is possible. The greatest evil and the greatest good” (Ducornet 1999a, 72). According to Liliane Louvel, text/image dynamics accentuate this intimacy through a nostalgic return to the powers of *enargeia*.¹³

The coherent representation of imagination suggested by the image in the text, and textual mechanics ranging from the most subtle (punctuation, blanks, typographical characters) to the most explicit (the image in the text), create the distinctive space of writing. The power exercised by the image in the realm of the sensorial recalls the antique device of *enargeia*. The magic lantern of the text allows the reader to construct his/her own lantern. He/she is thus free to project images onto the world in the back and forth movement of a very private projection. (160)¹⁴

The reading space created by the Ducornet/Motley interplay, in its action on the reader’s imagination, thus functions in the transformative mode Ducornet favors, “*transformation* defines and rules the world” (Ducornet 1999c).

Motley’s illustrations also mirror and expand the distortion of meaning, and temporal and spatial bearings inherent to Ducornet’s

harnessing of the spirit of nonsense. This recalls John Tenniel's illustrations of Carroll's "Alice" stories, where strange, hybrid creatures are emphasized through image. Motley even further extends Ducornet's work on the elasticity of sense through an orchestrated use of what he terms "grotesqueries" (Motley 2009), that is creatures that waver on the conceptual boundaries of life forms, thus exploiting what Douglas Wolk sees as being typical of Cartooning, "Cartoonists can draw characters who look only vaguely like actual people do, and backgrounds with only the faintest hints of real-world complexity" (120). In this sense, the visual vacillations afforded by the movement text-image in these pieces echo the verbal tight-rope performed by stories that test the limits of the possible.

"The Dickmare," "The Scouring," and "Lettuce," for example, all play upon conceptual frontiers. "The Dickmare" is unsettling, "Once she had thought her husband admirable, Admirable his thorny cone, his sweet horny operculum [...] Not one to retreat into his shell." (100) The reader is drawn into a hybrid tale of marital strife between creatures seemingly of the mollusk family (as evident in the use of "operculum" and "shell") who answer to "Dickmares." The mollusk – husband occupies a "recliner" (104), tells "the small fray" tales about "the terrible Kracken [...] downing mischievous little mollusks at will" (101), and is prone to "doleful interlude[s]" with the "Cuckfield quintuplets" (101). The superimposition of middle-aged conflict onto sea creatures creates a disconcerting fusion. Motley's "grotesqueries," scattered throughout the piece, echo Ducornet's eroticized Jabberwocky-like play, "she is lovely, vitreous and permeable, her bottom globulous. Aroused, she is luminous in the dark" (104), thus accentuating the inherent intermedial spirit of Ducornet's language. Its playfulness indeed reflects Jean-Jacques Lecercle's "linguistic *punctum*," an adaptation of Roland Barthes's visual concept,¹⁵ to address the affective, borderline text/image stimulation of portmanteau-words as they "fascinate the reader much

more efficiently than the snake-like Jabberwock” (Lecerle 1994, 23). Ducornet often seeks to reveal the fantastic in unexpected aspects of our own world. Her “childhood heroes,” Anton van Leeuwenhoek (the “father” of microscopy) and Lewis Carroll (Ducornet 1999c), are alloyed in her linguistic fusions and play with shifts in scope and size, as her creatures explore the unseen contours of the natural world and question our perceptions of the real.

Similarly, Ducornet infuses otherworldly, mechanical creatures in “The Scouring” with surprising eroticism, using verbal play to arouse and challenge the reader’s perceptive capabilities:

I wish, I confided, we could taste each other!
She darkened further and condensed. [...] My own eyes – so now unaccustomed to exercise – selected favorite objects and guessed the lovely disarray quickening beneath her dusty shell. Between the dazzling planets of her breasts her heart twinkled. *Your beauty* I conveyed to her, *is a force and . . . an atmosphere!* (115)

The speculative, borderline beings in this story have experienced a form of sensorial castration, as the “physical world, once so overwhelming, is now reduced to level planes” (114). Physical corporeality is rendered redundant, as characters have no mouths and are blocked into a perpetual, mechanical “forward motion.” A first person narrative reveals the nostalgia of one of these “machines,” “I’d make a stew of lamb, or bake a gingerbread – not to eat them, mind you, (for already we had overcome the vicious cycle of corporeal servitude) but to inhale those fragrances. [...] Cooking, like sex, stimulates all the senses to an extraordinary degree)” (113-114).¹⁶ Motley echoes the longing of the robot-like character with an image of the creature (bearing antenna, video screen, and wheels instead of legs) reaching up to a bug-inspired, mouthless, futuristic

device with large eyes and a detached head, “hovering” above the ground.

Motley’s illustrations also frame Ducornet’s play with speculative modes in “Lettuce” where his scene of future, apocalyptic disaster opens a story that, from the first line, raises the theme of dogmatism to the forefront, “Now that the Management runs the planet, it is necessary to petition the Ultimate Authority should one contemplate deviating, however imperceptibly, from The Way” (123). Typographical manipulation of capital letters underlines the theme of control, and despite Ducornet’s layered manipulation of verisimilitude and a consequent destabilizing of narrative coherence, the reader is able to discern a whiff of spy narrative, “On one occasion only has a petitioner managed to hide out in the High Head and this despite the microhootered faucets. Although it cannot happen, the petitioner had crawled across the ceiling, circumventing whoopers and gongs” (123-124). The main act of transgression in the story is that of growing lettuce, a banality whose absurdity heightens the critical commentary in Ducornet’s satirically charged, nonsense renditions of what she perceives as a detachment from the sensual world in contemporary society. Motley’s framed image of a hole in the ceiling, from which odd, unidentifiable strands emerge, provides a fitting closure to the piece’s disorienting speculation.

This essay can only scratch the surface of these text/image dynamics. The “Butcher’s Comics” and its play with the comic strip frame, Motley’s hidden images, Ducornet’s anti-fairy tales, and Motley’s drawing games (“The Goulue in Retirement” is accompanied by a quasi-pornographic image to be detached and folded so as to conceal sexual content in a “now you see it, now you don’t” paper game) all deserve extended study along with the theme of “middle-aged rage” underlined by Salter Reynolds in relation to the marvelous in the ordinary. Multi-faceted critical modes, tempered by varying shades of whimsy and exaggeration, indeed predominate

throughout the collection. The interplay between authorial productions and the resulting disruptions in reading lead to disjointed patterns of reception. The spatial stasis of image is rendered fluid, as image and text engage in a dynamics of shifting dominants, playing with intermedial resonances and fostering the transformational processes Ducornet values. The work of each author thus probes the recesses of the other, draws forth or amplifies, subverts or diminishes. As an artist, Ducornet could have illustrated the collection herself, but her collaboration with Motley is a surprisingly better reflection of principles that guide her aesthetics, as the inter-authorial/intermedial synergy is what makes the collection so conceptually explosive, thus fully engaging the reader in what Ducornet refers to as the “infinite, the mutable, the *evocative* world which is the world of the imagination” (Ducornet 1998, 139).

Notes

1. The cover displays this term rather than the usual term of “illustrated.”
2. Ducornet and Motley have worked together in the past. Motley’s comic strip versions of Ducornet’s stories “Clean” (re-published in *The One Marvelous Thing*) and “Fairy Finger” taken from *The Complete Butcher’s Tales* (1994)) appear in *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*, Fall, 1998.
3. A comic strip printed monthly in *The Brooklyn Rail*. <<http://www.brooklynrail.org/>>
4. “And I was shut down by Anthony Hecht, a very good poet, who was apparently embittered at the time. He shot a lot of people down. He said ‘You shouldn’t be doing this, you write like a painter.’ Then when *The Stain* appeared, it got wonderful reviews, and the first reviewer said, ‘She writes like a painter’” (Ducornet 2009).
5. (my translation) “La typographie, la mise en espace du texte peuvent produire l’effet d’image rythmant le texte de la scansion du visible” (Louvel 2002, 161).

6. “Well, I love to teach. I’m no longer teaching full-time, but last spring I did the Vermont Studio Center, and I just got back from the Naropa summer festival in Prague. I go off for a few weeks each year to teach. But, speaking of received ideas, I do find myself very much concerned by the workshop. I think it is, more often than not, extremely destructive, and I’ve seen many brilliant writers profoundly harmed by the workshop and its impositions” (Ducornet 2003).

7. Two different stories have the same title.

8. “The horizon of expectations on a micro-textual level is also modified, because a reader confronted with a page of text that is not as smooth and linear as usual, immediately becomes suspicious, expects difficulties, and is thus obliged to not only decipher the text with precision and patience, but also to engage in enquiry.” (my translation) “L’horizon d’attente au niveau micro-textuel est lui aussi modifié puisque face à une page de texte non lisse et linéaire comme à l’ordinaire, le lecteur, immédiatement mis en garde, s’attend à quelques difficultés et doit donc s’armer de patience afin de proprement décrypter le texte mais aussi se livrer à une enquête” (Louvel 2002, 161).

9. (my translation) “On se rapproche ici d’une question posée dernièrement par Bernard Vouilloux à propos du célèbre ‘duck-rabbit’ de Wittgenstein. Il me semble impossible de voir le canard et le lapin en même temps ; et il me semble également impossible de lire un caractère (ou une phrase de Tolstoï) tout en le *voyant*, au même instant, comme un arbre ou un trait de visage” (Shusterman 2002, 81).

10. With, of course, the exception of “She Thinks Dots,” and “The Butcher’s Comics.”

11. “The problem of the *paragon*, that is the opposition between painting and poetry, or of the famous analogy, *ut pictura poesis*, is thus resolved, if there ever was a problem, or is attenuated by the transaction between the two media, that is their “commerce” or their percolation, created through rhythm. The interest lies in that neither of the two media loses its specificity, but rather gains a surplus of energy which produces a redimensionalization of affect.” (my translation) “Le problème du *paragone*, l’opposition entre peinture et poésie, ou de l’analogie célèbre de l’*ut pictura poesis*, se trouve

comme résolu, à condition qu'il y ait bien eu problème, ou résorbé en partie par la transaction des deux media, leur 'commerce' ou leur percolation, au moyen du rythme. L'intérêt de la chose étant, bien entendu, qu'aucun des deux média n'y perde sa spécificité mais y gagne au contraire un surplus d'énergie, produisant une redimensionalisation de l'affect" (Louvel 2002, 227).

12. (my translation) "Le visuel imprime son rythme du temps comme détour de lecture" (Louvel 2002, 168).

13. A rhetorical term for a description with a strikingly visual effect. *Enargeia* is particularly well known for its strong affective dimension.

14. (my translation) "La représentation imaginaire cohérente proposée par l'image-en-texte, les dispositifs textuels allant du plus discret (ponctuation, blancs, caractères typographiques, etc.) au plus explicite (l'image dans le texte) dessine le champ propre d'une écriture. Les pouvoirs de l'image sur le sensible rappellent l'antique *enargeia*. La lanterne magique du texte permet au lecteur de construire la sienne. Libre ensuite à lui de projeter ses images sur le monde dans l'aller-retour d'une projection très privée" (Louvel 160).

15. I am referring here to Roland Barthes's use of the term *punctum* in *Camera Lucida* (1980) to address the affective impact of the photographic image on the viewer.

16. Ducornet openly luxuriates in the body and the senses, "I love the sensual world, I love the body, and I love the physical, natural world. And for me part of the delight of existence is the feast. The ideal day for me is to get a walk in nature, do creative work of some kind, and then prepare a feast at the end of the day." (Ducornet 1998, 141)

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Illustrations

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Figure 1, 2, 3: Tom Motley's decorations to "She Thinks Dots."

Figure 4: Tom Motley's "The Doorman's Swellage Initial."

Figure 5: Tom Motley's "Koi1A."

GURO-KAWAII (GROTESQUE-CUTE) MANGA/ART

Mayako Murai. *Guro-Kawaii* Re-Envisionings of Fairy Tales in Contemporary Japanese Art

Not just *kawaii*

The three Japanese artists I discuss in this chapter, Junko Mizuno, Miwa Yanagi, and Tomoko Konoike, work in different media – mainly in manga, photography, and painting respectively – and adopt apparently varied approaches. They share, however, an ongoing interest in fairy tales and a style which blends childlike sweetness with the macabre. This style, sometimes called *guro-kawaii* (grotesque-cute) in Japanese, seems widespread in current art trends, especially in Japan. This chapter examines the ways in which these three artists re-envision fairy tales in their works and considers the implications of their *guro-kawaii* aesthetics for repurposing the genre, placing special emphasis on the problematics of gender.

A *kawaii* aesthetic has increasingly dominated Japanese culture since the 1970s, when Japanese culture began to transform radically under the influence of American culture following the period of rapid post-war economic growth. The sociologist Sharon Kinsella defines the term *kawaii* as follows: “Kawaii or ‘cute’ essentially means childlike; it celebrates sweet, adorable, innocent, pure, simple, genuine, gentle, vulnerable, weak, and inexperienced social behaviour and physical appearances” (1995, 220). The Tokyo-based art critic Ivan Vartanian emphasises the empathetic aspect of *kawaii* in his 2005 *Drop Dead Cute: The New Generation of Women Artists in Japan*: “Though it usually refers to things adorably diminutive, *kawaii* can be used more broadly to define anything that draws out an empathetic response. In part, it is a taste for elements of childhood incorporated into adult life” (11).

This definition of *kawaii* as an empathetic recuperation of childhood by adults can be linked to the idea of neoteny. Neoteny is a term used in developmental biology to refer to the delay in the physiological development in an animal or organism which results in the retention of juvenile traits (e.g. a flat face, a large head, sparse body hair) in adults well into maturity. The idea of neoteny achieved wide-spread currency through the work of the anatomist Louis Bolk, who claimed in 1926 that “man, in his bodily development, is a primate foetus that has become sexually mature” (in Gould 361). This paedomorphic cuteness, which appeals to human nurturing instincts, is also a characteristic associated with femininity from a masculine perspective, which, as I will show below, becomes a starting point for women artists’ subversive re-appropriation of cuteness.

Ryutaro Takahashi, a psychiatrist and an art collector, applies the idea of neoteny to art, claiming that current Japanese art is itself in a state of neoteny (2008, 8-9); a new kind of Japanese art, born prematurely when Western art suddenly flooded in at the end of the nineteenth century, has been developing very slowly over a hundred years while retaining formal characteristics often considered “juvenile” within the context of “mature” Western art. In the works of many postmodern Japanese artists, for example, contrary concepts such as reality and fantasy, the self and the other, humans and animals, or life and death sit side by side with each other on a flat surface with no apparent contradiction, which is a characteristic often associated with the child’s imagination. This childlike conflation of the real and the unreal in art, however, is not new; traditional Japanese paintings stylise and distort such natural forms as people, plants, animals, and landscape to create highly ornamental images independent of the “real” world. This lack of realistic depth in both pre- and post-modern Japanese painting may be connected to what Max Lüthi calls the “flat surface” of the folktale which “transforms the world” into an archetypal form by putting “a spell on its elements

and gives them a different form” (Lüthi 1947, 24). Postmodernist artists combine this stylised mode of expression with forms of contemporary pop culture such as manga, anime, and computer games. This self-reflexive intermedial style is sometimes called “superflat,” a term coined by the artist Takashi Murakami for a 2001 exhibition curated by himself; Murakami’s work is known for its postmodern re-Westernisation of Japanese manga and anime culture, a culture which originally developed under post-war American cultural influence.

Manga has a long history in Japanese art dating back to the late nineteenth century, but its modern form, which developed after the Second World War, had been considered mainly as a consumer product, both childlike and childish, until the 1990s, when it came to be generally recognised as an art form suitable also for a mature audience. Many contemporary Japanese artists, who have been familiar with manga culture since their childhood, cite the direct influence of manga upon their work. For the three artists discussed here, the influence of *shojo* (girl) manga has especially been significant. *Shojo* manga, created mainly by female artists for the female readership, has developed its own female-centred ethics and aesthetics since the 1970s, disseminating over-romanticised, narcissistic self-images of girls whose twinkling saucer-like eyes, elongated limbs, and masses of pink frills and ribbons represent a desire to remain fixated with girlishness forever.

Importantly, women artists have increasingly come to the forefront of the Japanese art scene since the rise of the neotenic art trend in the 1990s. In Japanese society, cuteness or neotenic characteristics, both physical and psychological, have been, and are still, associated with women and acknowledged as desirable by men; such women artists seem to ironically fetishise and flaunt the cute, infantile characteristics attached to themselves by men in order to subvert male authority. Their works, therefore, are marked by the

“female grotesque” as defined by Mary Russo, that is, as images of the feminine which transgress the male norm. Cuteness in fact reveals a dark side of childishness. As the cute aesthetic is anchored in the adult viewers’ empathetic acknowledgement of childlike elements within themselves, cuteness can entail complex emotions and a propensity for destruction or even self-destruction usually repressed in adult social lives. Vartanian describes the *guro* “flipside” of *kawaii* as follows: “Cuteness, though, ostensibly devoid of irony, does not negate darkness, and can in fact be a means to accessing darkness, as characters become loci of emotion and identification” (11). The affinity between the fairy-tale imagination and the *guro-kawaii* aesthetics of contemporary Japanese art may be explained partly by the fact that the fairy tale is a genre which gives a form to unconscious desires rooted in childhood experiences. The three artists discussed in this chapter, as I will argue below, deploy the *guro-kawaii* aesthetics for the purpose of feminist subversion.

The topless feminism of Junko Mizuno’s fairy-tale manga

In Junko Mizuno’s manga based on fairy tales, cute and sexy girls, who are topless most of the time for no apparent reason, go through gory adventures in order to be united with sickly – or even dead – princes. Her style may be summed up as Gothic *kawaii* with a sexy edge; over-romanticised, as well as over-eroticised, images of young women are combined with absurdly grotesque details. As a direct influence on her work, Mizuno names Aubrey Beardsley, who is known for his *ukiyo*¹-influenced ornamental drawings and his grotesque eroticism inspired by Japanese erotica (Mizuno, “Interview”); here again, we see a postmodern re-Japanisation of the Westernised images of Japanese culture, a kind of doubly deflected, grotesque “Orientalism.”

Mizuno’s graphic novel can be seen as a kind of softcore pornography, a subject which has generated considerable controversy

within feminism. Second-wave feminists such as Andrea Dworkin pointed to the relationship between pornography and increased sexual abuse of women; post-feminism, however, resists such rigid conceptualisations of male and female sexuality and, instead, promotes the women's right to sexual pleasure and the portrayal of women as actively desiring sexual subjects. Fien Adriaens points out that this post-feminist sexualisation is related to "the shift from sexual objectification to sexual subjectification, from a focus on a powerful male gaze to a self-regulating narcissistic individualistic gaze" (Adriaens 2009). Mizuno's post-feminist heroines flaunt their bodies for their own narcissistic pleasure in a way which does not necessarily exclude the male gaze (in fact, her manga have a large number of male fans worldwide). As I will argue, however, her feminist narcissistic gaze also perverts the ideology of heteronormative romance with its fascination with the theme of death and even self-annihilation.

In her *Cinderalla* (a pun on "*shinderu*," the Japanese word for being dead), the cute and sexy heroine is made to slave away every night by her stepmother and two stepsisters, both of whom have enormous breasts and all of whom are zombies like her father. Cinderalla works extremely hard in her father's *yakitori* (charcoal grilled chicken on skewers usually accompanied with beer) restaurant to support her zombie family. One day she falls in love with a pale young man dressed in pyjamas, who turns out to be a zombie pop idol. Eventually, she is turned into a zombie herself by the beneficial fairy, also cute and topless, and, after a separation, identified as his love – in this case, not by having the right-sized foot for the glass slipper but by having the right-sized socket for the eyeball she dropped on a staircase. Cinderalla then accidentally becomes a successful entrepreneur selling monstrously big strawberries – a sign of grotesque-cuteness again – which grow from the *yakitori* sauce she invented. They all live happily and undead ever after.

Mizuno's *Cinderalla* can be read as an ironic parable about regulating the female self as a sexually attractive and socially successful individual in neo-liberal society. In post-feminist discourse, the relationship between femininity and feminism is reconfigured in such a way that these do not conflict with one another, so that women can take both positions at the same time. This newly defined femininity has been taken up by popular discourse and is exemplified by such figures as the female protagonists in the TV series "Sex and the City," who are rich and beautiful singletons with an insatiable desire for more and more satisfaction in life, both materially and sexually. In Mizuno's *Cinderalla*, however, such pervasive, if self-conscious, preoccupation with physical beauty, a quality partner, and social success is so grotesquely and fantastically distorted that it offers a critical resistance to the dominant cultural values to which post-feminist realist fictions like "Sex and the City" ultimately subscribe in terms of such political issues as race, class, and gender. The ending of Mizuno's *Cinderalla* parodies both the compulsory happily-ever-after of the fairy tale and the kill-or-be-killed dichotomy of the Gothic vampire story; the uncanny figure of the living dead as a happy and *kawaii* bride disrupts the gender stereotype normalised by traditional fairy tales which fetishise deathlike passivity in women.

Mizuno adopts a different approach in her *Princess Mermaid* [Plate 3], where the over-sexualised body is first used as a weapon to allure and attack men and then abandoned at the story's double-edged ending. In Mizuno's version, three beautiful mermaid sisters lure fishermen into the sea in order to kill and eat them in revenge for a massacre of mermaids in which their beloved mother died. One day the second sister falls in love with a fisherman's son who, far from being a beautiful prince, is a poor, green-skinned boy constantly abused by his family; in her attempt to become a human herself, she is turned into a dragon through a trick. Her lover, however, accepts

her in her monstrous form, and the couple live happily ever after, whereas the eldest sister, who refuses to love anyone except her deceased mother, dies in a filthy water tank after being captured and then soon forgotten by a wealthy married man.

In Mizuno's rewriting of Andersen's fairy tale about unrequited, self-destructive love, the eldest sister, who retains her sexually attractive mermaid form, dies tragically while the second sister, who is transformed into a form even more remote from a human being than a mermaid, is given a happy ending, which is a repetition with a difference of the myth of the water spirit Mélusine. With thick eyelashes and a round, toy-like body, this female dragon is cute in a grotesque way, and, instead of wishing to regain her former body, she decides to save the mermaid species with her newly acquired physical strength: "I ended up like this ... but that also means I can protect your family" (Mizuno 2003, 94). This ironic twist can be seen as a critique of the dominant cultural representations of the desirable female body; the *guro-kawaii* monster the heroine turns into is presented here not as an undesirable state to be exorcised but as an empowering self-image for girls. Moreover, the two sisters' contrastive double ending again suggests Mizuno's preoccupation with death as a privileged topos; the eldest sister, who would not conform to the heterosexual romance as her younger sister does, is herself a heroic figure who dies in celebration of intergenerational female bonding, which is a theme pursued by Miwa Yanagi in her fairy-tale photographs.

Girls at play in the bloody chamber: Miwa Yanagi's fairy-tale photographs

The sexualised young women predominating in Mizuno's work disappear in Miwa Yanagi's *Fairy Tale: Stories of Women Young and Old*; instead, her fairy-tale world is populated only with women either pre-sexual or post-sexual. The exclusion of women who fall between

these two stages as well as of men of all ages is, of course, strategic; in order to create a narrative space where desire is not confined to heteronormativity, Yanagi's *Fairy Tale* re-imagines traditional fairy tales as stories of intergenerational bonding between those types of women whose bodies are not usually sexualised in cultural representations and who are also mostly merely marginal figures in traditional fairy tales.

In Yanagi's digital photographs, images of real people and places are computer-edited and combined with purely computer-generated images. In all her work, images are elaborately manipulated to enhance their constructed nature; as Linda Nochlin points out, "revealing the device" is her prime strategy (Nochlin 2008, 232). The use of black-and-white in *Fairy Tale*, on the other hand, enhances the dream-like, subconscious quality of the images. It also serves to foreground the ambiguity of the nature of each figure; old witches' supposedly malevolent smiles may look rather innocent, and young princesses often appear more knowing than traditional stories tell us they are.

The confusion is further intensified by the fact that all the models in *Fairy Tale* are girls aged between five and ten. The girls playing the parts of old women wear masks with exaggerated wrinkles and the hooked nose typical of a fairy-tale witch, but their bodies are undisguised, with lacy chemises revealing the cute plump limbs of young girls. Instead of making the disguise look natural, Yanagi deliberately emphasises the disjunction between the mask of an old crone and its wearer's girlish body. The grotesque, cute, and often humorous hybridity of these images destabilises our naturalised notions of youth and old age, which are presented here as ambiguous and reversible; it is obvious that the models can exchange their roles by simply putting on or taking off their masks. The invented fairy tale entitled "Mud Mask," in which a girl carves out an old woman's face

on her sister's mud-covered face, reveals this role-playing aspect of the series in a self-reflexive way.

In Yanagi's version of "Snow White," the young girl and the old woman are shown as the mirror image of each other. The figure with her back to the camera appears to be the young Snow White, and the figure confronting the girl looks like her wicked stepmother. A closer look, however, will reveal that the masked figure is the reflection of the girl in the mirror. In the Grimms' "Snow White," it is the wicked stepmother who sees not her own but her stepdaughter's face in the magic mirror. She then sets out to kill Snow White, whose youthful beauty has defeated her in a social beauty contest which defines aging as a demeaning and fatal process for women. In Yanagi's version, however, the two stages of woman's life are compressed into one figure in which the young/beautiful/good side coexists with the old/ugly/evil side, and it is the potential for death that connects them as one side of the apple must be as poisonous as the other.

Yanagi's "Little Red Riding Hood" [Fig. 6] restages the rescue scene of the girl and her grandmother from the wolf's belly. The encounter between the girl and the wolf, a theme vital to countless re-workings of this quintessential fairy tale, is clearly not central to Yanagi's interpretation. The two male characters, to whom Bruno Bettelheim attached such great significance, do not feature here; the Grimms' huntsman representing the good father is completely omitted from the scene, and the wolf, who is Bettelheim's sexualised patriarch, is reduced to a flimsy fur suit with a big zipper glistening with dark-coloured liquid suggestive of freshly spilled blood. This *guro-kawaii* image does not make clear whether this is a happy ending or not; it is clear, however, that the girl and her grandmother went through death before their rebirth together. Yanagi's "Little Red Riding Hood," like her "Snow White," seems to celebrate the transformative potential arising from women's sharing of the same

destiny, which is also an undercurrent theme throughout Mizuno's work.

In "The Little Match Girl," the girl and the old woman are merged into one image straddling the border of death. At first sight, the figure, with her legs carelessly stretched out, looks like a little girl, but a closer look will reveal that her face is wrinkled with age: the face of the dead grandmother, who has come to guide the poor girl to heaven in Andersen's story, has been superimposed on the face of the girl. This is the only photograph in this series which uses, not the grotesque masks as we see in other photographs, but a more subtle makeup, through which the girl's dead grandmother comes back to life in a most uncanny way. Yanagi's heroine continues to live with the dead old woman's face as if in vengeance for a world which sacrifices young girls as innocent and willing victims.

In "Sleeping Beauty," the girl sits astride the old woman and holds the spindle which, in Perrault's story, puts the heroine to sleep. The power relation of the traditional tale is thus challenged in this recasting, with the girl threatening to put the old woman to sleep. At the same time, it is clear that the two girls can swap roles at any time by taking off or putting on the mask as they look almost identical otherwise. The accompanying text reads as follows: "'Time for bed.' 'I am not sleepy.' 'It is time to sleep.' 'Then you sleep first, Grandma'" (Yanagi 2007, 36). Yanagi turns Perrault's parable about female sexual passivity into a bedtime game played by two girls in the intimate space of a spinning room with soft, cocoon-like balls of yarn rolling all over the floor, a space pervaded with an aura of female-centred eroticism and deathlike stasis where the childlike flirting with death is connected to intimacy between women in a manner characteristic of the *guro-kawaii* feminist aesthetics. There is obviously no need for a prince who comes to awake the girl to fully-fledged sexuality.

Yanagi's "Gretel," as the title makes clear, removes the clever brother from the story. As in "Sleeping Beauty," the power relation is reversed, and it is the girl who encloses the old woman and waits for her to become fat enough to eat. The motif of the girl who eats her grandmother can be found in "The Grandmother's Story," an oral version of "Little Red Riding Hood," which can be interpreted as a girl's coming-of-age story through the assimilation of the procreative power of an older woman (Verdier 1995, 110). Yanagi's "Gretel," however, seems to suggest a different story. The beautiful girl nibbling at the old woman's gaunt, zombie-like finger appears to be herself consumed with a longing, probably more for death than for life. In this Gothic horror version, the girl and the crone do not stand in eat-or-be-eaten opposition to each other; rather, they seem to be tied together in their willingness to share the same destiny.

Thus, Yanagi's photographic re-imagining of fairy tales envisions a different life story for women by focusing on the periods before and after sexual reproductivity and by blending the binary oppositions well-established in classic European fairy tales, often cast as the opposition between women young and old. In doing so, Yanagi's work explores an alternative mode of desire which is centred not on heteronormative sexual relationship but on mutually transformative and empowering bonding between women. As is often the case with *shojo* manga, the kind of eroticism it evokes is fundamentally autoerotic since all the characters are presented here as mirror images of each other. Closed upon itself, this cosy but claustrophobic fairy-tale fantasy seems obsessed with death, representing an all-female version of the *danse macabre*. Seen in this light, the *guro-kawaii* aesthetics may suggest a feminist re-reading of the Freudian uncanny which, instead of repressing autosexuality with the threat of difference, castration, and death, allows for the sameness, the imaginary relationship with the mother, and the continuity of life and death.²

In the realm of the senses: Tomoko Konoike's fairy-tale paintings

Tomoko Konoike's use of fairy tales seems less direct than the other two artists discussed above, but her images certainly stir the fairy-tale imagination. In her "Story Series" of four paintings, the symbolic redness in "Little Red Riding Hood" is transferred to the girl's shoes as she has no head on which to wear a hood – the upper half of her body takes the form of the wolf [Plate 4]. This grotesque hybridity is depicted with countless fine lines, which also cover the whole surface of the large-scale canvas (220 x 630 cm each). Repeated motifs in her oeuvre include howling wolves with girls' legs and small knives flying around like a swarm of bees, both of which signal potential violence.

Konoike's visual recasting of "Little Red Riding Hood" activates the viewer's fairy-tale imagination not only with motifs which explicitly refer to the classic tale such as woods, wolves, and girls but also through the very texture of its painterly surface. Apparently minor details such as the furriness of wolf fur or the luxuriance of foliage are foregrounded whereas supposedly essential narrative elements such as the protagonist and the beginning-middle-end sequence are marginalised. Examined closely, an infinite number of fine pencil-lines on canvas remind us of embroidery; the almost tactile texture of the surface is suggestive of the physicality involved in the process of creation as in the case of the traditionally female art of embroidery.

In her version of "Little Red Riding Hood," the presence of the basic characters of the story is suggested, but their relationship by no means conforms to the traditional one, especially in the case of the wolf, who is supposed to be the heroine's aggressor but who here constitutes the upper part of her own body. The hybridity and the pluralisation of the ostensible protagonist preclude any straightforward empathetic identification on the part of the viewer,

and it is not clear which gender or even what species the protagonist belongs to. The sharp instrument used by the Grimms' huntsman to cut open the wolf's belly is not in anybody's hand but seems to fly around at its own will. *Chapter One* [Plate 5] depicts wolves' tails growing out of a cluster of crystal blades, suggesting that the wolf and its slaughterer are also one and the same. Here, the colour red is transferred to the blades, so it is the knife that bleeds. This version of "Little Red Riding Hood" is obviously not interested in dramatising the confrontation between the human and the wolf which comes at the climax of the traditional story; rather, it attempts to crystallise the story in the dynamics of the textural juxtaposition of disparate feelings, soft, warm, furry, and organic on the one hand, and hard, cold, smooth, and mineral on the other. In contrast to Mizuno's work, which is highly charged with sexual desire, sensuousness rather than sexuality regulates the pleasure principle of Konoike's fairy-tale art.

Konoike's fairy-tale images also contrast with those of Yanagi, in that they are not as death-driven. The paintings in her "Story Series" were created and shown in the reverse order, beginning with the work entitled *Chapter Four: The Return – Sirius Odyssey* and moving backwards towards *Chapter One*. Narrating backwards, however, does not solve the mystery as is expected in a detective story. According to the subtitle of *Chapter Four*, this story tells the adventures of Sirius, the star known as the celestial wolf in Chinese astronomy. However, it is not clear who is fighting with whom or who wins and returns where. Moreover, the series can begin and end anywhere; without the chapter numbers, it would be impossible to tell which picture goes where – at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end. The four pictures are nevertheless loosely connected to each other through common motifs and textures and are woven into one narrative space. Her non-linear fairy tale, rather than being driven towards closure, opens up alternative possibilities for understanding and constructing narrative desire.

Konoike's picture book entitled *Mimio* [Fig. 7] follows the life cycle of the forest through spring to winter. Mimio is a soft, small, round, furry creature which looks like a cuddly toy; however, cuteness is counterbalanced with the baffling unfamiliarity caused by non-human facelessness. Mimio looks similar to such typically *kawaii* characters as Hello Kitty and Dick Bruna's Miffy, whose large bright eyes look straight into the viewer's eyes, but it seems difficult to sympathise with a character with no face. Konoike observes that children are usually frightened by Mimio's facelessness and that it requires an adult's emotional complexity to be able to sympathise with this *guro-kawaii* figure. Like Konoike's other protagonists, Mimio is an ambivalent character defying any easy empathetic identification on the part of the viewer.

Having no mouth, Mimio is devoid of speech, but the story is mainly narrated from Mimio's perspective. Throughout the narrative, however, Mimio very rarely figures as a subject; instead, the narrative consists mostly of isolated noun phrases describing Mimio's perception of the surrounding natural objects and phenomena: "The headlong rush of summer – the smell of droppings from countless living things" (Konoike 2001). Here, Mimio is supposed to be doing the smelling, but as Mimio obviously has no nose with which to smell, the reader is induced to imagine the smell of these warm, freshly deposited droppings for Mimio. Mimio, whose name contains "mimi," the Japanese word for "ear," plays a rather passive role for a protagonist, functioning mainly as a receptor open equally to all the elements in the woods such as flowers, trees, insects, earth, wind, fire, and water.

Mimio's wandering in the woods reminds us of the delightful detour which the Grimms' Little Red Cap takes in the woods looking for flowers and for which she is punished with death, albeit in a temporary form in their version. Through the sensuous textures of the natural elements perceived by Mimio, this picture book recasts "Little

Red Riding Hood” as a story which is not centred on the confrontation between good and evil in man. Mimio is a creature who is constantly defined and redefined by what it feels with its own body. In other words, Mimio is embodied in its interaction with natural surroundings.

The environment itself, therefore, is the main character of Konoike’s version of “Little Red Riding Hood” with Mimio as a receptor responding to light, heat, smell, sound, and other external stimuli in the forest. When winter comes, Mimio’s breath grows slower and fainter until the senses are “released into the darkness of the void” (Konoike 2001). This ending, however, brings the reader right back to the beginning of the book where after the death-like sleep Mimio begins to feel the light and the warmth of the sun again. Through Mimio’s senses, the natural elements of the woods, which Little Red Riding Hood was told especially not to indulge in, begin to tell their own story of the wonder of the never-ending life cycle.

Re-envisioning the fairy-tale desire

As seen above, the *guro-kawaii* aesthetics shared by these three artists reconfigures the fairy tale as a powerfully empathetic critical device. Mizuno’s fairy-tale manga flaunts female sexuality in a grotesquely distorted way so as to disrupt the gender stereotypes propagated by traditional fairy tales. Yanagi’s photographic recasting, on the other hand, creates an all-female narrative space where desire is oriented towards a radical sameness. Konoike’s work, instead of retelling old stories, points towards a different narrative desire through its intensely sensuous texturisation. In their *guro-kawaii* re-envisionings of fairy tales, the fairy-tale uncanny takes on a different meaning, giving the viewer wider freedom to explore alternative modes of desiring in a post-feminist and post-humanist age.

Notes

1. *Ukiyoe*, stylised wood-block prints dominant in the Edo period whose favourite subjects included famous courtesans and actors as well as landscapes, had a great influence on the nineteenth-century avant-garde artists in France, especially on the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists.
2. I owe this point to Anna Kérchy, who also made many other insightful comments on this chapter.

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Illustrations

Plate 3: Junko Mizuno, Cover of *Ningyo Hime Den*, 2002. © Junko Mizuno. Courtesy of the artist and Bunkasha.

Plate 4: Tomoko Konoike, *Chapter Three Wreck* (detail), 2005. Acrylic, sumi, Kumohada-mashi (Japanese paper) and wood panel, 2200 x 6300 x 50 mm. Photograph by Keizo Kioku. © Tomoko Konoike. Courtesy of Mizuma Art Gallery.

Plate 5: Tomoko Konoike, *Chapter One* (detail), 2006. Acrylic, sumi, Kumohada-mashi (Japanese paper) and wood panel, 2200 x 6300 x 50 mm. Photograph by Atsushi Nakamichi (Nasca&Partners). © Tomoko Konoike. Courtesy of Mizuma Art Gallery.

Figure 6: Miwa Yanagi, *Little Red Riding Hood*, 2004. Gelatin silver print, 100 x 100 cm. © Miwa Yanagi. Courtesy of the artist and Seigensha Art Publishing, Inc.

Figure 7: Tomoko Konoike, *Mimio Original Drawings*, 2001. Pencil on paper, 39.7 x 54.4 cm. © Tomoko Konoike. Courtesy of Mizuma Art Gallery.

SECTION THREE: REWRITING MYTH

THE INTERACTION OF LITERATURE AND CRITICISM. FEMINIST IMAGINATION, CHALLENGING THE CANON Vanessa Joosen. *Reclaiming the Lost Code: Feminist Imaginations of the Fairy-tale Genesis.* Olga Broumas's and Nicole Cooley's Revisions

The myth that the Brothers Grimm transmitted German folktales in unchanged form has long been rejected in fairy-tale criticism (see Rölleke 1975; Warner 1994; Zipes 2002). Not only did the Grimms borrow their most famous tales from educated women rather than illiterate sources, they (especially Wilhelm) further adapted the tales when they were published and revised for the various editions of *Die Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (1812-1857). In the 1970s and 1980s, several critics explored this dynamics between oral and literary fairy tales from a feminist perspective (see Haase 2004). But they were not the only ones to address the unequal historical relationship between female sources and male transcribers. Whereas the oral narratives of these fairy-tale tellers are lost to academic criticism, authors of fiction have taken the liberty to re-imagine their stories and give them back their voices. As such, fairy-tale retellings form a creative, fictional discourse that supplements the academic feminist discussion at a point where it reaches its own boundaries and uncertainties. In this article, I will introduce a handful of these stories in connection with relevant fairy-tale scholarship, and then explore the retellings of two poets in more detail: Olga Broumas and Nicole Cooley.

A seminal work in the feminist study of *Die Kinder- und Hausmärchen* is Ruth Bottigheimer's *Grimms' Bad Girls and Bold Boys* (1987). She argues that "[i]dentifying the real narrative voice in the spinning tales is crucial, [...] because mixed and often contradictory messages emerge from different narrative levels within

these tales” (10). Whether such a “real narrative voice” in a polyphonic genre as the fairy tale can ever be discerned is highly questionable, and in practice Bottigheimer indeed focuses on revealing the various threads from which the Grimm tales are spun. She locates the reason for the contradictory messages she discovered in the oral tales themselves and in the editorial changes made by Wilhelm Grimm. Heinz Rölleke stresses that the Grimms may have intensified bourgeois role patterns, but that they never manipulated the stories to express messages that they did not contain: “No, the Grimms have essentially let the tales speak for themselves” (2000, 199).¹ Whereas Rölleke thus interprets the Grimm tales as more harmonious polyphonies, Bottigheimer and other feminists have rather focused on the dissonances between the voices. Most retellings do the same, and the way the Brothers treated their female sources is envisaged in these fictional texts as a true battle of the sexes. Linda Kavanagh’s “The Princesses’ Forum,” for example, explicitly refers to the editing practices of the Grimms. When Sleeping Beauty complains that in many stories women are depicted as enemies, Cinderella reformulates Bottigheimer’s conclusions in an extreme fashion: “That’s because men wrote the stories [...] It makes them feel good to have women fighting among themselves for male attention” (1985, 8). In Barbara Walker’s feminist retelling “Snow Night,” it is suggested that the author of the traditional “Snow White” is her rejected admirer, the hunter, “his reason quite gone:” “he lived confined for the rest of his life as the dwarves’ prisoner. In later years he sometimes passed the weary hours by writing stories. It is said that he wrote an entirely different version of the story you have just heard” (1996, 25).

Several other authors have applied the popular feminist strategy of gender reversal to the Brothers and replaced them with the “Sisters Grimm.” Although the Grimms did have one sister, Lotte, the stories have little to do with her. Michael Buckley’s series, for example,

describes the adventures of Sabrina and Daphne Grimm, who discover that they are descendants from Wilhelm. In their fantasy world, *Die Kinder- und Hausmärchen* is not a fairy-tale collection but a history book: “Every story is an account of what *really* happened” (2005, 66). The Grimms are pictured as honourable scribes who faithfully recorded the trials and tribulations of fairy-tale creatures. Buckley’s fantasy stories draw on a glorifying discourse around the Brothers that has largely been demolished in retellings for adults. The stress there is on their misrepresentation of female oral tradition. Cathleen O’Neill’s “Revenge of the Sisters Grimm” invents for the Grimms what Virginia Woolf had imagined for William Shakespeare: a fictional sister with the ambition to write. There are three sisters Grimm who live in Patri-Ark, “the land of he and him:”

The laws of former Patri-Ark
Kept sisters past hid in the dark,
where rules were made by he for she
and written out of his story.
No trace was found of woman-kind
save what the bravest one could find
by delving through the olden lore
of memory, songs and tales of yore. (1989, 11)

O’Neill’s story reminds the reader that the information available about the Brothers Grimm greatly surpasses what is known about their oral sources or their sister: “The arkives contained only his story. The annals were full of He and Him. Sisters, wives, mothers and daughters were not worthy of record” (12). The voice of the women in this society can only be accessed through stories written down by men (the so-called “Patri-Arkives”), in which, the characters suggest: “we must look for the secret sign” (12). These observations find their non-fictional parallel in the works of feminist

researchers such as Bottigheimer, Jeannine Blackwell and Valerie Paradiž. The latter writes about her research on women in the Grimms' circle that, not unlike O'Neill's Sisters Grimm, she was "digging up whatever scraps of event and biography [she] could find about the women" (2005, xv). O'Neill's tale is even more reminiscent of the "true fairy tale" that Blackwell writes to introduce her "Fractured Fairy Tales," an article on "German Women Authors and the Grimm tradition" (1987). She describes the life of Bettina von Arnim as follows:

Once upon a time there were two brothers. [...] They went to all the wise women in their kingdom and asked them for magic stories. The wise women were happy to help them, but when the brothers wrote down the tales, they omitted some of the magic words, and then jumbled up parts of the plots. They even left the wise women out of the stories they told, or changed them to wicked, bossy, and ugly. (1987, 162)

It is not hard to guess who the two brothers were, especially since von Arnim belonged to their circle of friends. That the Grimms need not be mentioned by name stands in stark contrast to Bettina von Arnim as a female author whose fame is far more limited. Blackwell comes particularly close to O'Neill's story when she writes: "Authority is removed from the oral feminine voice to the male editor/author" and at the same time "coded messages are being passed" (165) – this is an intertextual link with the "secret sign" of O'Neills retelling (12). The research undertaken by her fictional Sisters Grimm leads them to stories of matriarchy, as it has been practised in the 1980s by feminist scholars such as Heide Göttner-Abendroth, Sonja Rüttner-Cova and Gertrud Jungblut (Haase 2004, 15). Whereas the critic Blackwell is still in doubt "[w]hether the coded message is effective as an antidote to the textual message"

(165), the author O'Neill imagines a speedy optimistic ending. In her story, the codes are not irretrievably lost, nor is even a thorough analysis of the patriarchal tales needed to reveal them. The retrieved knowledge greatly empowers the Sisters, and patriarchy is helpless in the face of their female rebellion: "The Grimms returned to society armed with their fury plus the new information about the old ways and secrets. [...] In time men came to depend on them totally" (13). The simplistic reversal from female to male submission illustrates what Anna Altmann describes as the feminist see-saw effect: one dominant group merely replaces the other; the system of repression itself is not questioned. O'Neill's utopian tale of feminist emancipation takes the impact of stories to the extreme. The critic Blackwell's conclusion is hopeful as well, but her optimism lies mainly in the fact that nineteenth-century stories by female authors are finally rediscovered and reread for their literary value rather than for their revolutionary power. Obviously this happens in a society where the second feminist wave has taken place: whereas in Blackwell's article, feminism has changed society so that it is possible to rediscover female authors of the past, in O'Neill's tale, it is thanks to the stories of the past that a feminist overturn of society can happen.

Rather than describing the search for the lost code, as O'Neill does, several authors have tried to revitalize hidden or lost meanings through their revisions of classical texts, to proceed from critical parody to creative poesis. Drawing on Lacanian and feminist theories on *écriture féminine*, Alicia Ostriker labels the female rewriters of fairy tales the "Thieves of Language" (1982). Whereas in her "true fairy tale," Blackwell argued that men had stolen from women both their stories and opportunities to write, Ostriker starts from the Lacanian assumption that women had never owned language in the first place: "the language we speak and write has been an encoding of male privilege" (1982, 69), a phallogentric logos. Like Kay Stone,

Blackwell and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Ostriker stresses that female submission to a male code, whether linguistic or literary, has never been complete, and that “[w]omen writers have always tried to steal the language. What several recent studies demonstrate poignantly is that throughout most of her history, the woman writer has had to state her self-definitions in code form” (69). Ostriker briefly discusses Olga Broumas’s influential poetry collection, *Beginning with O* (1977). The poem “Artemis” contains an auto-reflexive moment on the process of “transliteration” that Broumas practices, picturing a performative body that speaks and writes itself. The O is both a cavity, an absence, and a sign and sound, a possibility for expression. As Cristina Bacchilega applies Hélène Cixous’s thinking to the fairy tale: “Writing, then, is holding a mirror to our bodies (and subjectivities) so as to transform into symbols those bodily symptoms which want to speak but which on their own are iconic rather than verbal signs” (1997, 15). Broumas’s concentration on the body seems motivated by a lack in language, in which only fragments of the (female) body are retained:

What tiny fragments

survive, mangled into our language.
I am a woman committed to
a politics
of transliteration, the methodology

of a mind
stunned at the suddenly
possible shifts of meaning – for which
like amnesiacs

in a ward on fire, we must
find words
or burn. (23-24)

In these final lines of “Artemis,” the iconic use of language appears as insufficient in a world where others use referential language and have a better chance of being heard. Broumas’s “transliteration” is reminiscent of the reading strategies practiced by critics such as Blackwell: to look for shifts of meaning in the fairy tales, to articulate hidden and new messages in a well-known code. Yet, Broumas’s poem also contains a warning that the meanings they want to communicate can just as easily shift in the code that is used, to mean something else than what the speaker intended.

Whereas “Artemis” deals with language and the body, Broumas’s sequel to “Cinderella” reflects on literary codes. The narrator is a “woman writer.”

I know what I know.
And once I was glad

of the chance to use it, even alone
in a strange castle, doing overtime on my own, cracking
the royal code. The princes spoke in their fathers’ language,
were eager
to praise me
my nimble tongue. (57)

The narrator feels like an intruder in the royal castle, and the new status she has been promoted to prevents her from expressing herself freely. In the traditional version of “Cinderella,” the “royal code” she mentions speaks of female rivalry for the prince. The narrator admits that she has been temporarily engaged in this strife:

a woman forced
to bear witness, falsely
against my kind, as each

other sister was judged inadequate, bitchy, incompetent,
jealous, too thin, too fat. (57)

“[M]y kind” can refer to other women but may also have a more specific meaning. It can be used for the stepsisters, who are now considered true sisters, true family. If “my kind” refers to female authorship, the poem functions as a reflection on Broumas’s own select position as a respected feminist author, while many of her colleagues do not fit the “royal code” and, it is suggested, she herself can only be successful on the terms of the other sex.

Once the alternative meanings behind the male code have become visible, a new need for expression appears. The common use of language has not proved satisfactory. In “Artemis” the body produces vowels, not words; in “Rumpelstiltskin,” Broumas writes that “[t]he words we need are extinct / Or if not extinct / badly damaged” (1977, 65). The process of transliteration is an act of re-reading that yields the need for re-writing, a search for a new language. The last lines in Broumas’s “Artemis” (“we must / find words / or burn”) are reminiscent of Adrienne Rich’s famous dictum: “Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival” (1993, 167). In “Cinderella,” Broumas underlines indeed that transliteration and the bonding with sisters are acts of survival:

Give
me my ashes. A cold stove, a cinder-block pillow, wet
canvas shoes in my sisters’, my sisters’ hut. Or I swear

I’ll die young
like those favored before me, hand-picked each one
for her joyful heart. (58)

Where others have given up, the narrator suggests that she will try to survive, returning home rather than dying young in a house and literature where she does not belong. Yet she takes with her the knowledge of this literature in order to subvert and reappropriate it. Thus she interprets the elements of Cinderella's hardship not as punishments from her stepmother and sister, but as the metaphorical circumstances in which women writers have been forced. The beauty contest, in which Cinderella was "hand-picked" is re-imagined as another competition: that of literary appreciation. It shares with the beauty contest the encouragement of female rivalry, the estrangement from and betrayal of other women. Rather than dwelling in the canonical house on male terms – taking literally what Gilbert and Gubar call the "overwhelmingly male 'Palace of Art'" (1979, 73) – Broumas seems to argue for reclaiming language and literature, for staying true to one's self and for writing from a context of female bonding and a feminist ethic.

Where Broumas imagines herself stealing a masculine language, some feminist fairy-tale critics picture male collectors as the real thieves: they have "stolen" the stories from their oral sources. Karen Rowe argues that telling fairy tales is "semiotically a female art" (1986, 16) and turns Ovid's Philomela into a metonymic figure who represents all female storytellers. Philomela told about her rape by weaving it into a tapestry, after her rapist tore out her tongue and her speech was thus literally stolen from her:

Ironically, Philomela, the innocent woman who spins, becomes the avenging woman who breaks her enforced silence by simply speaking in another mode – through a craft presumed to be harmlessly domestic, as fairy tales would also be regarded in later centuries. (301)

Typical of the history of fairy tales is that female tales survive in the writings of men. The retellings can take the artistic liberty to re-imagine lineages of female storytellers and place themselves at the end of it. Emma Donoghue's *Kissing the Witch* (1997) is an excellent and frequently discussed example. In what follows, I shall explore the lineage of story-tellers in a lesser known example: Nicole Cooley's "Snow White."

The poems in Cooley's *Resurrection* (1996) re-imagine the lives of female historical figures and fictional characters, such as Helen Keller and Alice Liddell. In "Snow White," Cooley explores how the oral tellers' female code may have differed from the Brothers Grimm's:

The casket lengthens with her body
in the story told by the two sisters,
storytellers of the unnamed village
where the Brothers Grimm stop for the night.

Listen, the first says, she was warned
not to open the door to anyone and three times
she invited the mad woman in, let

The Queen lace the corset to crush the breath
from her body, placed the poison comb
in her own black hair, swallowed
a piece from the magic side of the apple. (247)

The first stanza draws on the belief that the Grimms travelled through Germany to collect their tales – a practice which has proved to be a myth: "Their primary method was to invite storytellers to their home and then have them tell the tales aloud" (Zipes 2002, 28). The primary oral source of the Grimms' "Snow White" was probably Marie Hassenpflug (Rölleke 1975, 380-84). The village where she

lived is not unnamed, as in Cooley's poem, it is well known that she was from Kassel. The oral context in which Cooley resituates the text is thus a fictional recombination of historical elements with popular myths and imagined elements. The actual story content that Cooley rephrases does not correspond to the Grimm's annotations either. There is indeed a variant in which Snow White's casket grows with her: Giambattista Basile's "The Young Slave" (1634) – it is ironic that a written tale by another male author is here used to evoke the female oral version.

In the re-imagined oral version of the tale, Cooley presents Snow White's death as a suicide. The storytellers stress that in spite of all the warnings, Snow White invites the queen into her house three times. The sisters envisage Snow White as a conscious subject in her interaction with the queen, rather than the naïve victim of the traditional tale. They stress that she *lets* herself be laced and puts the poisoned comb in her *own* hair, suggesting that she is in control. The line breaks in the poem help to achieve this stress. Such hints of suicide do not occur in any of the Grimms' collected versions or annotations. The explanation that Cooley gives for this is similar to Rowe's:

At the table in the sisters' house the men
translate each word into their own language.
The sisters' story fills page after page.

In this story, the women are condemned
to daylight, the Queen dancing the fire
dance in iron shoes, the Queen burning.
The girl's body is locked in the Prince's embrace. (247)

Like Rowe, Cooley diversifies between a male and a female semiotic code: the men *translate* the sisters' words into a different

language. The masculine code distorts the oral meaning: the women no longer take conscious decisions, but are “condemned” and confined, reduced to a body that is acted upon – a strong contrast to Broumas’s performative, speaking body. Whereas in the sisters’ tale, Snow White’s “casket lengthens with her body,” in the Grimms’ tale her “body is locked” and restrained. In Cooley’s imagined oral version, Snow White and the Queen acted as allies working towards the same goal (Snow White’s voluntary coma or death), here they are physically separated: the Queen dances and burns while Snow White is embraced by the Prince. The daylight of the brothers’ tale wipes out the darkness of the sisters’, describing Snow White’s suicide.

Like Rowe, however, Cooley does not see the Grimms’ collection as the end of the story. Not only does she claim access to it in the first part of her poem, but in the second part she shows how women still perform subversive acts and prepare and eat poisoned apples:

Years later, in another country, my mother’s sisters
accept the apple like a communion wafer:
the Body of Christ, the Bread of Heaven.

At the altar they wait, hands open, hoping
to sleep for the rest of the century while they grow
old in their deaths, apart from everyone,
and beg the Queen to return with the other

punishments, greater terrors, a promise –
this time, nothing will save you. (247)

Several elements of the fictional oral “Snow White” are resumed in this evocation of a mass suicide with religious connotations (the Church may function here as another male-

governed institution, like the history of fairy tales). Again a community of sisters is described, there is a willing exchange of the apple between women, and again their sleep or death is a moment of growth, as is the casket that lengthens. The women that Cooley describes seem to know the Grimm tale of “Snow White,” and ask the queen for a potion from which they will not be “saved.” The poem pivots on the strong contrast between the first set of sisters, who still fill “page after page” with their stories, and the second group, who are passive and – except for their plea for terror – mute.

As in the first part of Cooley’s poem, the traditional fairy-tale ending is depicted as the ultimate horror, above which the women prefer death:

If they drink from the Cup of Salvation,

they can refuse the Prince and his offer
of refuge, his kingdom. In the forest
I wash my aunts’ faces with wine and water.
I lay their bodies on the crystal slab.

Their eyes stay open. Nothing can carry them
into the sleep they want. Over and over I prepare
the potion to take the sisters into the other world.

They can’t get enough of oblivion. (247-48)

The narrator performs the acts of the dwarves in the Grimms’ “Snow White,” washing the aunts with wine and water, laying their bodies on the slab that is reminiscent of the bier in Grimm. Yet, the sentence from Grimm that “nothing could bring her back” (1857, 88) is transformed: “Nothing can carry them into the sleep they want” – the exact opposite. The Cup of Salvation is not one that leads to the

resurrection in the title of Cooley's collection. The sisters do not want to leave the forest for the Kingdom of Heaven, nor for the more worldly kingdom offered by the prince – they ask to be taken away to a point of no return.

The role of the narrator in the poem then shifts from the dwarves' to the queen's, preparing new potions to kill her "aunts." Paradoxically, the goal of the women's agency, liberty and sisterhood here lies in the possibility of self-annihilation or even the complete self-erasure from history contained in the word "oblivion." If women are interpreted as the object, rather than the subject of oblivion, that is if oblivion is understood not only as the condition of unconsciousness but also as a state of being forgotten, this may affect the rest of the poem as a meta-comment. What does it mean if women cannot get enough of being forgotten? The sisters mentioned in the first part of the poem remain anonymous, even the name of their town is no longer known. The final line shifts the responsibility for their anonymity from the Brothers Grimm, where it still resided in the first part, to the sisters themselves. The closure of the poem then radically subverts Rowe's and Blackwell's regret that we have access to such a small number of unmediated tales by female storytellers. The two critics attribute this to women's domination by men, but Cooley's poem adds the possibility of a more conscious choice of women who refuse to participate, neither in life nor in literature. Whereas the first sisters still believed that stories and experiences could be exchanged, the second group does not. The conclusion that Ostriker draws from Anne Sexton's treatment of the fairy tale, also applies to Cooley: these authors "challenge not only our culture's concepts of gender but also its concepts of reality" and normative, rational subjectivity (1982, 79 and 85).

The ambiguous desire for and denial of subjectivity in Cooley's poem acknowledges and challenges the research that aimed to restore the voices of the Grimms' female sources. The final line suggests that

oblivion is the state that women prefer: it implies a refusal of consciousness, a refusal to become a subject and thus builds a strong contrast to the cunning encoders that O'Neill, Rowe, and Blackwell – or more recently, Marina Warner (1995) – imagine. However, Cooley's narrator counteracts the women's wish through the mere fact that she tells their story. By thematizing their wish for oblivion in the poem, paradoxically the narrator too saves the women she describes from being forgotten. In this sense, the narrator not only takes on the role of the dwarves and the queen, but also that of the female storytellers in the first part. That apparently the narrator no longer needs to do so through the intermediary writing of a man, invests this bleak retelling with some sense of progress and hope.

Like most other fairy-tale retellings that can be intertextually linked to fairy-tale scholarship, the works of Broumas, Cooley and the other authors discussed do not simply duplicate ideas. They engage with the Brothers Grimm, their tales and their criticism critically and creatively at the same time. In Kavanagh, Walker, and O'Neill the feminist fairy-tale critique is explicit, but combined with fantasy and humour. Cooley and Broumas reflect on the process of telling and meaning making itself, and replace the fairy-tale code with one that cannot easily be deciphered. The freedom of expression of fiction allows for speculations on the oral tradition that eschew scientific verification and thus lie beyond the reach of fairy-tale scholarship. The history of fairy tales up to this day is high on the agenda of authors and critics (see, for example, Bottigheimer 2009), and the retellings help to popularize ideas from this discourse and introduce them to a wider readership – even though, as I have shown, this sometimes means that outdated theories may continue to lead a second, fictional life, the retellings can also help to set the record straight and draw the reader's attention to the gaps in fairy-tale history.

Notes

1. Original text: "Nein, die Grimms haben im wesentlichen denn doch die Texte selbst sprechen lassen."

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ANTI-FAIRY TALE. REVISITING BLUEBEARD

David Calvin. Anti-Fairy Tale and the Demythologising Business in Jane Campion's *The Piano* and Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber"

In this chapter I will discuss Jane Campion's 1993 film *The Piano* in relation to Angela Carter's 1979 short story "The Bloody Chamber." Through comparing these narratives, I will outline their shared feminist and postcolonial concerns in deconstructing the "Bluebeard" fairy tale, arguing that what Carter termed, 'the demythologising business' (Wandor 38) represents a par excellence postmodernist project, and realisation of the anti-fairy tale. Finally, I will argue that profoundly relevant socio-cultural implications are raised through both Carter and Campion's deconstruction of "Bluebeard," and their interrogation of its underlying gender mythology.

"The demythologising business," Carter explained, begins with exploring, "what certain configurations of imagery in our society, in our culture, really stand for, what they mean, underneath the kind of semi-religious coating that makes people not particularly want to interfere with them." (Wandor 38) In practice, the author purposed herself with uncovering the roots and machinations of the popular fairy-tale corpus. While Carter would sometimes construct her own 'fairy tales' from archetypal fragments of old ones (*Wayward Girls and Wicked Women* being one such example) her principal art was to revisit and deconstruct old narratives. Carter argued that, "[r]eading is just as creative an activity as writing, and most intellectual development depends upon new readings of old texts. I am all for putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode." (Wandor 38)

In re-telling these familiar fairy tales, the author would set about exposing and deconstructing the roles, rules and archetypes underlying the genre. Carter's impious journey would take her all the

way from the oral realm of Mother Goose, through the printing house of the brothers Grimm, to the cutting floor of Disney and beyond. Her intention was, “not to do ‘versions’ or, as the American edition of the book said, horribly, ‘adult fairy tales,’ but to extract the latent content from the traditional stories.” (Haffenden 80) Cristina Bacchilega would describe this as the “hypertextual re-awakening of dormant metaphors in fairy tales” (47). In short, Carter would take the embedded, underlying imagery and openly explore it – irrelevantly laying before us and scrutinising the ingredients of what Tolkien termed, “the pot of soup, the cauldron of story” (Tolkien 1939). Not only would Carter identify the recipe of humanity’s ‘great soup’ of myth, she would also endeavour to re-configure the dynamics of its constituent, stock elements: “is there a definite recipe for potato soup? [...] this is how *I* make potato soup!” (Sage 2)

In her short story, “The Bloody Chamber” (1979) Angela Carter re-tells the story of “Bluebeard” from the perspective of his wife. Touching on the myths of Pandora and St. Cecilia, and the philosophy of the Marquis de Sade, the author explores the misogynistic undercurrents of “Bluebeard” and its mythological antecedents, challenging the underlying cultural myth of ‘female curiosity’ and infusing the narrative with her own antithetical *moralité* (see Warner 1994, Tatar 2006). Some fourteen years later, Jane Campion would take up the mantle, as it were, with her 1993 film, *The Piano*, which likewise revisits “Bluebeard” from the perspective of the wife figure, producing a similarly demythologising anti-fairy tale. Set in colonial New Zealand, *The Piano* tells the tale of Ada McGrath (Holly Hunter) – a Glaswegian emigrant who, along with her illegitimate daughter, Flora (Anna Paquin) arrives on the barren South Island as part of an ‘arrangement’ to marry her father’s friend Alisdair Stewart (Sam McNeill). An elective mute, Ada’s chosen ‘voice’ is the titular piano, while she communicates through sign language to Flora, who often provides mischievously apocryphal

translations. The piano proves too cumbersome to carry and is abandoned on the beach in favour of Ada's kitchenware. Stewart's employee, George Baines (Harvey Keitel) instead takes the piano back to his own home and barter with Ada for sexual favours (under the guise of piano lessons) to obtain it back. The scenes of their 'piano lessons' are juxtaposed with rehearsals for a "Bluebeard" shadow play, the performance of which provides a chiasmic kernel to the broader "Bluebeard" narrative that is played out in the film. Before we consider Carter and Campion's respective uses of 'disenchantment' in un-telling the tale, we must first consider the traditional narrative and its *moralité*.

Published in 1697 in his *Contes de ma Mère l'Oye* collection, Charles Perrault's "Bluebeard" (subtitled "the dangers of curiosity") features a villain with a deadly secret. To the heroine, his most recent wife, Bluebeard entrusts the keys to his mansion and permits her entry to all but one room. When he leaves on business, the heroine cannot resist opening the forbidden chamber, which is lined with his previous wives' bodies. Horrified, she drops the key and it acquires a blood stain that will not remove. When Bluebeard returns unexpectedly, he inspects the key and sentences his wife to death. The heroine buys some time by asking to pray and asks her sister to look out for their brothers. They arrive just in time to decapitate Bluebeard. The wife divides his spoils between her siblings, affording commissions for the brothers, while she and her sister have dowries to marry good men. Charles Perrault, who was wont to add his own fable-like *moralités* onto fairy tales, seemed at a loss to deduce or articulate the moral undercurrent of "Bluebeard." In his first edition, Perrault added a single moral, warning of "the dangers of female curiosity" whilst omitting to mention the crimes of Bluebeard. In later editions he appended a second moral (actually entitled 'second moral') beneath the first, stating that "husbands are no longer so terrible" to their wives and adding that, "it's not hard to

tell who's in charge" (Tatar 2002, 156-157). Perrault's initial instinct to read the cautionary didactic as being solely directed at Bluebeard's wife, followed by his augmenting (note, not replacing) this moral with such a trivial rebuke for the villain (itself also tempered with implicit wife-blame) implies that he was either unwilling or unable to outrightly condemn Bluebeard. Perrault, it seems, was very much aware of the latent, bawdy content of the tales he collected and was known to superscribe, as it were, his own judgments onto fallen fairy-tale women.¹

In Bruno Bettelheim's well-known psychoanalytic study of fairy tales, *The Uses of Enchantment* (first published in 1976), the author interprets the transgression of Bluebeard's wife from a Freudian perspective and makes similar inferences. Focusing on the motif of the bloodstained key, Bettelheim argues that the true knowledge acquired is sexual – the key being a phallic symbol stained by the irreversible act of defloration. This is why, he notes, the blood won't wash off (Bettelheim 300). Different variants employ other fertility symbols. In some versions, Bluebeard leaves his wife with an egg, and in an Italian sister tale, "How the Devil Married Three Sisters" (Crane 1885) she is given a flower that will be singed should she open the secret door. Indeed even the very term 'defloration' connotes virginity with a flower.

Campion appears to reference these various allomotifs from the outset of *The Piano*. When Ada arrives with *Flora*, her illegitimate daughter, in tow, it is an immediate announcement that the heroine has already opened one of society's forbidden chambers and irreparably 'singed' her reputation. Furthermore, her silence references another "Bluebeard" tale-type, "Mary's Child," (collected by the Brothers Grimm) in which the heroine is punished with muteness for acquiring forbidden knowledge. From the very outset, Ada bears these marks of a fallen woman, albeit with a difference – as the later novel adaptation explains at length, Ada's muteness is

voluntary, a conscious decision to rebel after her father's rebuke at the age of six. Ada's enigmatic silence and impassioned music lends her an unnerving and mysterious presence among the colonists, whom she refuses to assimilate with. Behind Ada's silence there is an impassioned past only implied by the intensity of her music, Flora's embellished recollections, and a piano key with a name etched into it.

It becomes clear that both Carter and Campion wish to interrogate the skewed relationship between women and forbidden knowledge – not just in “Bluebeard,” or its sister tales, but its antecedent root *mythos*. Though the tale provides a locus for this mythology and a template for their respective tales, Carter and Campion both seek to illustrate its prevalence. The sexualisation of knowledge is evidenced in numerous languages. For example, the etymology of the Hebrew word for ‘know’ (*yâda*) is used to describe both cognitive awareness and sexual congress. Indeed, until relatively recently in the English language the verb bore the same dual meaning: “Adam *knew* Eve his wife, and she conceived,” (Genesis 4:1) is how the King James Bible words it. In legalese, this archaic connotation survives as the term ‘carnal knowledge’ – a phrase usually associated with illicit or unlawful intercourse. Gesenius’ *Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon of the Old Testament* notes that: “Verbs of knowing are frequently employed for this euphemism in other languages, both Oriental and Occidental,” including Syrian, Arab, Greek and Latin (47). In Western mythology, however, there is an inherent gender bias in this association. While the Greek hero Prometheus heroically steals fire from the gods for the benefit of mankind, for example, Pandora conversely opens a forbidden box that releases all of humanity’s ills.² Our literature, mythology and folklore are saturated with examples that follow a similar vein: when men gain forbidden knowledge it is celebrated, when women do so, they are condemned; for men forbidden fruit is a heroic deed or

conquest, for women it is dangerous, contaminating, sexually perilous and existentially fatal: '*fall*.'

Angela Carter reveals this mythic cultural bias in "The Bloody Chamber." Despite the heroine's contravention being ocular, the Marquis still equates her defiance with sexual infidelity, calling her a "whore" for opening the bloody chamber. German expressionist playwright Frank Wedekind made the same association in *Pandora's Box* (1904), rewriting Pandora as a corrupt, devious figure that ends up living as a common Victorian prostitute, eventually meeting her end at the hands of Jack the Ripper. Carter's Bluebeard is well versed in this gender mythology:

His library seemed the source of his habitual odour of Russian leather... an edition of Huysmans's *La-bas*... Elipás Levy, the name meant nothing to me. I squinted at a title or two: *The Initiation*, *The Key of Mysteries*, *The Secret of Pandora's Box*... yet I had not bargained for this, the girl with tears hanging on her cheeks like stuck pearls, her cunt like a split fig below the great globes of her buttocks on which the knotted tails of the cat were about to descend, while a man in a black mask fingered with his free hand his prick, that curved upwards like the scimitar he held. The picture had a caption: 'Reproof of Curiosity.' (Carter, 1979A, 16-17)

This sequence prefigures the wife's discovery of the actual bloody chamber, but draws a line between a long mythology of sexualised female curiosity and "Bluebeard," exposing the underlying influences and associational patterns. Though the wife is sardonically called a "little nun" here and later a "whore" upon finding the bloody chamber, Carter both exposes and debunks the latent inference of sexual transgression on her part. As the title suggests, there is an actual bloody chamber, but no actual adultery. Carter does not seek to

rationalise or explain her Bluebeard's motives, but rather to illustrate the irrational gender bias of "Bluebeard" and its underlying mythology. All too aware of this tradition, the Marquis consciously sets a trap for his wife, to bring about their respective roles in Carter's Sadeian tale:

I knew I had behaved exactly according to his desires; had he not bought me so that I should do so? ...I must now pay the price of my new knowledge. The secret of Pandora's box; but he had given me the box, himself, knowing I must learn the secret. I had played a game in which every move was governed by a destiny as oppressive and omnipotent as himself, since that destiny was himself; and I had lost. Lost at that charade of innocence and vice in which he had engaged me. Lost as the victim loses to the executioner...[his face contained] a terrible, guilty joy as he slowly ascertained how I had sinned... Then he sharply ordered: 'Kneel!' (Carter, 1979A, 34-36)

Jane Campion's *The Piano* likewise evokes the same latent inferences to suggest sexual betrayal, as her heroine actively engages in an affair. At face value, it appears that Campion falls into line with both Bettelheim's interpretation and Perrault's *moralité*: Ada commits adultery and, being the first wife of Stewart, he does not appear to have a 'bloody chamber.' Indeed in a review at the time, one critic dismissed Campion's film along similar lines, labelling it a "Discordant Tale of Kiss-Me-Quick Adultery." (Clancey, 1994: 8) However immediate this interpretation may seem, it does not do justice to *The Piano*, or indeed "Bluebeard," to shy away from the complex contradictions that render such a one-dimensional reading useless in itself. Rather Campion, like Carter evokes this latent inference only to debase it.

The *reductio ad absurdum* of the last wife's transgression leads us to question as to what was there for the first wife to find. Drawing

upon Lacanian theory, Phillip Lewis offers an unorthodox interpretation:

It is a test, a calculated risk, and Bluebeard basically wants his wife to believe that he has a powerful secret that she cannot know. It is a power that is intended to be beyond women's grasp. When she does, however, seek to know what it is, she finds nothing. Thus... the paradoxical core at the origin of his secret had to be its falseness or emptiness: the secret truth of his secret is that there is no secret. In these circumstances, the victim's ordeal was essentially a test of her obedience, while the perpetrator's experience – including, along with the frustration caused by her disobedience, his discovery of the perverse pleasures accessible to killers and undertakers – entailed compensating for his lack of a genuine secret by constituting one after the fact. (Lewis 208 in Zipes 2006, 162)

Lewis' critical explanation of the tale lends itself well to Campion's explicit re-interpretation. It is evident that Ada is Stewart's first wife (a fact alluded to in the film and elucidated in the later novelisation) and that there is no real bloody chamber filled with past wives, or anything, for that matter. Rather in his vacuity, which he vainly tries to compensate for by posturing a masculine 'woodsman' archetype, Stewart amply represents a baseless projection of colonial superiority and power. When the Maori demand payment for moving Ada's piano, Stewart can only offer them buttons. Later, when Stewart is watching Ada with her lover from beneath the floorboards, a button falls off and rolls through the gap. The sequence references another "Bluebeard" tale type, "The Robber Bridegroom," (recorded by the Brothers Grimm) in which a ring falls from the severed finger of the villain's victim and rolls towards his fiancée, who is hiding. While the traditional roles of husband and wife are here reversed, it is interesting that Campion

replaces Bluebeard's currency with buttons. It is a subversive devaluation of his social, cultural and gender *habitus*. To Lewis, the revelation of this weakness represents a castration anxiety, which is expressed by Bluebeard's desire to decapitate his wife. When this façade fails, to his humiliation, Stewart transforms from his woodsman-like posturing as protector-provider, to the contrasting shadow figure of Bluebeard, as he turns his axe on his own wife, severing her finger in a symbolic castration of sorts. It should be noted that although Ada does in fact commit sexual betrayal, Stewart's immediate response to this is one of passive voyeurism. Thus it is clear that while Campion's own interpretation of forbidden knowledge is sexual, she, like Lewis, does not believe that this act in itself constitutes the true kernel of the tale's forbidden fruit.

The answer lies in Bluebeard's response. When Stewart watches Ada and Baines, his attitude reflects mere impotence and passivity, even curiosity. It is only when his wife rejects his own awkward sexual advances that Stewart issues his prohibition, and only when she breaches this precinct that he reacts with violence. As Cristina Bacchilega observes, Stewart "quickly falls into a well-known script that mimics "Bluebeard"" and reverts to "[an] alternately paternalistic and authoritarian husband model." Bacchilega further adds:

Baines and Stewart are as unprepared as [Ada] is for the self-discovery initiated by their liminal experiences. Baines takes the risk of improvising, of acting out new knowledge; afraid of his own actions in uncharted territory, Stewart resorts to the authority of the well-known... both men respond to encounters with "the other" by mediating them through a cultural Victorian script." (133)

Like Angela Carter, Jane Campion engages in the ‘demythologising business,’ reducing Bluebeard from a powerful, shadowy figure of patriarchal dominance, to an impotent voyeur with no real secrets to hide, or power to uphold. Rather his power is defined not by its contents (if any) but by prohibition alone. In Carter and Campion’s terms, the bloody chamber is exposed as an empty signifier. Its emptiness however signifies the vacuity of the prohibitor’s perceived/projected authority. It is only substantiated by his wife’s submission to the terms he sets, however arbitrary. Thus when Ada defies Stewart’s *habitus*, it is as much an affront to “Bluebeard’s” underlying gender mythology as the Maoris tearing down the shadow play. When Ada ultimately refuses to yield to Stewart’s authority and rejects the social architecture of colonial society, he realises that he has no power to hold her anymore – other than brute violence, which fails to subdue her. A “deflated authority figure” (136) Stewart ultimately acknowledges his position, not just in society, but within the “Bluebeard” narrative, speaking as though Ada’s thoughts were written onto his mind and over his received mythology.

She has spoken to me... her voice was there in my head. I watched her lips, they did not make words, yet the harder I listened the clearer I heard her, as clear as I hear you, as clear as I hear my own voice. She said, ‘let me go, let Baines take me away, let him try and save me. I am frightened of my will, of what it might do, it is so strange and strong.’...I want to wake and find that it was a dream, that is what I want. I want to believe that I am not this man. I want myself back; the one I knew. (Campion 1993, 114-115)

For both Carter and Campion, Bluebeard’s wife does not stain the key by her betrayal; rather she herself is *already* stained. Pre-destined to fall and set up to do so, it is clear that Bluebeard’s wife is

tarnished – tarnished, that is, by a mythology that determines their respective roles before the fact. Thus Carter’s Marquise realises her attraction as being her ‘potentiality for corruption.’ (Carter 1979A, 11) Even her husband’s very gesture of giving of flowers is symbolically barbed with the same sentiment:

I could not stifle for his white, heavy flesh that had too much in common with the armfuls of arum lilies that filled my bedroom... those undertakers lilies with the heavy pollen that powders your fingers as if you had dipped them in tumeric. The lilies I always associate with him; that are white. And stain you. (Carter 1979A, 15)

Similarly in the “The Snow Child,” Carter’s Sadeian count gives his wife a rose that ‘bites’ her. When the Marquis realises the stain on the forbidden key, he presses it into the Marquise’s forehead, creating a scar. However, in the new *moralité* of Carter, she accepts and embraces her scar – suggesting that though she cannot escape her role in the gender mythology of “Bluebeard,” she can survive it, and without shame. Likewise, in *The Piano*, Campion exposes and deconstructs the latent symbolism of staining. When Stewart catches Flora gyrating against trees, (acting out what she has seen through spying on her mother and Baines) he punishes her by making her scrub imaginary stains off of them. He even tells her she “missed a bit” – emphasising and undermining at once his arbitrary authority to perceive and judge ‘staining.’ Like Carter’s heroine, Campion’s Ada is physically scarred by Bluebeard, but bears her scars with pride. When her silver finger (a prosthetic fabricated by Baines after her mutilation – itself a reference to the silver hands granted to the vindicated heroine of “The Maiden Without hands” – another “Bluebeard” tale type) and unmarried living arrangements attract

shock amongst her new neighbours, Ada gleefully quips that she is, “Quite the town freak, which satisfies.” (Campion 1993, 122)

While Carter and Campion make manifest “Bluebeard’s” latent content in order to demythologise both the fairy tale and its underling gender mythology, their subversive use of context allows them to ‘un-tell’ the tale. While fairy tales are placed in an abstract context – once upon a time... in a far off land – both Carter and Campion anchor the narrative in a real time and place. Not just to draw a direct parallel between “Bluebeard” and the cultural modes of Edwardian France or Victorian New Zealand, but also to signify the persistence of this mimetic strain and demonstrate its incompatibility with contemporary gender relations, mores and modes. In each of their texts, Carter and Campion locate Bluebeard high on the ladder of *habitus* – at the zenith of aristocracy and empire, respectively – to illustrate their misogynistic cultural foundations and shake them at the core. It is no coincidence that Carter’s “The Bloody Chamber” is set in Brittany. The story’s very geographical context immediately situates the text within the Sadeian mythology that the author seeks to explore. That same year, Angela Carter also published her study of the figure, *The Sadeian Woman* (1979) as a companion text of sorts – further illustrating her association between de Sade and “Bluebeard.” Although “The Bloody Chamber” is set over a hundred years after the death of de Sade, it is clear that it is his cultural legacy that Carter deems most important. The author could of course have created a fictionalised version of de Sade. Rather, I believe that Carter wishes to illustrate a history and continuity of misogyny in Western art and culture, as she depicts her own Marquis as a dedicated student of de Sade, (whom he frequently cites when addressing his wife) whose high art and hidden pornography references mythological figures such as Pandora. Indeed, the Marquis spends so much time in his library that he reeks of the Russian leather with which his volumes are bound – implying that he is palpably saturated in the Sadeian

gender mythology. While the “Bluebeard” narrative type pre-existed both de Sade and Perrault, it is not so much the figure’s immediate socio-historical relevance that is key to Carter’s understanding of the tale (though it is important); rather it is de Sade’s crude articulation of an underlying misogyny that is inherent, she felt, in Western culture. Seemingly repelled by the figure and yet fascinated in equal measure, Carter explored the cultural significance of de Sade, arguing that much of Western art reflected gender dynamics that could be reduced, upon examination, to the fundamental terms of de Sade’s philosophy. As Carter pointed out, de Sade’s is a philosophy preaching the pleasures of sexual exploitation, while paradoxically fulfilling a cultural-critical function through revealing that “flesh comes to us out of history, so does the repression and taboo that governs our experience of flesh” (Carter 1979b, 11) necessarily entangled in an intricate web of power dynamics.

Like Carter, Campion chooses to locate “Bluebeard” within a specific social and historical context, as opposed to the intangible spheres in which the fairy tale operates. This strategy in itself is as important as the anti-fairy tale device of exposing traditionally latent machinations. While “spatial and temporal indeterminacy ...are among the most salient elements of the fairy tale,” giving it “the advantage of a forum for timeless ethical imperatives” (Pizer 336)³ it is a common strategy for the anti-fairy tale to be anchored to cultural and geographical referents. The use of abstractions, ambiguities and a paratactic structure imbues the fairy tale with an elemental compactness, allowing its mimetic core parable to transcend the variables of time and culture. Contrastingly, the anti-fairy tale – particularly those variants that re-visit familiar narratives – is not parabolic or forward thinking, but retrospective and revisionary. The intent is not to promote a universal parable, as the reception presumes, but to explore and criticize the *effects* of such established

narratives; to expose the true bias of these tales, and ‘un-tell’ them in a real-world context.⁴ John Pizer suggests that:

The term ‘anti-fairy tale’ indicates a genre inscribed not by a parodistic impulse, but by a will towards dialectical antithesis. Anti-fairy tales... are imbued by structural attributes of the fairy tale form in order to more effectively present a radically alternative *Weltanschauung*. (336)

Angela Carter’s comments on the spatio-temporal ambiguity of the fairy tale illustrates the significance of her departure from the same formulae in “The Bloody Chamber:”

The form of the fairy tale is not usually constructed so as to invite the audience to have a sense of the lived experience. The ‘old wives’ tale’ positively parades its lack of verisimilitude. The Armenian variant of the enigmatic ‘Once upon a time’ of the English and French fairy tale is both utterly precise and absolutely mysterious: ‘There was a time and no time... When we hear the formula ‘Once upon a time,’ or any of its variants, we know in advance that what we are about to hear isn’t going to pretend to be true. Mother Goose may tell lies, but she isn’t going to deceive you in *that* way. She is going to entertain you, to help you pass the time pleasurably, one of the most ancient and honourable functions of art. (Carter 2005, xiii-xiv)

In surmising the function of indeterminate locality, Angela Carter contrastingly illustrates the importance of her ‘demythologising’ use of realism and context. Where Carter used this device to draw a line between de Sade, “Bluebeard,” and a cultural undercurrent of misogyny, Champion’s situating of “Bluebeard” in Colonial New Zealand draws a similar association in the fundamental

terms of oppressor and oppressed. During the performance of the “Bluebeard” shadow play, the attending Maori invade the stage and tear down the screen to ‘rescue’ Bluebeard’s wife. Naturally, many people found this scene offensive. One film critic noted that the silence of Ada is foregrounded at the expense of the Maoris, and criticised Campion’s “blindspot” to their plight as being a result of her “distraction” with gender issues, adding, “That the film does not even begin to interrogate imperialist attitudes is a remarkable and telling omission.” (Clancy 8)

However, one might suggest that although Campion’s portrayal of the Maori may appear shallow and one-dimensional, their subjugated position is pointedly identified with that of Ada. While Stewart smiles during the scene, the Maori response is to physically attack the antagonist in defence of his wife, with whom they symbolically align themselves, their anger overriding their suspension of disbelief. In an almost metafictional sequence, the Maori interrupt and physically reject the (nested) Bluebeard plot, whilst simultaneously being trapped in the same broader narrative, which frames *The Piano*. In so depicting the Maoris’ sense of identification, Campion equates the terms of a marriage of dominion in particular with the colonial subjection of an entire people at large. Thus this ‘telescoping’ effect extends to the Maori the very same personal empathy invested in Ada, and in a manner that is sympathetic and allegorical, recognising at once the impossibility of grasping the gravity of this subject. Campion explains,

The Maori background is like an objective correlative of what the heroine feels: their culture takes care of the spiritual and the sexual as much as the purely material. Yes. They highlight the Puritan side of the colonists. They have a much more harmonious and stronger relationship between what is animal and sexual in themselves and their rationality. Baines is

between the two; he belongs to neither the whites nor to the Maori. He was probably a whaler, settled there, and his unfinished tattoo shows a will to be integrated that has not been totally accomplished. (Wrexman 104)

With regard to the denouement of Carter and Campion's respective anti-fairy tales, it should be noted that neither includes the traditional rescue figures. While the Maori symbolically occupy the role of the brothers when disrupting the "Bluebeard" play, Ada still remains trapped in the narrative. It is only through her own intransigent wilfulness that Ada demonstrates that she cannot be made to fit the role proscribed to her by the colonists' inculcated gender mythology. Though Stewart is at first a faithful 'steward' of this mythology, he comes to realise that he has no 'bloody chamber' to protect. As is portended by Ada throwing off her ill-fitting wedding dress, she leaves to live an unorthodox, unmarried life elsewhere with Baines. Carter's Marquis is not so willing to back down from his role, though he is all too aware of its foundations from the outset. Carter's Bluebeard is killed not by vengeful brothers, but by the heroine's mother, who dispatches him with a single shot from her late husband's service revolver.⁵ As with Campion, a second marriage is ruled out, as the Marquise is pleased to live with her blind piano tuner, (a clear denial of male gaze) and with the subsequent social tarnishing implied by her mother's disapproval. Like Baines, the piano tuner represents an alternate mode of masculinity outside of patriarchal *habitus*. In the fairy tale, marriage represents "the fulcrum and major event of nearly every fairy tale; it is the reward for girls, or sometimes their punishment" (Zipes 2006, 189). By not replacing the bad marriage with a good one, Carter and Campion reveal that the anti-fairy tale does not necessarily affirm social or cultural institutions, as the fairy tale is often assumed to do. Thus, instead of

reinforcing the conventional generic expectations of moralizing, they return to the rebellious tradition of the early *conteuses*.

In the closing sequence, Campion offers us more than one ‘ever after;’ an alternate narrative outcome imagined by the protagonist. Though Ada attempted suicide by drowning with her ankle tied to the piano, she changed her mind, unloosed the rope, and swam free. In the surreal closing sequence, Ada imagines her body at the bottom of the sea, anchored to the piano. Campion has herself stated that she at first considered this sequence as the lone narrative outcome. Instead of replacing it with the other ending, she could not discard it altogether. Perhaps Campion is suggesting that in one sense, Bluebeard’s wife will never be able to unfetter herself from her mythic association as the fallen, ‘curious woman.’ For Campion to offer us two possible endings is the antithesis of “the moral and epistemic certitude of the traditional genre” (Pizer 336). The anti-fairy tale provides no such affirmations. As Angela Carter would remind us, she is “not part of the remythologising business.” (Wandor 38) The implications of ‘the demythologising business’ go beyond the fairy tale itself. In their retrospective use of social context and exposure of the fundamental prejudices of “Bluebeard’s” root *mythos*, Carter and Campion pull on a thread that runs through the ages, leading us to the very foundation and fabric of Western culture and society today.

Notes

1. The most immediate example is in “Le Petit Chaperon Rouge” – a tale that he inherited as having a resourceful heroine that affects her own escape, and replaced with a girl named ‘Little Red Cap’ who is killed by the wolf as a deserving victim of her own sexuality. Perrault removed the explicitly sexual content of his source oral tale, “The Story of Grandmother,” and replaced it with a symbolically racy red cap and anthropomorphised wolf. His moral adds that ‘not all wolves

are of the same sort' – reinforcing his sexualised interpretation of the tale – but omits to pass judgement on the villain. Little Red Cap is denied rescue or restoration while her killer is left unpunished in the story and un-blamed in the moral. The pattern of Perrault's readings, additions, omissions and interpretations suggests that he had a proclivity for depicting heroines as deserving victims of their own sexuality. Nevertheless, some scholars have problematised Delarue's hypothesis on Perrault's removing the 'original tales' sexual content on the grounds of temporal confusion, suggesting that this version was collected over 150 years after Perrault's tale. Recent criticism initiated the argument that Perrault was far from the prudish misogynist absorbed in entertaining the emerging bourgeoisie and salon culture, but was rather a progressive 'Modern' author deriding the 'Ancient' social and literary codes, and even defending women's causes, while creating with the figures of the humble Grisélidis and the incest-feeling Donkey-Skin feminist role models of his time. As Martine Hennard Dutheil de La Rochère and Ute Heidmann recently claimed, "Carter's dialogue with Perrault is not unlike her approach to the Marquis de Sade, insofar as she reclaimed both writers against critics who condemned fairy tales and pornography. Like Perrault, Carter believed fairy tales could carry useful knowledge distinct from conventional morality and that as a modern genre par excellence they could be (re)made to reflect ever-changing realities" (2009, 40).

2. A contrasting masculine model of obedience is Perseus, who manages to avoid being petrified by the Medusa by looking only at her reflection. The myth is redolent of the Biblical account of Lot's wife, who ignores the angels' prohibition not to look back towards Sodom and is turned into a pillar of salt. In Genesis, Eve is seduced by Satan into eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, and then leads her husband to do so too. However John Milton, in his epic *Paradise Lost*, depicts Adam as having a self-restrained attitude towards forbidden knowledge. When Satan tempts Eve in a dream, Adam refers to it as being "of evil sprung" (v.98), while Eve thinks it to be "created pure" (v.100) – a gendered embellishment that would be typical of a long catalogue of Western art dealing with the subject.

3. However, as Jack Zipes points out, already Perrault "anchored allegorical portraits in history as well, and patterned ogres on aristocrats like Gilles de Rais (Bluebeard). Finally, by including

references to Versailles, he provided social commentary ranging from the necessity of appearances and the shallowness of courtiers to women's fashions and gourmet sauces." (2000, 237)

4. While Campion strives for realism, Carter often stylistically resorts to fairy tale features, such as the use of character abstractions. In "The Snow Child," Carter reduces the ("Snow White" or "Snow Drop") narrative to a surreal narrative landscape occupied only by a Count, Countess and the eponymous Snow Child. In this Sadeian triangle, the women occupy the roles of 'Justine' and 'Juliette' respectively, as Carter distils the narrative down to its fundamentally misogynistic core. Of course her use of such a fairy tale framework and devices begs the question as to whether Carter's 'new wine' can in this case burst the 'old bottle' of the narrative it so closely approximates in form. However, the demythologising *intent* remains the same, whatever style or mode is used to do so.

5. The bequeathing of a weapon is a recurrent motif in the anti-fairy tale, where traditional male rescue figures pass symbolic emblems of empowerment to the women who replace their role. I use the term 'phallic baton' to describe this leitmotif. One prominent example is in Matthew Bright's 1996 film *Freeway* where 'Chopper Wood' passes Vanessa (The Little Red Riding Hood figure) his pistol before being gunned down. She later uses it to rescue herself.

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CRITICAL MUSICOLOGY AND MONSTER THEORY. REVISITING BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

**Andrea Schutz. Monsters Beneath the Skin: Angela Carter's
"The Courtship of Mr Lyon" as Palimpsest in Snow Patrol's
"Absolute Gravity"**¹

Angela Carter's influence on fairy tales goes far beyond renewing interest in the genre itself: *The Bloody Chamber's* stories overrun their own boundaries to make appearances in unexpected places: "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon," one of Carter's Beauty and the Beast stories, is quoted three times in the 1998 Snow Patrol song "Absolute Gravity."² Snow Patrol is a Northern Irish-Scottish alternative rock band, formed in 1994; one does not expect to find hyper-literate postmodern fairy tales in rock music, but Gary Lightbody has been insufficiently recognised for the intertextual games of his lyrics. "Mr Lyon"³ is written under "Absolute Gravity's" skin, lifting the song out of its genre and making it some hybrid other: a literate pop song.

Hybridity and skin are the operative words for song and story. The tale starts with ostentatiously separate skins but moves them together to the point of hybrid-likeness: although the Beast assumes a skin like Beauty's in becoming 'human,' the story insists on subtly theriomorphic – human-animal – selves for both. The domestic(ated) ending points to their bodies' separateness from all other human bodies. Likewise, "Absolute Gravity" begins from Carter's motions of hybridity, but similar skins push outward and away, driving the characters to ever greater separateness in their transformations. Hybridity fragments, distorts and makes them impossible.

Carter's descriptions of Beauty begin story and song. Beauty is described four times within the story: as a snow child, as having (in a photograph) a look "sometimes of absolute sweetness and absolute gravity, as if her eyes might pierce appearances and see your soul" (Carter 44), as being uncomfortable with empty social forms – "small

talk turned to dust in her mouth,” (46) – and finally as one who “smiled at herself in mirrors a little too often these days” (49). All these descriptions define her as skin, form, surface; however, the description of her photograph assumes that interior qualities stand revealed by surface. All demand an interaction of surface and what shows through skin: Beauty is for reading.

Beauty also offers reading opportunities about the surface and ‘sous-face’⁴ of the whole tale: as Anny Crunelle-Vanrigh has argued, Carter’s story plays between its surface and its sources, what she calls “the double status of ‘Courtship’ as fairy tale and as hypertext” (128). Leaning on Genette, Bal and others, she uses the term ‘palimpsestuous’ to describe both the writing and the reading of such a layered, involuted text.

‘Palimpsest’ is an apt term for this sort of postmodern reading and Carter’s writing. Crunelle-Vanrigh uses the term metaphorically to delineate the ‘game of replication,’ ‘rewritings,’ repetition, difference, and *différance* in Carter’s story (128). Literally, a palimpsest is an artifact of medieval manuscript production: a piece of vellum or parchment (usually lamb or calf skin) is scraped down a second or even a third time, and re-used. Over time, the original writing can reappear beneath the second text, ghostlike, so that the palimpsest’s text may subtly exert its presence and matter upon the obvious, even to the point of making the surface text difficult to read.⁵ Palimpsests occur precisely because the ink was written onto and into the skin of the vellum. There is an important conjunction between the medieval and the postmodern here. I want to combine the literal and metaphoric possibilities of the palimpsest, to consider the question of skins as texts, as readable surfaces.

As constructions of other Beauties and Beasts, Carter’s pair are bodies of texts, bodies to be read. Form and species are likewise to be seen as palimpsests, sous-face showing through to the surface of

skins, exerting textual force on the readable body. The association between body and text is a commonplace in medieval thinking (see Frese 1992 et al)⁶ and survived the shift from script to print: we still speak of ‘a body of work’ or a ‘textual/literary corpus.’ The very technology which allows for palimpsestuous reading is itself only possible because texts were once animal bodies. In this regard, postmodern Beauties, Beasts, their skins and furs, their choices and words are all monstrous in a medieval and medievalist’s sense: showing forth, demanding to be seen, demanding to be read.

The starting point for all engagement with the monstrous is Isidore of Seville (*Etymologies*, Bk XI, iii: On Humans and Portents, Stephen Barney, trans. 243) and St. Augustine (*City of God*, Bk. 21, Chapter 9, 982). Both derive the term *monstrum* from Latin *monstrare*, ‘to show;’ Isidore additionally derives the term from Latin *monere*, ‘to warn.’ Both consider that the function of the monster is to be in the world and disclose truths larger than itself. In effect, the monster is metaphor: excessive, deformed, fractured, diminished metaphor, arguing for things beyond itself, and making visible what cannot be said. However, as bodies to be read, monsters are also necessarily misread. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen argues, even though the monster is the product of the culture which needs it, “the monster is the harbinger of category crisis” and “the monster always escapes because it refuses easy categorization....: they are disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration.” (“Monster culture (Seven Theses)” 6-7.)⁷ Medieval teratology is thus a good tool for discussing a literate pop song crossed with a postmodern fairy tale. Song and story’s textual palimpsests may also be seen as written into the skin of the story, so that substance (sous-face) exerts a destabilising force on form (sur-face). The quotation of “Mr. Lyon” in “Absolute Gravity” writes Carter’s palimpsestuous story into the skin of that song to exactly such a destabilising effect.

“Absolute Gravity” therefore participates in all Beauty and the Beast narratives. With Carter’s story providing frame and background detail of the song in one’s ears, Lightbody accomplishes a synaesthetic shift from text to song, from sight to speech and hearing; because he is writing a song to be sung, heard, and danced to – not a silent poem – Lightbody also effects a connection and jump from skins to skins. The story’s skin(s) leap across time and genre into the song, which then leaps out of Lightbody’s voice and into the bodies of those hearing it. Reading, however, necessarily takes one skin at a time, flaying skins and stories.⁸

“Mr Lyon” is the second of ten stories, but it is also the first of two. Doubles and dualities are obviously of interest to the whole collection,⁹ but all Beauty and the Beast stories are founded on clear differences, separatenesses, singularities. Previous tellings particularly stress the singularity of both creatures.¹⁰ Beauty and Beast are absolute names setting the bearers opposite extremes. Accordingly, Carter describes the Beast less often than and in contrast to Beauty. However, extremes meet at their ends: while Beast repels as Beauty attracts, both compel fascination. Indeed, focus on either quality makes it the other, exciting similar, paralysing awe.¹¹ Different skins, then, tell the same story. The man may be in the lion, but there is a lion in the girl, too.

Beauty’s descriptions as snow maiden, photograph, and narcissist underline her insubstantial and inhuman qualities. She is markedly more fragile, more ephemeral, more distant from the human than the Beast’s animality. The Beast, likewise and by contrast, is a grounded creature, heavy in his substantiality. He approaches through senses other than vision: touch, taste, sound. Face to face, he expands into presence with “a quality of being more *there* than the rest of us are” (Carter 44). The Beast’s bulk and strength make him physical and more obviously frightening than ephemeral Beauty. He is monstrous, because so definitely made of flesh, while she is beautiful

because almost made of air. They assume opposite ends of the human chain of being, the one seeming closer to angels or at least fairies; the other all animal. In this regard, both reflect the medial nature of all human beings: part animal, part angel, humans are hybrid neithers, “difficult middles” as Cohen puts it (see 2006). It is also noteworthy that the bulky one is defined by dignity, an internal, insubstantial quality, while the lucent snow girl has gravity, lifting her free of mass because it makes her not of this material world. They thus also occupy the other side of their binaries. A destruction of differences is at work when different skins tell the same story.

Carter uses isolation, monstrosity and physical transformation to bring her Beauty and Beast together, while keeping them separate from ordinary people.¹² When Beauty chooses their final skins she will choose a hybrid-human form, but initially Carter removes the differences between woman and lion, not by suggesting there are none, but by underlining *and* undercutting them. Beauty is repeatedly struck by their distinctness, precisely because she ceases to notice it. “For a lion is a lion and a man is a man” (45), Carter says, setting things in their place and then promptly erasing the lines between categories. Beast outdoes Beauty in beautiful form even as she shudders at his appearance, even as the human response to him fails to acknowledge his beauty and dismisses it as belonging to a different order. Definition of Mr. Lyon oscillates between the human and the non-human, mimicking in language’s halting sequence what skin and body do in graceful instant.

Both are apparently made to be looked at, yet do the more damaging looking. Beast sees her as at once even less substantial and more profound. She appears to him first as photo, simulacrum, vision. His perceptive scrutiny of her photo paradoxically allows a definition of her as more than surface: she looks “as if her eyes might pierce appearances and see your soul” (44). She arrives in the Beast’s life, then, as the capacity for vision, as vision with understanding: she is

insight, perhaps wisdom. Her gaze is actually terrifying: she is monstrous because she can see *to* and *through* the monstrosity of others. Both have the capacity to tear you open and turn you inside out: the beast with his claws, the girl with her eyes; either way, outside is coming off – as in “The Tiger’s Bride;” as in “The Erl-king” – and inside will be revealed. Both, then, are monstrous: inhuman, excoriating, terrible, revealing. They are singular and separate from the world, for much the same reasons: contact with them hurts. In other words, their very differences make them alike. It is not their difference from each other which matters; it is their differences from everyone else. They cannot be locked into easy binaries of body-soul, substance-form, human-animal. As monsters, they trade places across such binaries and introduce third, hybrid terms. Their different skins become the same skins. Beauty rejects their theriomorphic options, and chooses human forms. Form is no guarantee of substance, though.

Carter’s story traces the way their isolation and monstrosity result in physical transformations. The Beast, configured entirely as body, does not transform till the end, when his body will have diminished exactly as the insubstantial maiden is embodied. Beauty changes when she leaves Beast because her father’s restored fortune is an end to isolation. She becomes less singular and more common in the human world. Where she was once striking for her soul, she becomes body, mere surface. She is given a place in the “huddled warmth of humanity” (48) cut off from the seasons, urbane and social. She no longer looks deeply at other people; she only sees her surface:

You could not have said that her freshness was fading but she smiled at herself in mirrors a little too often, these days.... Her face was acquiring, instead of beauty, a lacquer of the

invincible prettiness that characterizes certain pampered, exquisite, expensive cats. (49)

Remembering that “The Tiger’s Bride” is “Mr Lyon’s” counterpart, that the Beast is leonine, that Beauty read tales of “white cats who were transformed princesses” (46), we see what her animal shape would be: she would also be feline.¹³ However, she is becoming a domestic cat, neither wild nor big.

The Beast’s pet spaniel prevents her disappointing transformation, drags her out of her new world, out of artifice, and back to the Beast, who has been replicating her metamorphosis. He is also nearly a civilized human: unable to hunt for himself, disinclined to kill the gentle beasts, dependent and docile (50). So she chooses for both of them. She seems to choose a subtle means of annihilating his Otherness by turning him into her: a respectable marriage, an ordinary dignity. That is not quite the case. She chooses not their wild natures, but not their domesticated ones either: she chooses their hybrid species (human, but not social), their hybrid habitat (house, garden, hills). She chooses independence and sufficiency; their hybridity remains on his face, not hers: his mane and broken nose “gave him a distant, heroic resemblance to the handsomest of all the beasts” (51). “Mr. and Mrs Lyon walk in the garden” (51) a matched set in absolute gravity and isolation, remaining apart from the society which understands neither their forms nor their substance. They wear his Anglo-Norman name together: she is as much a lion as he is but where he wears his past on his body, she wears it in words. His skin becomes her name, and he becomes her palimpsest, showing through and reminding.

Gary Lightbody’s work participates eagerly in the hyper-literary, hyper-self-aware nature of palimpsestuous writing. Clearly or covertly, Lightbody refers to other song writers, authors, films, in

a conjunction of lyrics and contexts which entwine his work firmly within that of his peers, interests and influences. From references to “God Only Knows” by Brian Wilson to Stevenson’s “Dr. Jekyll and Mr Hyde,” references and allusions amplify and intensify Lightbody’s lyrics. Many works find themselves singing in Snow Patrol songs; frequently they sing back at the song.¹⁴ Lightbody’s lyrics are invitations to serendipitous recognition calling the listener into his context: each find impels the listener to discover what others may be lurking in lines or lyrics. Lightbody’s lyrics are therefore as much an exercise in bricolage and palimpsest as are Carter’s fairy tales.

The references and allusions are musical as well as literary. Although the study of pop songs discourages purely textual criticism, demanding instead consideration of their social and performative contexts (Moore 4; Walser 18; Griffiths 2007), I would argue that Lightbody’s lyrics require an awareness of their literary contexts and that the recording or performing of his songs is precisely his engagement with those contexts (Walser 27, 31). It remains true that, whether or not his audience is aware of the literary range of his performance, he is. “Mr Lyon” is both frame and background detail of the song in one’s ears, an important mixing of metaphors which highlights the shift from text to song, from sight to speech, from skin to skin. The change of medium – from lush fairy tale to pop song – plays with constraint and expansion of expression. Song lyrics are compact; music makes contact elsewhere than in sight; the lyrics to a song are not first apprehended as text as all, but as sound, and not always intelligible sound at that. At first listen, individual words are often obscured by other sounds; understanding is a matter of repeated engagement with sound if lyrics are not provided. Listeners’ reactions to the song have little to do with textual contact; the sound of the song drives the reaction, and moves not the brain necessarily but the

rest of the being immediately. Music expands the minimalism of lyric (Kania 2007).

Nevertheless, the use and placement of the borrowings alter the narrative.¹⁵ As Carter wrote them, the borrowed words referred to Beauty; as Lightbody uses them, their cumulative coherence fractures. Absolute gravity may refer to the woman in the song, but it may not; small talk becomes the male voice's problem, but it is still the woman who smiles at herself too often. The reason for her self-absorption shifts, too. Lightbody's changes signal more fragile relationships between characters, and the narrative shifts shape even as the characters do. Indeed, transformation and readable monstrosity remain important in Lightbody's song; the story's monstrosity informs the song's. However, Lightbody uses isolation, monstrosity and physical transformation to drive his Beauty and Beast apart: different skins do not tell the same story. More to the point, he distorts these themes into still more monstrous reflections of themselves. Very often, the speaking ghosts within Carter's intertext permit Lightbody's minimalism to incorporate more narratives because he can use Carter's intertextual ghosts. Carter's Beauty and Snow White stories haunt the girl smiling at her reflection and Lightbody also adds something of the Frog Prince to the dynamic between his lovers. As a result, while Carter's characters converge in unity, form and species, Lightbody's pair has no relationship and separate entirely when the lover becomes ever more monstrous.

In stark contrast to "Mr Lyon's" hetero-normative socialisation, "Absolute Gravity" is a work of distortion and descent. We find arrest, rather than progress; a loss of articulacy rather than transcendent speech; interruption instead of sequence. The three lines from "Mr. Lyon" in title, second line and chorus open the song up to intertext and so frustrate its own narrative. The lyrics spiral downwards on their own weight, their own gravity, tracking a monstrous, deforming young man, who becomes increasingly

invisible and unintelligible, and speaks a monstrous deformed language which he cannot control.

Again, the woman has gravity, separate now from any hint of sweetness or facial expression. It must be understood as an intellectual quality: seriousness, authority, weight when speaking. It is thus distinct from Beauty's gravity, which is a serious cast of countenance potentially capable of insight. Both women have a capacity for serious expression, but in Lightbody's Beauty the expression is almost certainly intellectual; her physical attributes are irrelevant till the second verse. The description comes from the young man implicated in the story, not an omniscient narrator: perhaps he can see past outward forms to inner realities; perhaps the absolute gravity of the penetrative gaze is his. This is the first interruption: she might still be excoriating or revealing, but he is not; her gravity makes him lightheaded. He immediately becomes less serious and less perceptive.

The tension between gravity and dizziness, with the impossibility of balance between them, makes the metaphorical core of the song. While one is generally most aware of gravity when lightheaded, the woman's gravity gives her a stability which the young man lacks. Attracted as he is to this, he cannot compete. On the contrary, the more attracted he is to her gravity, the more lightheaded he becomes: small talk does not serve and makes him feel foolish. Not only small talk, but conventional approaches to women fail with this one, precisely because they lack gravity and substance. Instead of dazzling her with his inner qualities, despite his hideous exterior, this beast becomes ever less articulate, ever more monstrous, embodied and hideous, as far as he can tell.¹⁶ Small talk turns to dust in *his* mouth, not hers, not because he has no facility with social forms, but because of her superiority in language, and – I think – her disdain for discursive emptiness. He is thereby also losing

in humanity. More to the point, looking at her makes him preoccupied with getting her to notice him. Form starts to overtake substance.

But there is no power in his gaze either. Whatever ideas he may have for catching her eye do not work: she, after all, smiles at herself in mirrors a little too often these days. Carter's Narcissist becomes all surface, but that is almost expected, given the adulation Society bestows. Critique of Lightbody's Beauty startles; he was so infatuated with her a moment ago. But given the intellectual virtues and attractions implied by her gravity, physical vanity is perhaps not entirely what is meant; she is perhaps a solipsistic thinker, looking at the world solely from herself. Looking into mirrors is at this point not a physical self-satisfaction, but an intellectual error. She is not transforming into a vain and murderous queen, anxious at being supplanted by a younger version of herself; she is becoming self-absorbed and arrogant in her gravity.

Her reflection on herself prompts his own. He begins to worry that he is unbalanced. But what does that mean? Is he wrong to be critical of her, or is he not critical enough? How will he know, if he remains lightheaded around her?¹⁷ Calling attention to his lack of balance destabilizes not only him and his assessment of the woman who attracts him, but the whole story. Beauty and the Beast is a wonder tale precisely because the girl falls in love with the beast's inner beauties, but that cannot happen here if he cannot speak. He presents himself ever more as surface, without depth or 'sous-face' to interest her. Nothing about him disrupts her contemplation of self; the monster in this song does not show her a different world, nor yet a different mode of being. As a result, he becomes more superficial in another sense: he is increasingly interested in her surface and not her gravity.

He becomes ever more fixated on her appearance and physicality: "the way she walks, oh my God! she'd get it/ All my

friends reckon she is oh-so fine.” These lines read like a wolf-whistle, like harassment and objectification, but they are deliberately banal, and point out how empty the young man is becoming. Sung, however, they mean something else entirely. They sound like despair at inadequacy, all the more because he is becoming less and less eligible for her regard. Gravity, articulacy might draw her gaze to him, but he is no longer capable of either, and so he transforms: “But the way I talk when I’m speaking near her/ She must think I crawled out of the sea today.” His verbal inadequacy produces the metamorphosis. The less she notices him, the more he devolves. He has become something icky, well distant from the ‘warm fuzzies’ most Beasts seem to be (Warner 299-300). He sounds like a primeval amphibian; he presents himself like some monstrous, half-evolved creature, not even in the same biological class, to be dissected and rejected. This is not the transcendent hybridity we saw in Carter’s Beast; the abject monster does not change the viewer at all. In that regard, the song perverts the Beauty and the Beast tale. And yet, it is fulfilling the expectations outside the tale: one expects Beauty to reject the ugly. It therefore becomes a different story entirely: the young man finds himself at the beginning of the Frog Prince.

Very importantly, this song is not a whole story: it is a beginning of several, none of which comes to conclusion. The last sung line is again the question of balance. It is therefore a story interrupted and arrested as much as it is a story in devolution. Rather than growing in understanding of each other, the two characters grow farther apart. Rather than proceeding along the same narrative path, the two characters diverge to follow different stories. The young woman becomes embroiled in a twisted version of Snow White, with intellect, not beauty the main vanity. Her story stops and she disappears into her own vision of self. His monstrosity becomes silence; he never becomes the princess’ friend, and never comes back to his human form or place. But all these beginnings and arrests

cannot be sustained: they devolve, too, into chaos and distortion. Not only do the young man's speech and self become disordered and chaotic, the music follows the lyrics' pattern of separation, devolution and distortion.

At first hearing, two things stand out: the swaggering bass line, which sounds like a young man on the strut, and the scratching, which sounds like particularly catty gossip.¹⁸ As one listens further, however, it becomes apparent that the bass line, though swaggering, is not actually going anywhere: not a bass line walking, it is rather a bass line pacing. For all that it is a big sound, with lots of movement to it, the bass line is in a cage, an illusion of movement. The scratching is play with sound and rhythm, as it always is, but it matters that the song begins with unintelligibility, without attempt at articulate words.¹⁹ The music is also characterized by big, open, lazy chords and a lot of distortion, which increases at the end of the song. Even metrically, the song becomes ever less regular: the lines pop and contract from 9 into 12, 8, 6, 10 and then 11 beat lines, crammed with extra syllables near the end. The counts get even more erratic if one counts the syllables as beats in music: "Maybe I'm unbalanced" is consistently held till it falls over, so although the written line has 6 syllables, the sung line has at least 10 beats.²⁰ Finally, one must note that all the music descends: the sung lines are nearly rapped on a single note (2-3 at most), but all of them – and the bass line, and the scratching – descend: at hardly any point in the song does the music go up the scale. All of it goes down.

The music, therefore, executes the story told in the lyrics. There is no harmony between this Beauty and Beast; there is no relationship between them; there is no mutuality. There is also no choice. Movement in the song belongs not to the man, but to the woman he watches and she is walking away, while he paces on the same spot, riffing on an obsession. They transform simultaneously, but not symmetrically: she stays human (and narcissistic); he devolves

through time and species to some primeval, indeterminate creature. His instability is all. The young man loses control, the song ends in mid-phrase, as if even musical articulacy has become impossible; metre, music, lyrics, intertext track the deforming of discourse, the devolution to amphibian and the pressure of diffusion and chaos.

Carter's story is precisely preoccupied with sight, with skin, and what pushes through from beneath the skin: it is about being seen and seeing through surfaces. Carter's story as palimpsest of Lightbody's song is likewise the thing pushing through the skins and shapes there, and it pushes the song's monsters into view. Both are metamorphic, both are monstrous, in essence as in theme: monstrous, metamorphic shapes show through the forms of *Beauty and the Beast* in Carter's story; monstrous, metamorphic forms emerge beneath the surface of Lightbody's song. The questions of monstrosity, transformation and convergence underlie Lightbody's song but the song itself sings of distortion and descent, of increasing monstrosity and separation, not a happily-ever-after ending. Carter's story is an ever present memory of what should happen; Lightbody's song traces the utter failure of his narrative as it transforms into still others. Problems of sight and understanding, failure to see through the skin, the transformative effect of vision; these are the sources of the monstrosity in the song, but they manifest in other senses too. Sound distorts, language fails, touch becomes impossible.

Notes

¹ A version of this paper was read at the University of East Anglia's conference "The Fairy Tale after Angela Carter" University of East Anglia, Norwich, April 22-25, 2009.

2. *Songs for Polarbears* (1998) Jeepster Records. Music: Gary Lightbody, Mark McClellan and Jonny Quinn. Scratching: Tom Simpson.

3. The more common abbreviation of the story's title is "Courtship," directing attention to its socializing features and hetero-normative ending. Since I am more interested in the questions of skins and beings, I abbreviate it as "Mr. Lyon."
4. 'Surface' literally means the top side of something; 'sous-face' would therefore mean the underside of something, or that which is below the surface. I am additionally using the terms to expand the distinctions between form and substance.
5. The OED's definition of the term – as "paper, parchment, or other writing material designed to be reusable after any writing on it has been erased" – suggests that the second text supersedes the first. This is not necessarily the case. Interestingly, the etymological references indicate that the word palimpsest derives from "the same Indo-European base as Sanskrit *bhas-*, *psā-* to crush, chew, devour," a derivation which echoes seductively with the Mr Lyon's destructive potential. Beauty's skin, in being eaten, would become the skin beneath the Beast's skin, if the fairy tale went differently. As such, though, one wonders whether her skin and characteristics would then likewise 'show through' his. If one sees Little Red Riding Hood as the obverse of Beauty and the Beast, perhaps the wolf's post-prandial somnolence is the girl's (or the granny's).
6. See also Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body* (1992), for a (post) modern approach.
7. Medieval teratology is of ongoing interest in medieval studies. Besides Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's important *Monster Culture* (1996), he has pursued the topic in *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters and the Middle Ages* (1999) and *Hybridity, Identity and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain: On Difficult Middles* (2006). David Williams' *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Medieval Thought and Literature* (1996) is likewise an important source even for the study of fairy tales and their wondrous and strange creatures. "Hans my Hedgehog" is not unlike some of the strange hybrids Williams and Cohen discuss.
8. It should be noted that Carter uses this image herself in both "The Tiger's Bride" and "The Erl-King." The tiger's bride feels "the harsh velvet of his head against my hand, then a tongue, abrasive as sand-paper. 'He will lick the skin off me!'" (67); likewise the Erl-King "strips me to my last nakedness, that underskin of mauve, pearlized

satin, like a skinned rabbit; then dresses me again in an embrace so lucid and encompassing it might be made of water” (89).

9. As Sarah Gamble has argued, all the stories in the collection work with entrapment in various bloody chambers (2008). It might be just as valid to suggest that most of the stories are refractions of Beauty and the Beast, with explorations of the limits of brute-beast-beauty.

10. For instance, Jeanne Marie Le Prince de Beaumont’s version stresses that merchant’s daughters were all “très belles; mais la cadette surtout se faisait admirer et on ne l’appelait, quand elle était petite, que la *Belle Enfant*; en sorte que le nom lui en resta, ce qui donna beaucoup de jalousie à ses soeurs. Cette cadette, qui était plus belle que ses soeurs, était aussi meilleure qu’elles.” “[His daughters] were very beautiful: but the youngest particularly was admired above all, and when she was little, was consistently called ‘the beautiful child’, to the point that the name stuck with her, which caused a great deal of envy in her sisters. This youngest daughter, who was more beautiful than her sisters, was also better than they.” (*My translation*) Singled out for both beauty and moral worth, the girl continues to display her singular courage, generosity and understanding. The beast is likewise extraordinary: he is “une Bête si horrible qu’il fut tout près de s’évanouir” (a beast so horrible that he [the merchant] almost fainted).

11. If we think of Ovid’s Medusa and Andromeda, the likeness becomes most obvious: Medusa turns men to stone if they look at her, but at his first sight of Andromeda, Perseus stands stone still in the air and nearly plummets to his death:

*“quam simul ad duras religatam bracchia cautes
vidit Abantiades, nisi quod levis aura capillos
moverat et tepido manabant lumina fletu,
marmorem ratus esset opus; trahit inscius ignes
et stupet et visae correptus imagine formae
paene suas quaterere est oblitus in aere pennas.”* Book IV, ll. 672-77

“As soon as Perseus saw her there bound by the arms to a rough cliff – save that her hair gently stirred in the breeze, and the warm tears were trickling down her cheeks, he would have thought her a marble statue – he took fire unwitting, and stood dumb. Smitten by the sight of the beauty he sees, he almost forgot to move his wings in the air” (Miller 227).

12. Cohen's fourth Monster thesis "The monster dwells at the gates of difference" argues that, as difference made flesh, the monster is the "incorporation of the Outside, the Beyond – of all those loci that are rhetorically placed as distant and distinct but originate Within" (1996, 8). One of the least noticed *différences* in the tale is time as a linear and organising principle. Time runs strangely in Mr Lyon's house and connects to skins under skins insofar as multiple times show forth simultaneously. Most obviously, the house exists in monster time, as a place where a rose may still be found preserved in winter, but Mr. Lyon's body defies time by being both what he will be as well as what he is now. Mr. Lyon is therefore simultaneously showing forth his past, present and future, all in the one skin. Beauty likewise shows forth what she will be, when there is enough money to keep her idle: passing the time reading, doing embroidery, or a little light raking; pretty, decorative, indolent tasks for the pretty, decorative indolent pet she edges into becoming. For all that it is tempting to see the Beast's wealth as part of the Centre, it is less clear that he has acquired that wealth in any normal, non-magical way. The luxurious house itself, magical and out of time, sets its owner apart from the ordinary or the normal. Even within the norms of fairy tale conventions, the Beast's world is Other and Beyond.

13. Note that there is an expedition – as if to some jungle! – to buy furs for her. Regardless of what kind they might be, they are her furs, and belong to her intrinsically, somehow. They effect a transformation, making her what ordinary humans already think her: her father's darling, his 'pet' (41).

14. For instance, Sufjan Stevens' "Chicago's" makes a strategic cameo appearance in Snow Patrol's "Hands Open:" occurring in the 'make up song within the break-up song,' (in "Liner notes to Eyes Open") "Chicago's" chorus of unrepented mistakes is a destabilizing comment on "Hands Open's" apparent desire for reconciliation. The most obvious literary allusion occurs in the last line of "How To Be Dead" (in "Final Straw", 2005?): "Dr Jekyll is wrestling Hyde/ For my pride." Stevenson's story works its way back through the song, making the ordinary disagreement between lovers the result of disagreement between opposing parts of the young man's soul. The dualities of the relationship are thereby complicated by essential dualities in one of the partners.

15. Lyrics to “Absolute Gravity” may be found on the jeepster website: <<http://www.jeepster.co.uk/site/>>
16. Warner notes “In the literary fairy tale of the ancien regime, the Beast’s low, animal nature is more usually revealed by his muteness, uncouthness, inability to meet Beauty as a social and intellectual equal. In Villeneuve’s version, Beauty sighs that, though he treats her well, she finds him boring because he can utter only a few words and repeats them endlessly.” (299)
17. In one live performance on Youtube, he sings “Her gravity *keeps* me lightheaded” suggesting that there is almost something deliberate in her treatment of him. 28 Jan, 2007 Youtube May 7, 2010. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UHkIgooYh8o>>
18. Dr. Martin Kutnowski, a Musicologist colleague, thought it sounded like ducks, or something animal, anyway. The point is precisely that words are not distinguishable.
19. It is interesting to note that in the performance already mentioned, the scratching at the beginning does have words: “I don’t need the pressure.” I have not been able to identify the work used, but it reminds us that performance is constant interaction with a range of texts and intertexts.
20. Note that this is true on the recording, but not necessarily in performance. In the Youtube performance cited above, Lightbody barely says ‘unbalanced’ before almost actually falling over and disappearing out of frame. The word takes one beat and leaves space.

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CULT FAIRY-TALE ROMANCE. REVISITING THE ANIMAL-GROOM TALE

Natalie Robinson. Bella and her Beastly Choices: Exploring the Fairy Tale in the *Twilight* Phenomenon

What kind of place was this? Could a world really exist where ancient legends went wandering around the borders of tiny insignificant towns, facing down mythical monsters? Did this mean every impossible fairy tale was grounded somewhere in absolute truth? Was there anything sane or normal at all, or was everything just magic and ghost stories? (Meyer 2006, 294)

Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* novels and their cinematic versions are currently captivating a devoted following of fans, predominantly girls and young women. Filled with vampires, werewolves, and supernatural occurrences, the story revolves around the heroine Bella Swan, a seventeen-year-old, whose sweet-scented blood is the catalyst for her engagement with a dangerous male figure. The connection between the *Twilight* saga and the fairy tale genre drives its phenomenal popularity and informs its meaning for young readers. The reception of the text as a "fairy tale romance" raises questions about the power and purpose of the fairy tale in contemporary literature for young adults. The excitement generated by the fairy tale romance eclipses the danger that surrounds the heroine and disguises potent notions of self-loathing, violence, and self-sacrifice inherent in Meyer's discourse. Bella's choices take her down the dark fairy tale path fraught with fatalistic danger; her trajectory of perceived empowerment leads towards victimization and death through transformation, thus becoming a reflection of her beloved, an irrevocably altered version of herself.

The narrative of the *Twilight* saga follows the tradition of the animal-groom fairy tales. Meyer states that the idea for *Twilight* came from a dream in which she imagined the characters of Bella and Edward. In the dream, the girl and the vampire:

Were discussing the difficulties inherent in the facts that A) they were falling in love with each other while B) the vampire was particularly attracted to the scent of her blood, and was having a difficult time restraining himself from killing her immediately. (Meyer in Sullivan 451)

Bruno Bettelheim describes “the animal-groom tale” as one in which “the beast is male and can be disenchanted only by the love of a female” and where the nature “of the beast” changes according to location and historical moment (285). The beast may be a bear, a serpent, or a godlike creature but he always seeks “to gain access to the body of a woman whom he claims as his mate” (Gould 160).

The two most famous animal groom fairy tales are the “Bluebeard” tale and the “Beauty and the Beast” tale. In the “Bluebeard” tale, the heroine marries a man who is truly beastly beneath his cultured veneer, and in the “Beauty and the Beast” tale, she marries a male who is beastly in appearance but, once uncovered, not so in nature. In every animal-groom tale variant the “heroine encounters sexual passion for the first time, inside herself as well as outside in the form of a beast” (Gould 152). The heroine’s trajectory follows the tradition of “the female quest narrative” which finds its origins in the myth of “Cupid and Psyche” (Benson 105). The “female quest tale” has “three dominant motifs: the curiosity of the heroine, which is the pivot of the prohibition-violation motif; the subsequent series of ordeals which function as the quest element; and the resulting marriage of the original protagonists, which serves as

the heroine's reward and the end point of the narrative" (Benson 105). The heroine's curiosity and her subsequent action produce a disruption of order and she must overcome the consequences of her actions to restore social order and proceed to marriage and stability.

The condemnation of female curiosity is common in variants of the animal-groom tales, as it is in many foundational cultural stories, and in the so-called traditional tales collected and published by Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm. The oppressive patriarchal constructs that produced the morals these tales aimed to teach became the focus of postmodern fairy tale revisions such as those by English writer Angela Carter. Carter spoke for many of her generation when she set out to "demystify, debunk, and deconstruct" the narratives she called "sacred cultural texts" in order to break "the magic hold" of the stories (Carter in Tatar 115). She acknowledged that fairy tales have always existed in a "kind of communal melting pot [as] narrative raw material" available to anyone who wishes to access them and reconfigure them in forms to suit a particular purpose (Carter in Gamble 22). Fairy tale narratives appear in many genres of literature, are often our first experience of literature and film, and their images and language permeate our contemporary culture. The powerful motifs link us to our storytelling past and appear in our newest forms of communication.

The *Twilight* phenomenon is largely a new media phenomenon and its scope is international. In our postmodern age, new media technology influences almost every aspect of contemporary life and, accordingly, influences the way children and young adults receive literature. As Jack Zipes states in his essay "Second Thoughts on Socialization through Literature for Children:"

The specific nature of literature for children and adolescents can be regarded as literary communication in which there is no

direct confrontation of text and reader. Rather institutions have already interceded to determine the meaning and reception of literature. The actual realization of texts is influenced by conventionalized expectations and evaluations. (22)

Young readers coming to Meyer's text now arrive at the first page within the context of the *Twilight* "phenomenon." Media images and popular reception form events of the narrative and characterization before the reader even begins the first page. The books and movies are the foundation for what has become an international community of "Twilighters:" fans who post and discuss "all things *Twilight*."

Sharon Mazarella's study of girls' use of fansites and blogs indicates, "the creators and visitors of these sites are intentionally seeking to create (or join) a community" (153). The Twilighters are a community and, as such, they discuss how they receive the story, understand characters, and transfer the meanings of the text into their lives. The readers pass on their views to friends who receive the text with notions of characters and structure already formed within the community. The products they consume within this community reflect the reception of *Twilight* as a "fairy tale" and the audience's identification with the heroine. A thriving merchandising component capitalizes on readers' recognition and identification of Bella as a fairy tale heroine and Edward as her princely male.

Isabella "Bella" Swan, exiled from her mother's home, arrives in a distant town to live with her bachelor father; she immediately assumes the domestic chores of the home and begins to adapt to her new environment (Meyer 2005, 9). The town and its inhabitants do not interest the gifted girl until she meets Edward Cullen. He is devastatingly handsome and mysterious; he is part Mr. Darcy, part Heathcliff – Bella, of course, reads Austen and Brontë – he has a killer CD collection and a silver Volvo he drives at twice the legal

speed limit. Bella's attraction to Edward is physical and intellectual; he is the only one who really "gets" her. Physically "perfect" and "godlike," intellectually brilliant, and effortlessly elegant, he is a thinking-girl's dream whose uneven temperament both intrigues and frightens. Initially, Edward is openly hostile towards Bella, who reacts with confusion and curiosity. Trying not to think of him, Bella cannot think of anything else.

Bella inwardly couches the journey towards Edward as an adventure, compulsively overriding her fear response, while she questions his past and his true nature. The answer: he is a vampire who lives amongst a family of new age revenants who no longer hunt humans but, instead, feed on forest animals; they call themselves "vegetarians" (Meyer 2005, 188). The group is cultured, world traveled, and all are extraordinarily beautiful.

The scent of Bella's blood, above that of all other humans, sparks a hunger in Edward. Meyer writes that Bella is "exactly" Edward's "brand of heroin" (Meyer 2005, 268). Dangerous addiction is the metaphor for the attraction between the beauty and her beloved. Edward must stay in strict control of his carnal urges or the unthinkable could happen; after all, he is a beast. He may appear in control but he possesses the strength and agility of a predatory animal. Upon learning of Edward's true nature, Bella states:

My mind swirled dizzily, full of images I couldn't understand, and some I fought to repress. Nothing seemed clear at first, but as I fell gradually closer to unconsciousness, a few certainties became evident. About three things I was absolutely positive. First, Edward was a vampire. Second, there was part of him – and I didn't know how potent that part might be – that thirsted for my blood. And third, I was unconditionally and irrevocably in love with him. (Meyer 2005, 195)

Constructing romantic notions of an “unconditional” and “irrevocable” love match, the young heroine chooses to “repress” her fear responses and journeys deeper into Edward’s world.

When Bella sees Edward’s skin shine in the sunlight she can no longer pretend he is not different from her. He is not the monster she imagines a vampire to be but he is “other” than she. Once aware of his difference, Bella is complicit; she chooses to believe Edward will not hurt her. Bella is under his spell and enchanted by the excitement he brings to her life even if he openly confesses his desire to devour her. In *From the Beast to the Blonde*, Marina Warner reminds us, “In myth and fairy tale, the metaphor of devouring often stands in for sex” (259). The animal groom tales traditionally explore the confusion and excitement of a young woman’s sexual “awakening” through metaphor. The beast represents all that is different and frightening within that experience, both the changes in the young woman and the behaviour of her sexual partner.

In contemporary literature, curiosity in a heroine signals an intelligent bravery and a willingness to explore the unknown. The exploration usually leads to some peril but the heroine uses that same intelligence to think her way to a happy conclusion. Edward must manage Bella’s curiosity carefully. Meyer writes in *Twilight* that Bella’s eyes are “alight with curiosity” and there are many references to her curious nature (2005, 259). Choosing to accept Edward as a vampire, she wants to know everything about him. If she is too curious she will eventually know all of Edward’s secrets: the beastly side of him unmasked.

On her website, Meyer states that she chose the name Edward for her hero partly as a nod to Charlotte Brontë’s Mr. Rochester, the character from the gothic romance *Jane Eyre*. The 1991 Disney animated film “Beauty and the Beast” resembles a gothic romance with its enchanted castle hiding the secrets within. The Beast is

Rochester-like, moody, and secretive in his study while Belle, a bookish Jane Eyre type, explores the castle and attempts to tame her beastly master. Marina Warner writes that “The Beauty and the Beast” story places the male lover, the Beast, in the position of the mysterious, threatening, possibly fatal unknown, and Beauty, the heroine, as the questor who discovers his true nature” (275). The heroine’s obedience and patience will result in her reward of marriage and wealth, a happily ever after if she can just hold her fear at bay long enough to see her mate transform into the prince she wants him to be.

In order for the heroine to proceed to a future of domestic happiness, she must be willing to self-sacrifice and avoid instinctual warnings of overt dangers. This message is an aspect of many fairy tales that has been of interest to feminist critics and writers, as we see in the work of Angela Carter and others. The concern is that in identifying with the heroine, readers may subconsciously transfer from fairy tales into real life “cultural norms which exalt passivity, dependency, and self-sacrifice as a female’s cardinal virtues” (Rowe 325). Karen Rowe’s concern about the role of the fairy tale and its potency in the lives of readers is that, “although readers discount obvious fantasy elements, they may still fall prey to more subtle paradigms through identification with the heroine” (325). Young readers will not believe that they will fall in love with a sophisticated vampire but they may ignore threats of violence within romantic relationships in hope of a “fairy tale ending” with marriage and wealth as an objective.

For readers of the *Twilight* saga, the perfect union of Bella and Edward will be possible when she is worthy of him, meaning as beautiful, as physically powerful, and no longer handicapped by the inadequacies of her female human form. Her passivity, her willingness to yield to Edward’s decisions, brings her closer to the desired ending. Helping readers to overlook Edward’s brutish acts,

Meyer's narrative stresses his protective actions. A male character cannot openly profess the desire to kill the heroine but the desire to "possess" her is acceptable to many readers. If the male character deviates into murderous desires, he becomes undesirable because he is too far outside of cultural norms. If the male is a vampire, or other non-human form, then the limits for behaviour are different. The fairy tale form's fantastical elements place the beast at a seemingly safe, metaphorical distance.

There is little critical attention given to Meyer's work that focuses on the violence within the relationship between Bella and Edward. The love story structure, and its resemblance to the "Beauty and the Beast" tale disguises the inherent threat to the young heroine even though it remains until her transformation, and arguably after the change. Meyer's readers see Edward within a literary frame of reference that they understand: the fairy tale prince with a beastly side. Meyer carefully creates Edward to appeal to her female audience. He is not entirely animalistic but he is unable to fully transform from Beast into Prince.

The notion of transformation is central to the romance between Bella and Edward. Bella desires to become a vampire and Edward struggles with the decision to grant her request. He holds the power to change her and if she transforms she will become his equal; the dynamic of their relationship will change once she becomes a vampire. The "power" in the relationship will change as Bella will no longer fear him or rely on him for protection, but her quest for empowerment is flawed. Her trajectory transforms her into a reflection of Edward and does not lead towards a vision of Bella as an independent young woman but towards victimization.

In the movie version of the first book, *Twilight* directed by Catherine Hardwicke, Edward, played by actor Robert Pattinson, appears less animal-like than his depiction in the book. He does not

hiss or growl when angered or frustrated. Instead, he glares and the edgy rock music of the soundtrack tells the audience of his agitation. Edward appears simultaneously predatory and protective as he towers over Bella, played by actor Kristen Stewart, telling her to stay away for her own safety while at the same time he pursues her. The film's tone reflects comments made by the director about Meyer's development of the "sexual tension" between the two main characters. Hardwicke says: "You've found your soul mate, and that the person who you are in love with and who is in love with you could kill you – even better!" (in Sullivan 2009, 451). The notion that the threat of death is desirable in a literary or cinematic, and very influential, teenage relationship is concerning. In both the film and the books, the heroine is a mixture of questor and passive victim and her confusion sends mixed messages to audiences. Bella's desire to be with Edward, who Meyer writes is "her world," involves self-sacrifice in a relationship that ideally should nurture her body and soul, not threaten to destroy both.

Bella's body is the focus of much attention in the saga. The scent of her blood, the symbol of her fertility and her human sexuality, brings danger and contributes to her growing habit of self-loathing. Bella is accident-prone and injures easily, a serious problem considering the company she chooses to keep. Although Edward does make protestations that to be human is better than being a vampire, Meyer's humans are not as appealing as the glamorous Cullen vampire coven. To be human is boring, but to be a clumsy, sexually curious female human is contemptible and threatens the stability and safety of the culture she inhabits. Bella loathes her humanity and sees the figure of the vampire as both a way to become worthy of Edward's love and a way out of a human life that holds no challenge for her. Her desire for transformation marks a choice she makes to venture into the unknown with little regard to the peril or the permanence of her decision.

Bella seeks to become what she perceives will be worthy of Edward's love: a physically beautiful and potent predator able to possess everything she desires. She fails to see the beauty of her human body and that is a concerning message in a text read by legions of young women. When Edward refuses to facilitate the transformation, Bella feels unworthy of his love. She falls victim to the male gaze of her lover and her culture by which her value depends on her inclusion in a heterosexual relationship where she is equally "matched" with her male partner. Without her partner, the young woman is adrift.

When Edward leaves, ostensibly for Bella's safety at the beginning of the second novel, the heroine withdraws further from her friends, school, family, and all other forms of community life and enters a semi-catatonic state (Meyer 2006, 84). Meyer omits three months in the narrative because Bella, so vibrant and independent at the start of the saga, cannot navigate life without Edward. In the section that follows the withdrawal, Bella, still disturbingly vacant, enters into a relationship with a childhood friend Jacob, a second dangerous male. This relationship builds at the urging of Bella's father in the tradition of the "Beauty and the Beast" tale. Her father is unaware that Jacob descends from a patrilineal line of shape-shifting werewolves who only transform when vampires threaten the area. Bella is the entity that triggers Jacob's transformation and he too must learn to control his beastly nature and his growing attraction to the heroine. Spending increasing amounts of time with Jacob, Bella begins to court danger in new ways, racing motorbikes and, in a link to her mythical sister Psyche, cliff-jumping (Meyer 2006, 359). Jacob now becomes protector of the broken and injured Bella but he still presents a beastly threat.

Slowly returning to consciousness and some "normal" teenage activity, Bella longs for the return of her prince and when he does return she must choose between two beastly suitors. Meyer's

narrative is lengthy, all volumes are over five hundred pages, and crowded with details of convoluted side stories but inevitably Bella chooses Edward, falling back on her notion of an unconditional and irrevocable love match.

For Bella, the goal is everlasting love in an immortal body and, as she is a contemporary heroine, she wants the prince but not necessarily the marriage. Edward is old-fashioned, as someone who is over one hundred years old would be, and insists on marriage before consummation of their relationship, and before considering Bella's transformation. Their marriage results in a wedding night that leaves the bride battered, bruised, oddly detached from her own physical pain, and pregnant with Edward's child. Meyer does not describe the wedding night's consummation but instead Bella awakens in a room of broken furniture and shredded feather pillows with an angrily repentant Edward.

In the morning, Bella sees her body:

Under the dusting of feathers, large purplish bruises were beginning to blossom across the pale skin of my arm. My eyes followed the trail they made up my shoulder, then down across my ribs. I pulled my hand free to poke at a discoloration on my left forearm, watching it fade where I touched and then reappear. It throbbed a little. So lightly that he was barely touching me, Edward placed his hand against the bruises on my arm, one at a time, matching his long fingers to the patterns. (Meyer 2008, 89)

This is the culmination of a contemporary "fairy tale romance" praised by parents and critics for its chaste depiction of teenage love without premarital sex! The new bride brushes her groom's apologies aside nonchalantly and tells herself the soreness of the bruises "wasn't that bad. Sort of like the day after lifting weights" (Meyer 2008, 91). Again, she does not seek safety but represses her fear and

her pain to appease her beloved and to perpetuate her own vision of their fairy tale love match. The scene is one of domestic violence and a relationship our contemporary culture ideally warns young women to avoid.

The narrative continues as the birth of the couple's daughter, the vampire's child tearing Bella's body apart, immediately precedes her death and transformation. Edward is both the cause of her death and the one who rescues her from complete annihilation (Meyer 2008, 368). Transformation assures that she can survive a sexual relationship with her husband and fulfills her wish to become a reflection of all that she believes is beautiful: Edward.

Fans do not mourn the death of Bella at such a young age, but celebrate her beauty and "power" as a vampire. The newlyweds' home is a "cottage from a fairy tale," a "place where anyone could believe magic existed," and "where you just expected Snow White to walk right in with her apple in her hand, or a unicorn to stop and nibble at the rosebushes" (Meyer 2008, 479). An idyllic fairy tale domestic home with her desired prince is Bella's reward for the violence of her marital bed and her death through childbirth. She has wealth, a husband, a child, and a charming home. In addition, she now has physical beauty to match Edward's.

Meyer's description of the transformed Bella represents all that contemporary Western popular culture celebrates in female beauty. The creature Bella sees in the mirror is "indisputably beautiful;" she is "fluid even in stillness, and her flawless face was pale as the moon against the frame of her dark, heavy hair. Her limbs were smooth and strong, skin glistening subtly, luminous as a pearl" (Meyer 2008, 403). The description evokes the image of Snow White and the fairy tale connection Meyer makes to the cottage positions Bella as a her twenty-first century descendant. The fact that Bella now has supernatural strength and agility, and a type of protective

mind shield, seems secondary to the heroine's acquisition of physical beauty. Vampire is the new princess in this fairy tale. Bella obtains wealth, recognized beauty, and her prince but she pays with her life and her future as a woman. The message seems lost on the legions of young fans.

Folk and fairy tales always have been, and always will be, part of our collective oral and literary communication. Perhaps, with the commercialized, musical Disney cartoons as their primary reference, a new generation desires a space to explore the themes of animal-groom tales and Meyer fills that space with the story of Bella and Edward. Meyer wields the power of the fairy tale to position the lovers as a contemporary Beauty and her Beast but she does not disrupt the "magic hold" of the traditional tales to truly empower her heroine. Instead, the *Twilight* saga reinforces the hold of the stories and it disguises messages intended as warnings presenting them as messages of empowerment.

At the conclusion of the saga, Bella is Mrs. Edward Cullen, mother to a gifted half-vampire child, supernaturally strong and physically exquisite but no longer human. Her flawless beauty, reminiscent of the beauty of Angela Carter's Countess in the tale, "The Lady of the House of Love," is "a symptom of her disorder, of her soullessness" (Carter 1985, 196). The girl with so much promise and vitality is immortally powerful – no longer the human girl in peril, yes, but dead, unable to reverse the transformation, give birth again, or experience life as a mature, grown, real woman. It is a disturbing contemporary version of a "happily ever after" but one that fans of the saga expect and accept. If Bella's journey is the contemporary popular notion of female empowerment, however fantastical or metaphorical, it is a symptom of a collective disorder in need of critical attention.

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Illustration

Figure 8. *Twilight*'s Edward and Bella. Charcoal and graphite drawing. Fanart by Julia Brigante (oXPinkPixyXo) from *deviantart.com*. Reprinted with permission of the artist.

METAMORPHIC, PORNOGRAPHIC FANTASY. REVISITING SHAKESPEARE

Sabine Coelsch-Foisner. From Shakespeare to Carter: Metamorphic Interplay in Angela Carter's Pornographic Fantasy, "Overture and Incidental Music for A Midsummer Night's Dream"

In his foreword to Angela Carter's collected short stories (*Burning Your Boats*, 1996), Salman Rushdie describes "*Overture and Incidental Music for A Midsummer Night's Dream*"¹ as an "out-and-out fantasy" (xiii) and praises, in particular, its 'precise and unforgettable' definition of an English wood:

The English wood is nothing like the dark, necromantic forest in which the Northern European imagination begins and ends, where its dead and the witches live [...]. No. There is a qualitative, not a quantitative difference between this wood and that forest. (275)

Carter's distinction offers an intriguing perspective from which to approach her fantasy on Shakespeare's romantic comedy, a) because it underpins her multiple intertextual allusions, and b) because it helps to understand the generic hybridity of the story.

Strictly speaking, "*Overture and Incidental Music for A Midsummer Night's Dream*" is no fairy *tale* or *story*, but a meditation remotely recalling such modernist experiments in sound and colour as Virginia Woolf's "Blue & Green," "The String Quartet" or "Three Pictures," whilst infused with postmodernist strategies of permutation and disruption, metamorphic play and mythopoetic² meta-discourse. Carter's "*Overture and Incidental Music for a Midsummer Night's Dream*" is neither a re-telling nor a continuation of Shakespeare's play, but a celebration of its dense metamorphic texture charged with

typically Carterian wordplay, critical comment, and parodistic intertextuality. Its structure is reminiscent of a musical form in which the tune is repeated in different keys and where the first statement continues. Rushdie's description of it as a "fugue" (Rushdie xiii) is pertinent, because in a different sense 'fugue' also denotes a "dreamlike, altered state of consciousness, during which a person may lose his [sic!] memory and wander away" (Collins 452). Carter gains such freedom by challenging mythic versions of femininity and masculinity – as Shakespeare had already done³ – and weaves a pornographic fantasy out of her critique. In *The Sadeian Woman* she referred to this procedure as "moral pornography" (the use of "pornography as a critique of current relations between the sexes") and was heavily criticised for it by early feminist criticism.⁴ My interest in Carter's story is less motivated by its possible political agenda than by its aesthetic, because "*Overture and Incidental Music for a Midsummer Night's Dream*" is first and foremost a playful engagement with the rich metamorphic play in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which culminates in the wood-scenes. Far from rejecting its gender politics, Carter draws on all aspects of metamorphosis connected with the characters and setting, the structure and language. These will be explored in the following.

Shakespeare's wood with its non-human creatures provides the foil to Carter's fantasy. It is the home of the fairies and the place where emotions are loose and the mind is free to dream, and where the play's multi-layered action unfolds: Bottom is transformed into an ass; the noblest and the lowest / queen and beast are brought together; a play is rehearsed, and lovers are confused due to the operations of fairy magic. The wood is a dark realm, where the moon, symbol of change and madness, guides the lovers, and where the stable hierarchies of Athens dissolve in a carnivalesque chaos.

The fact that Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* should appeal to Carter's radically subversive imagination is obvious.

Shakespeare's play itself is replete with instances of madness and metamorphosis (see Coelsch-Foisner 2006) changing either the mind or the body of a character (never both!) and culminating in Bottom's transformation into an ass, just *after* Puck reveals himself as a cunning shape-shifter (3.3.101-6) and right *in the middle* of the mechanicals' rehearsal of "Pyramus and Thisbe" (3.1.107-113), which they intend to perform on the occasion of the court wedding in Athens. At this point in the play, Titania has already been anointed by Oberon with a drop from the magic herb "love-in-idleness" (2.1.176-85; 2.2.33-40) and is immediately "enthralled" to Bottom's changed shape when she wakes from her sleep; Puck has already – mistakenly – dropped the juice on Lysander's eyelids (2.2.72-89), so that the latter will instantly fall in love with Helena upon waking up, and the subversion of order will be complete when, soon after Bottom's metamorphosis, Demetrius is anointed by Puck (3.2.102-9) and, consequently, begins to woo Helena instead of Hermia.

Shakespeare's comedy abounds in parodistic analogies and (flawed) echoes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: e.g. Oberon's description of the magic herb alludes to the fruit of the mulberry tree, which is changed from white to red by the blood bursting from Pyramus' wound ("Before, milk-white; now, purple with love's wound"; 2.1.167); the masque is a lamentable comedy, "A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus / And his love Thisbe: very tragical mirth" (5.1.56-7), parodying the Petrarchan convention of praising the lady's beauty. When Flute, dressed as Thisbe, praises Pyramus in hilariously false tones, he converts the *blazon* into a funeral elegy: "These lily lips, / this cherry nose, / these yellow cowslip cheeks / are gone, are gone." (5.1. 324-7) Such meta-theatrical and parodistic intertextuality furnishes vital ingredients for the feminist storyteller's cauldron. Not only is Shakespearian cross-dressing a strategy ready to be exploited for postmodern notions of gender-fluidity, the form of the masque with its emphasis on music and dance provides a prime

instance of mythopoetic revisioning through intermedial shifts: a dance replaces the epilogue in Shakespeare's masque, and Titania takes notice of Bottom because of the latter's singing.

Carter offers a grotesque collage which foregrounds the supernatural and ambivalent currents in Shakespeare's play: Oberon's capacity to render himself invisible, Puck's notorious ability to shift shape, the incongruence between the fairies' size in relation to both humans and the king and queen of fairies, their indistinct sex and magic powers. Moreover, Bottom's body is not wholly transformed, its lower part remains human, and suggestions of adultery and illicit sex pervade the scenes in the wood. To these Carter adds her peculiar transvestite poetics, bringing the characters together in a wild orgy of desire and sex, with incestuous love, masturbation, hermaphroditism and sex-change being the dominant themes. Challenging the 'normal' dynamics of sexual relations, the story isolates the happenings in the wood from the rest of the play and is, not surprisingly, all about the fairy characters and the Indian boy, who occasioned the quarrel between Oberon and Titania. Being a changeling in the play, he has a paradoxical background, which Carter readily exploits for her 'overture.' Each of Shakespeare's inhabitants of the wood is redolent with symbolic meanings and fit to join the ranks of Carter's hybrids, transsexual pornographers and sex maniacs.⁵ The "blundering fiancés and crude mechanicals" are mentioned only once and of no interest plotwise (276), because the focus in Carter's fantasy is on the subversive *body-politics* suggested in Shakespeare's play, and her only interest is in characters that blur fixed bodily categories, such as sex, size, shape and visibility.

The story opens on a parody of *Moby Dick*: "Call me Golden Herm." The Indian boy is metamorphosed into a hermaphrodite: half male half female, he is all gold and both sexually and culturally hybrid, a wanderer between natural spaces, who feels ill-adjusted to England's wet midsummer. In his hands he holds a snake and a lotus.

S/he is a pure object of lust and – as in Shakespeare – the catalyst of the plot, since s/he provokes the quarrel between “Uncle Oberon” and “Auntie Titania.” The latter seeks to protect her ‘inscrutably smiling’ (279) Herm from the advances of her husband and the beast-like Puck.

The fairies are “elastic” (279), while Puck is “satyromaniac,” all hairy and related to Pan. His capacity to transform himself from hobgoblin to bear, lion, boar, and hound evokes the Beauty-and-the-Beast theme typical of Carter’s animal tales, where humans are continuous with animals⁶ (“Shaggy as a Shetland pony when naked and sometimes goes on all fours” [277]). His fluid identity makes him a prime exponent of the story’s perverse pornography:

Puck is no more polymorphously perverse than all the rest of these sub-microscopic particles, his peers, yet there is something particularly rancid and offensive about his buggery and his undinism and his frotteurism and his scopophilia and his – indeed, my very paper would *blush*, go pink as an invoice, should I write down upon it some of the things Puck gets up to down in the reeds by the river, as he is distantly related to the great bad god Pan and, when in the mood, behaves in a manner uncommon in an English wood, although familiar in the English public school. (277)

Puck lusts after the Indian ‘boy’ and, in order to be able to respond to her/his peculiar sexuality, adopts the latter’s double-sex shape. Oberon can turn invisible (cf. 2.1. 186), and all fairies share a capacity for making themselves “gigantic” (282) or shrinking to “the size of dots, of less than dots” (279). Their readiness to change size is not simply an allusion to their sexual hyperactivity, but a meta-narrative clue, suggesting Carter’s own magnification of the fairy plot

by isolating it from the dynamics of Shakespeare's comedy. As the story-teller zooms in on the fairies, she makes them "BIG."

In this transgressive show, Titania plays a crucial role, since she is an earthly Great Mother rather than a delicate fairy queen. Surrounded by "bumbling, tumbling babies" (280), she is a "nursing matron who cannot put horns on her husband, for he is antlered already" (281). Carter debunks the mother archetype by typically exaggerating Titania's fertility, which she describes in overly vulgar terms, completely unfit for a queen. Titania is a "great fat, showy, pink and blonde thing" (273), "like a double bed; or a table laid for a wedding breakfast; or a fertility clinic." (280) Oberon is a masturbating lecher, who cannot have the desired object; he is the "lord of night" and transformed into a cannibalistic Erl-King, decorating himself with a necklace of little skulls – perhaps those of the babies he plucks from human cradles. "Indeed, who in their right minds would trust a child to this man?" the narrator asks (282).

While exaggerating the non-human quality of Shakespeare's fairies, Carter paradoxically subjects them to the exigencies of the human body: Herm suffers from the damp weather and catches a cold: nothing in his princely "peacock-jewelled heredity [had] prepared [her/him] for the dank, grey, English midsummer" (274). The fairies equally suffer from a "damn occidental common cold virus" (275), and their wings are so water-logged that they constantly "crash-land among the plashy bracken furls" (273). The story ironically ends on Titania protecting her little hermaphrodite, while the fairies continue to lull her/him to sleep, until their song is drowned in sneezes:

The draggled fairies obediently started in on a chorus of: 'Ye spotted snakes with double tongue,' but were all so afflicted by a coughing and sneezing and rawness of the throat and rheumy

eyes and gasping for breath and all the other symptoms of rampant influenza that their hoarse voices petered out before they reached the bit about the newts and after that the only sound in the entire wood was the pit-pattering of the rain on the leaves. (283)

This final scene parodies the bower scene in Shakespeare's play, in which Titania's fairies lull Bottom to sleep (4.1.1-44). Carter cunningly subverts the high and low by describing Titania in grossest terms, whilst her "linguistic exoticism is in full flight" (Rushdie, Xiii) when Herm, who fills Bottom's place in this scene, explains his origin: "Child of the sun am I, and of the breezes, juicy as mangoes, that mythopoetically caress the Coast of Coramandel far away on the porphyry and lapis lazuli Indian shore where everything is bright and precise and lacquer" (273).

The fact that the changeling is given a key role in the story, while he is mute in the play, is characteristic of postmodern revisioning. Yet it is a technique for which a late-twentieth-century writer might well have looked back to Shakespeare, who employed a similar strategy by having rustics perform a masque at court, where they would never have been given a voice according to late-sixteenth-century theatrical conventions. Besides, meta-critical comments on the mechanicals' cross-dressing create a similar effect in the play. No doubt, Carter was aware of this and, in this respect her fantasy reinforces the source text rather than subverting it. Being a child of the sun, however, Herm challenges the prevailing symbolism of the moon in Shakespeare's play as well as the implications of the wood as a realm where characters undergo change. Carter's soggy wood, by contrast, offers no perspective of change. Since her figures actually *embody* metamorphosis, nothing is likely to change their situation. Even though they are elastic shape-shifters, they are curiously flat in the most fertile of climates. As distinct from the

structure of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, metamorphosis in Carter's story has no antagonistic counter-force, and there is no alternative to the wood.

Carter's technique may be seen as equally indebted to Shakespeare's meta-theatricality and meta-criticism. For critique is the logical counterpart of mythopoetic revisioning: all subversions and parodies establish links between cultures, ideologies and politics, confirming the original as much as they deny it. Hence it is not surprising that Carter's self-conscious fantasy should resonate with the poststructuralist and feminist theories akin to her own story-telling technique. (see Pollock 2000) Constituting a typically hybrid postmodern fantasy, her story borders on critical commentary, offering the reader numerous clues how to read her playful engagement with Shakespeare's fairy world: the breezes "*mythopoetically* caress the Coast of Coramandel" (273); the familiarity of the fairy wood, where all flowers have names and where no danger lurks, "is not an *otherness*" (276); the English wood is "*metamorphic*" (275). Herm explicitly assumes the role of a critic, when citing Robin's lines 2.1.20-24 and complaining that we are 'misinformed:'

For Oberon is passing fell and wrath
Because that she, as her attendant hath
A lovely boy, stolen from an Indian king;
She never had so sweet a changeling;
And jealous Oberon would have the child! (in Carter 274)

The reader is informed that the Indian boy, is a *hermaphrodite* *verus*, that the reference to the Indian king is a "*patriarchal* version" (274) of her/his background, because her/his mother had entrusted her/him to Titania, and since s/he was not "stolen," s/he wonders:

“Are these blonde fairies the agents of *protocolonialism*?” (274). The critical categories named in the story – otherness, patriarchy, colonialism, mythopoesis, transsexual identity, metamorphosis – circumscribe Carter’s revisionist poetics. Moreover, her intertextual parading is not limited to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, but extends to her own work, especially her early stories and title heroes: “The Erl-King” and “The Werewolf,” or “The Courtship of Mr Lyon,” “The Tiger’s Bride” and “Wolf-Alice,” all from *The Bloody Chamber* (1979). By establishing such relations, the story-teller appears to be also the reader of her own stories, just as Puck is actor, stage director and audience at the same time, and the noble audience amply comment on the masque – as do the actors themselves.

At certain points in Carter’s fantasy, the narrator even resembles a teacher who expounds on mythlore and reveals etymological roots and intercultural connections. Thus we are told that Puck “has relations all over the place – in Iceland, the *puki*; the Devonshire *pixy*; the *spook* of the Low Countries are all his next of kin and not one of them is up to any good.” (277) We are reminded that Titania, whose name derives from “the giant race of Titans” (279), is also Mab or Mabh in Wales (279-80), and that Oberon has a German equivalent: “do not forget, in German, they call him Erl-King” (283). At their best, Carter’s mythic allusions weave together multiple intertextual strands and layers borrowed from the storehouse of European literature. Thus, whilst remotely recalling the cups of the water-lilies filled with tears by the weeping singer of Keats’ *Endymion*, the “inclemency of the weather” makes “the flat dishes of the pale wild roses spill over with the raindrops that have collected upon them as the bushes shudder in the reverberations of dozens of tiny sneezes...” (273). Or, Pyramus’ final words in the masque: “Thus die I: thus, thus, thus. / [...] / Now die, die, die, die, die” (5.1.290-300) are transformed into: “Rain, rain, rain, rain, rain!” (273) The repetition of ‘rain’ strengthens the Victorian undercurrent of the

story, conveyed by references to William Morris' flower patterns, Conan Doyle, Mendelssohn, and the Victoria and Albert Museum, and evoking Virginia Woolf's depiction of Victorian England in *Orlando* (1928) as damp and excessively fertile.

Whether the allusions are to primary works – her own or others' – or to critical literature, Carter's preferred method is that of revocation or "correction" (275, 280), which suggests a constant re-loading of symbols and images as well as infinite possibilities to 'wander away,' i.e. carry associations further and further and introduce ever new variations. The wood, for example, carries myriad connotations: it is first distinguished from the forest, both quantitatively and qualitatively; then unmasked as an English wood ("nowhere near Athens; the script is a positive maze of false leads" (275), but even as an English wood it *was* "chopped down to make room for a motorway" (271); in the poetic imagination, the benign atmosphere of the Shakespearean wood is not the wood of Shakespeare's time but diagnosed as a product of Victorian nostalgia, which is again communicated in a sexual metaphor: the wood has been 'disinfected and cleansed' and its inhabitants, the fairies have been 'denatured and castrated' (276-7).

Carter's fantasy may be read as the product of such corrections, for it restores the otherness of the wood, its original wilderness and dystopian aspects: "the grave, hideous and elemental beings [with] which the superstition of an earlier age had filled it" (276-7). In her story, Carter transforms the harmless English fairy-wood into an unpleasant "dripping bastard wood" (273) that is both obsessively pornographic and violently antithetical. The overall effort of *Incidental Music* is to lay bare the layers underneath the varnish of a "mellow" Victorian version of the *Midsummer Night's Dream* and uncover the darker realities of repressed sexuality, superstition, violent instincts and elemental powers. At Carter's hands, Shakespeare's dream has become a downright nightmare. The

sneezing and coughing of her characters insert a cacophony into the benign orchestration of Shakespeare's midsummer night, just as Carter's grotesque creatures add shocking notes to the ambivalent fairies of Shakespeare's dramatic universe.

The structure of Carter's fantasy emulates the structure of a fugue, which is a metamorphic form, with the voice shifting between an outside commentator/observer and the narcissistic Herm, who establishes herself/himself as the centre of the story. S/He begins with his name, describes his sex in great detail, and continues to place herself/himself in the wood: "Uncle Oberon [...] makes it rain when he abuses himself, which it would seem he must do all the time, thinking of me, the while, no doubt. Of ME!" Herm's self-consciousness is not surprising since s/he has a "complicated integrity" and, being different from the fairies, has to assert her/his existence: "I am here. I am." (274); "See me shine!" (274).

Herm's narrative alternates with an omniscient narrator that parades her or his knowledge, informs the reader about the setting ("The wood is, *of course*, nowhere near Athens" (*my italics*, 275) and offers critical comment on Shakespeare's supernatural characters and their relationships. While censoring the Victorians' false understanding of Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, this voice paradoxically reminds the reader of a Victorian schoolmaster, pedantically naming all the trees and flowers in an English wood (we must not be surprised to find "pease-blossom and mustard-seed" among them [275]) and displaying a special interest in folklore and mythology. Corrections and meta-narrative comments ("Misinformation" [274]; "the script is a positive maze of false leads" [275]) continually destroy the illusion of a story whilst simulating a real speech situation, in which the speaker and the addressee apparently share a common past and present: "this wood *was* located in the English midlands" (275), and where the reader is directly addressed: "Have *you* seen fairy sperm?" (278); "And if he is not a

creature of the dream, then surely *you* have forgotten *your* dreams.” (283; *all italics are mine*). By providing for the role of the reader in the text, Carter anticipates the audience that will eventually watch the play when her ‘incidental music’ has come to an end.

Though removed from the restorative ethics of Shakespeare’s dream, which at times does verge on a nightmare (when Helena is spurned; when Hermia is slandered by both men; when Bottom is translated; when Titania is made to love a beast), Carter’s fantasy is true to the former’s mythopoetic and meta-dramatic aesthetic. In fact, it owes its nightmarish tone to the abrupt transformations in Shakespeare’s play, which are disruptive rather than constituting a carnivalesque safety-valve, because the dream is almost imperceptibly carried over into the real world: Demetrius has not woken up from his drugged sleep. Besides Puck, the most metamorphic of all characters, has the final lines in the play. Puck’s epilogue is a clever gambit, displacing those shifts and currents in the play that have dismantled the secure borders between the world and the stage, between dream and waking consciousness, between man, beast and fairy. Carter’s story offers no such healing closure, for it is not a coda or afterthought, but an overture. When her dream ends, “The orchestra has laid [lays] down its instruments. The curtain rises. The play begins.” (283)

By imaginatively placing the story *before* the actual play, Carter hints at fantasy’s power to alter generic conventions as well, which is *her* interpretation of Theseus’ lines in Act V Scene 1 (1-22): “The lunatic, the lover, and the poet / Are of imagination all compact.” Carter re-creates the metamorphic wood of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* from a late-twentieth century perspective, transforming its disturbing subtext into a pornographic fantasy and opening it up for unlimited subversions.

Notes

1. The story was initially published in Carter's third collection *Black Venus* (1985).
2. On the revisionary aesthetics of Carter's fairy tales see Brooke 2004.
3. On the ambiguities of sex in Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* see Coelsch-Foisner 2006.
4. For the reception of her concept of "moral pornographer" see Robinson 2000, 717; and Altevers 1994, Constantini 2002; Munford 2007. See also Katsavos 1994. On feminism and pornography see Gubar 1987, 728.
5. For a study of Carter's fantastic, transvestite and hybrid characters see Kérchy 2008.
6. On Carter's discourse about beasts see Pollock 2000.

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SECTION FOUR: RE-IMAGINING THE BODY

BODY-THEATRICAL PERFORMANCE

Attila Kiss. *Fantasies of Corporeality as the Other of the Subject in the Theaters of Anatomy*¹

In addition to what we have just named (the proper name in exappropriation, signature, or affirmation without closure, trace, *difference* from self, desterrance, etc.), I would add something that remains required by both the definition of the classical subject and by these latter nonclassical motifs, namely, a certain *responsibility*. The singularity of the 'who' is not the individuality of a thing that would be identical to itself, it is not an atom. It is a singularity that dislocates or divides itself in gathering itself together to answer to the other, whose call somehow precedes its own identification with itself, for to this call I can *only* answer, have already answered, even if I think I am answering 'no'. (Derrida 1991, 100)
Ethics is optics. (Lévinas 1969, 29)

Death and the body have become inseparably intertwined in the history of western metaphysics, and this union, which tried to eternalize some constituent of the subject as incorporeal and thus immortal, resulted in the suppression and demonization of the body. The body, however, has been held accountable not only for mortality, but everything which is beyond the capacity of the reasoning mind or the rationalizing ego to control – transgression, sexuality, heterogeneity, incalculable acts and thoughts of the subject. The body gets articulated, by the time the dominant discourses of the Enlightenment settle in, as the ultimate target of social censorship and individual self-hermeneutics. Consequently, nothing could be more fascinating than the re-emergence of this corporeality in the cultural

imagery of the postmodern. As the thought of death is in continuous metamorphosis with the new technologies of cloning, gene manipulation and hibernation, so the body reappears from under the skin of ideologically determined meanings as a site of epistemological curiosity, and a new postmodern inwardness directs the public attention towards the interiority of the subject. Fantasies of corporeality, which used to be marginalized and suppressed, are now infiltrating the practices of social spectacle.

The death count has also been increasing in philosophy since the linguistic turn. A complex thanatological process reached its climactic point in the history of critical theories in the mid-1990s when, after the death of God, the death of the author and the death of the human as we knew it, the long-anticipated theoretization of the death of character also downed on poststructuralist critics. (see Fuchs 21-36) By then, the subject had been subjected to a penetrating dissection by psychoanalytical and semiotic scrutiny, and this anatomy exerted an effect on understandings of the human being in all cultural practices and representations.

Herbert Blau defines anatomy as an attitude, a strategy which sets into motion those mechanisms that will lead to the advent of the postmodern – an inward, anatomizing look, a need to penetrate the surfaces, to dissect that which apparently holds a fixed position in a composite whole.² Blau refers to Derrida in his account, and the reference is a very fitting one, since deconstruction emerged and then reigned in poststructuralism as *the* critical practice that unveils and dismantles the inner motivations, biases, the ideologically solidified skeletons of systems – the “structuration of structure.”³ The anatomical interest of deconstruction has since then become general in critical theory, but anatomy has not remained confined to the realm of philosophy – much the contrary, it has grown into one of the most dominant and all-penetrating investments of the postmodern. This emerging of the anatomical interest in the postmodern had been

preceded by a long silence, a ban that had been imposed on the corporeal by the discourses of rationalism and subsequent ideologies of the bourgeois subject. My interest in the present paper is in the ways through which this anatomizing is related to the constitution of the subject and, more specifically, to the problems and crisis this postmodern subject faces in the present age. Anatomy as an endlessly mediatized and disseminated representation and testing of our fantasies of corporeality has become a distinctive marker in the cultural imagery of the postmodern. My contention is that no attempt at understanding the agency of fantasy and the fantasmatic of the body in contemporary culture can ignore this anatomical turn in the postmodern. Fantasy and the body, an inseparable pair in the history of civilization, have their climactic thematization today in the reemerging of anatomy.

Ever since the first anatomy lessons and anatomical theatres of early modern culture in Europe, the body has been operational with a gradually growing intensity in cultural representations as an epistemological point of reference in relation to which the identity and the capacities of the subject have been marked out by the dominant ideologies of society. The semiotic attitude to the meaning, the presence and the representability of the human body is indicative of the ways in which canonized concepts of subjectivity and identity are established in the historically specific society. Recent findings in cultural studies have repeatedly pointed out that the anatomical interest was characteristic not only of early modern culture. The severe mind-soul dualism, which had been imposed on the sovereign subject by the discourses of Cartesian thinking kept the body and the corporeal marginalized for long period, but, by the time of the postmodern, one of the many turns that critical thinking has gone through is definitely the corporeal turn. This interest in the bodily constitution of the subject and the corporeal foundations of signification has been necessitated not only by the critique of

phenomenology and the early findings of psychoanalytically informed postsemiotic theories, but just as well by the growing presence of the anatomized and displayed body in the practices of every-day life. The phenomenon that perhaps best characterizes the body in the cultural practices of postindustrial societies is the way it has been subjected to a process of anatomization and inward inspection. Anatomy has become an all-embracing and omnipresent constituent of the postmodern cultural imagery, and its growing presence has saturated not only the urban spaces where body representations are disseminated, but also the multiplicity of critical orientations that have been aiming at accounting for this postmodern interest and investment in the corporeal. The body is endlessly commodified, interrogated, dissected and tested in ways that are very often reminiscent of the early modern turn to the interiority of the human being. The intriguing private body has, once again, become a primary site of social fantastication.

In what follows I am going to comment on the parallels and similarities between early modern anatomical representations and the intensified dissemination of anatomical images in the cultural imagery of the postmodern. The question which I set out to posit and contextualize is the following: what are the causes, implications and consequences of the new postmodern discourse on anatomy and the presence of the corporeal in cultural representations? What do these images reveal about the subject, the subject's relation to the Other and its own inherent otherness? If the constitutive core of the fantasies of the subject center around the Other, and if the anatomy of these fantasies mark out the space of this Other within the subject, the postmodern cultural imagery of anatomy will bring the subject face to face with its own innermost fantasy. This new *exposure of the fantasy* is the engine of anatomy and inwardness in postmodern culture.

I would like to start out from a proposition by Jacques Derrida, the philosopher invoked in the passage by Herbert Blau, the

thinker who gave perhaps the greatest impetus to the post-Saussurean problematization of the decentered, non-originary subject. The proposition is part of an interview where the motto of my paper is also taken from. In this dialogue, the interviewer Jean-Luc Nancy maintains that the subject is above all “that which can retain in itself its own contradiction,” and he thus posits the discussion in the context of the Hegelian heritage of Western philosophy.

What are the sources and implications of this inner contradiction within the human being? Is there anything other than this inner contradiction that remains after the decentering of the non-originary subject? Derrida’s proposition is that a certain responsibility, a turning towards to Other, an answering to the call of the Other will have always been there as the act that lends the subject its own identity. Other than the tone this concept of the call shares with the thinking of Lévinas, there are two important circumstances which contextualize this remark and the perspectives it opens up. One is that Nancy’s interview with Derrida seeks an answer to the crucial question of the early 1990s: “Who comes after the subject?” Starting in the 1970s, the realizations of (post)semiotics and the critique of ideology gradually established the problematic of the constitution of the heterogeneous subject as a question that no critical orientation can since then leave unattended.⁴ The macrodynamics and microdynamics of the subject have been persistently theorized by poststructuralism to the point when the question finally became: do we have to do without the subject? And what or who is to follow when the “exit the subject” sign comes up? Is the route of postmodern anti-essentialism going to take us from the death of the author all the way down to the death of the subject?

The other aspect of the situation we need to be aware of is that it is in this interview where Derrida proposed his envisioned project of research into the “*carno-phallogocentric*” order of our civilization: an order founded on a special relation to the flesh, the body, the

corporeality of the subject's own, and of the Other, which relation lends us the responsibility that is the foundation of any ethics (1991, 101) Today, several years after Derrida's death and seventeen years after the publication of the volume *Who Comes after the Subject?*, two conclusions are to be drawn.

On the one hand, no matter how liquidized and decentered, the subject is still present and will not have been terminated by the time of the ends of poststructuralism or postmodernism. On the other hand, one might ask immediately: together with this anatomical remark by Derrida about the flesh and the responsibility for the being and the body of the Other, should we not also immediately problematize this concept of the "contradiction within the subject" as nothing else but the Other within the subject – as the Other which has always already preceded any act and any cognition by and of the subject? Should we not problematize this inherent self-contradiction as the *body*, the material foundation, the corporeality of the subject which is the foundation as well as the marginalized and ignored supplement of our subjectivity: the body which eats and is eaten, the body which is spoken to and the body which *does* the speaking?⁵

The obstinate binary opposition of mind and body has been in the dissolving since the 1980s in critical theory, and perhaps the most conspicuous public sign of the wider cultural side of this process (other than the indefatigable vogue of soap operas on hospitalization, emergency rooms and surgery) is the fact that currently the most successful and popular sensation in the world is the travelling anatomical exhibition of specially prepared corpses directed by the German professor Günther von Hagens. "Body Worlds" was first on display in 1995, and today "Body Worlds 4" is on tour in Philadelphia, Toronto, Haifa, Zurich, Singapore and Cologne.⁶ In the spring and summer of 2008 the promenades of Budapest were flooded by hundreds of mega-posters about the anatomy-exhibition "Bodies. The Exhibition" (www.bodiestheexhibition.com) This

production is not identical with that of von Hagens, but it has been definitely inspired by his endeavor to bring anatomy back to the public domain, and it only took fourteen years, after von Hagens' first uncertain but hugely successful attempt in Japan, for a spectacle like that to arrive in Budapest. As a rival to "Body Worlds," "Bodies" has been on a world tour with stops in Madrid, Brussels, Budapest and London. The Other of the subject is back: the materiality of the human being is again in the forefront of public curiosity, and this curiosity is now satisfied in massive anatomical exhibitions and theatres that produce an effect of *involvement through alienation* very similar to the one described by Herbert Blau.⁷ (See Fig. 9-10 and Plate 6) After the death of character, the new theater of the subject is the one which stages the other of the subject: the postmodern anatomy theater.⁸ I would like to continue along the implications of this otherness, which finds its propelling fuel in the most deep-seated *fantasies* of the subject.

As has been mentioned, this emerging of the anatomical has long been in the making, strongly related to questions of otherness and the Other of the subject. Now that the re-emergence of ethical or moral philosophy provides us with a chance to have a meta-perspective upon the past 30 years, I believe it is arguable that the three most influential discourses of poststructuralist critical thinking appear to have been converging since the early 1970s chiefly around two concepts, two critical phenomena: the idea of materiality and the idea of the Other. Deconstruction, psychoanalysis and the post-Marxist critique of ideology have jointly established a transdisciplinary ground for a complex account of the signifying practice and the speaking subject's positionality within the symbolic order by theorizing these categories.

As for *materiality*, the term proved to be primarily applicable not to the empirical status of the "actual world" or the Husserlian "lifeworld," but much rather to the materiality of the two foundations

of the process of signification: that of the speaking subject, and that of the signifying system, or language, respectively. Cultural studies, critical discourse analysis, postcolonial studies, or literary anthropology have all successfully profited from this convergence, but critical scrutiny may and should also be directed to the antecedents, the chronological forerunners of this material affinity.

As for the problematization of the *Other*, poststructuralist critical thinking has thematized the dialectical concepts of antagonism and reciprocity, subversion and containment, hegemony and liminal marginality by situating two agencies of Otherness in the focus of scrutiny. One of these is the Other of culture: the marginalized, the disprivileged, the subaltern. Another one is the Other of the subject: the body, the cadaver, the somatic heterogeneity of the corpus. (see Turner 1-36)

The political and cultural intensities of the past two decades have kept both of these instances of Otherness in the forefront of cultural curiosity, also establishing a new kind of connection between the two within the framework of the epistemological crisis of the postmodern.

The ideological technologies of modernism constituted the bourgeois Cartesian subject at the expense of the suppression and demonization of the body.⁹ This body initially resurfaces in the postmodern as the site of danger and potential crisis, but then it gradually turns into a site of attraction and unveiled secrecy. Since Foucault's introduction of the idea of the hermeneutics of the self, the care of this fallible, apocalyptic, hidden body has been conceptualized by theory as a central social practice through which ideological interpellation reaches out to the socially positioned and subjectivized individuals in Western society.¹⁰ The representations of prefabricated patterns of body-identity are endlessly disseminated and commercialized in postindustrial society. At the same time, formerly

marginalized signifying practices (poetic language, the fine arts, performances, installations, experimental theater, film) started to deploy the body as a site of subversion, promising to go beyond or to dismantle ideological determination.

As much critical literature has argued recently, the postmodern scrutiny of the body is comparable to the early modern anatomical turn towards the interiority of the human body.¹¹ In both historical periods the *body is a territory of the fantastic*, an epistemological borderline, a site of experiments in going beyond the existing limits of signification. In short, postmodern anatomies are grounded in an epistemological crisis which is very similar to the period of transition and uncertainty in early-modern culture, when the earlier “natural order” of medieval high semioticity started to become unsettled, and the ontological foundations of meaning lost their metaphysical guarantees.

The question of materiality and the question of the Other, then, converge these days in a social-cultural practice which re-emerges in the postmodern perhaps as a response to the epistemological uncertainties and philosophical challenges of the age. This is how we arrive at the “postmodern renaissance” of anatomy.

Anatomy as a cultural manifestation of inwardness and epistemological investigation emerged in the early modern period, and now, after the centuries of Cartesian suppression, it has its renaissance in the postmodern. The poststructuralist critical focus on the corporeality and heterogeneity of the gendered and ideologically positioned body, the social-anthropological theories of the interrelatedness of body and identity, the postsemiotics of the psychosomatic foundations of semiosis are examples of this anatomical investment, just as well as the cultural representations of commercialized and commodified body images, anatomy exhibitions and public autopsies. However, amidst this new ecstasy of

anatomization, we should not forget Derrida's idea about the carno-phallogocentric order of our culture, since it will have far-reaching implications for today's anatomy.¹²

My contention is that within the sacrificial connotations of this carno-phallogocentrism, we must also calculate the twofold connection of the subject to the practice of eating and eating well. The carnivorous relation ties the subject to the flesh of the other, but also at the same time to its own flesh, its own other, to the flesh within, and it is through this double relation that the subject realizes the presence of its own otherness in the image of the flesh of the other. When facing the corporeality of the Other in the food on my table, in the wounded and mutilated body of the soldier in the battlefield, the invalid in the hospital or the cadaver in the grave, or, for that matter, in the plastinated corpse of the postmodern anatomy theater, I come face to face with that which is other in me. Such a witnessing of otherness and self-otherness is indeed critical for the subject and might result in the unsettling of its identity, as Julia Kristeva has elaborately explicated this experience in her theory of abjection (1982).¹³ Yet, other than the subject being put on trial and thrown into crisis, the witnessing of the Other through corporeality as the other in me might also result in the subject's opening up for the responsibility that the call of the Other evokes. As the various images of death in the *memento mori* and *ars moriendi* traditions functioned in early modern culture as agents of Death the Great Leveler, so the corpses in the postmodern anatomy exhibition may unveil the sameness of the subject and the Other by the ostension of that which is other in both: the corporeal, bodily foundations of our subjectivity. In this respect, postmodern anatomy goes beyond a mere catering for the sensationalism and curious appetite of the general and alienated masses of consumerism, and it can start functioning as an inspiration of that Derridean "certain responsibility."

Sadly, the dissemination of anatomical representations of the “flesh within and without the subject” does not merely operate with static and carefully prepared corpses in the postmodern exhibition halls and public autopsies. The inventory of today’s anatomical representations is not complete without mentioning the images of terror, genocide, mass destruction and mass graves: cultural representations which are disseminated, exploited, distorted, manipulated and appropriated with unprecedented speed and intensity. Within fragments of a second one can search and find thousands of such representations on the internet, and the media is saturated with images of corporeality which have been taking a more and more anatomical, dissective, penetrating and horrifying directionality in the past fifteen years. The early modern anatomical interest now has a proliferating renaissance in the postmodern.

We see the postmodern subject enveloped by the symbolic order which is, on the one hand, an order of differential symbolic values but also, on the other hand, an order of a language which has an insurmountable materiality: a language of things. Ferruccio Rossi-Landi (1983) argued in his early homology model that ideology employs the subject as a tenant. This metaphor of ideology as tenant and the subject as shell reminds us of Norbert Elias and his formulation of the *homo clausus* in *The Civilizing Process* (1939) what is the shell around the human being, and what is it that is locked up in this shell which emerges with the advent of the bourgeois subject? The convenient poststructuralist answer used to be that the shell is the symbolic order, and the inside is a great big vacuum, as Hamlet realizes in the prototypical tragedy of subjectivity. However, as critical theory moves further on after the linguistic turn, we are less and less satisfied with the focus on the all-engulfing linguistic-ideological determinations of the subject, and, as the concept of the *homo clausus* becomes impossible to maintain in the interrelationality of society, the materiality of the interiority of the shell becomes the

target of scrutiny. A corporeal turn is necessitated after the linguistic turn, the postsemiotics of the subject must be grounded in a corporeal semantics, as Horst Ruthrof (1997) argues, among many other postsemiotic theoreticians, in his call for a *corposemiotic theory of meaning*,¹⁴ and thus our theories of the socially positioned human being take an anatomical direction. We reach the ends of a period which has been determined and characterized by the “error of Descartes”: a constitutive duality of the mental and the physical.¹⁵

Postsemiotics can no longer ignore the extralinguistic, the corporeal, the somatic, and it can no longer just dress it up in the panlinguistic shell of the prison-house of language either, even if the symbolic mediatedness of knowledge about that body will always radically prevent any immediacy of experience. At the same time, the human body becomes one of the most intensively disseminated cultural representations: eroticized, commodified, gendered, and gradually opened up. Just like in the early modern, the opening up of the human body becomes the site of an epistemological experimentation, the testing of borderlines, the probing of thresholds. Earlier on, in a period constituted by Cartesian rationalism, the ideologically marked out limits of knowledge used to exclude the reality of the flesh, the human being’s sovereign self-identity used to be conceived of in terms of the phenomenological abstraction of the transcendental ego.¹⁶

The critical convergence around the material can no longer be separated from the considerations of the linguistic turn, but will not be satisfied with the commonplaces it produced either.¹⁷

I maintain, in the light of the above theories, that the subject of present-day culture is enticed to bear witness to its own otherness and, thus, to its sameness with the Other in the cultural imagery of anatomization. In other words, postmodern anatomy establishes an effect in which the subject is compelled to experience and see the

strong materiality of the language and the extralinguistic, into which its own subjectivity is inscribed – the flesh behind the face, the body behind the character, the tongue behind the speaker.

In order to see, finally, how the anatomized postmodern subject catches a glimpse of this other side of itself which connects it to the Other as the source of a call for responsibility, and why this other side will always necessarily remain a language, I would like to dwell on the notion of the *suture* and its critique. The postsemiotics of the cinematic subject conceives of the suture as an agency in which the confusion of camera-perspectives or looks may deconstruct the subject position which is anticipated and expected by the viewer. Slavoj Žižek emphasizes that the suture which is constituted by the camera-perspectives cannot be conceived of as a mechanism that produces the closure of representation, a rounded-off, coherent, diegetic world, that is, a mechanism which transforms the spectacle into a visually complete cosmos. The shot-reverse shot operation of the camera has long been held responsible for a seeming closure: when the spectator thinks a perspective is missing from the cosmos of the film, this perspective is suddenly revealed by the reverse shot, establishing the illusion that the entirety of the field of vision is mastered by the spectator. While captivated by this illusion, the viewing subject remains blind to the fact that its vision is controlled by the camera. This results in the internalization of the ideological *gaze* which is represented by the camera perspectives.

In principle, it would still be possible to envisage the suture as ideological closure in this way, parallel to the operation of the “upholstery buttons,” “le point de caption.” The upholstery button is Lacan’s metaphor for the instance when a key signifier holds down and freezes the signifying chain, and fixates the signifiers into a system, that is, into the symbolic order. However, this reading would ignore the fact that the suture which is produced by the key signifier is operational because it actually dislocates, “un-sutures” the subject:

it deprives the subject of its foundations that are presumed to be guaranteed in an automatized manner by the subject.

Žižek's example for this operation is the King as key-signifier. The Monarch as an ideological key signifier connects the cultural-symbolical function ("being a King") with natural determination (heritage, lineage, authority by birth), and in this way it produces in the symbolic order the suture that links the interconnections in the system of power relations, but, at the same time, it deprives the subjects of any foundation or prior meaning that may have been presumed by them for themselves. Thus, the ideological suture produced by the key-signifier is capable of working exactly because it un-sutures all the other subjects.¹⁸

It is not impossible to apply this understanding of the suture to the operation of the camera which is interpreted as a metaphor of the Gaze, provided that the camera is not understood as an agency that produces the closure of representation, but much rather as an agency that maintains the constant difference of the camera and the viewer, and thus deprives the subject of all prior ground or autonomy of perspective, turning it vulnerable to the un-suturing effects of the cinematic spectacle. Of course, this un-suturing agency of the camera is intensified and foregrounded in experimental film, while it is usually concealed and suppressed in the classic realist film of the Hollywood tradition.

Žižek's radical interpretation of the suture will yield new insight if we apply it to the postmodern vogue of anatomy, the voyeuristic interest of subjects in their own corporeality and the dissemination of the representations of the body. Until now, Kristeva's theory of the abject as the most archaic experience of the subject in *Powers of Horror* (1982) established the primary theoretical ground for us to understand the way in which the image of the cadaver, the heterogeneous, uncontainable body connects the

subject back into the real of those unstructured drive motilities through the repression of which the abstraction of the ego is maintainable. The metaphysical values and ideological categories of the symbolic order establish those points of the suture which envelope the speaking subject's heterogeneous corporeality into the abstraction of the transcendental ego: the symbolic order sutures us into an abstract system exactly because it un-sutures us, deprives us of our real footing, our materiality. When the sentiment of the body, the always-present and always-ignored, suppressed foundation of our existence is brought to the surface by representations of corporeality, the seam of the suture on the subject is broken exactly because we all of a sudden grasp onto something which surely gives us a ground, we peep through the boundaries of the shell in which our self-awareness as *homo clausus* is encapsulated. We are reconnected with that which should be only too familiar, and from which we have been alienated.

At this point we arrive at my second motto, the by-now classical definition of ethics as optics by Emmanuel Lévinas, the philosopher of the face of the Other. Lévinas establishes the core of his ethical philosophy on an understanding of the Other whose face interpellates me and compels me to turn towards that face. This is the moment of responsibility, the dawn of the most fundamental relationality which has an optical nature that encompasses our entire existence. Seeing, vision as such is the foundation of ethics, and this provides the cadaver in the postmodern anatomy theater with an extraordinary unsuturing power. The look in the eyes and in the flesh of the corpse instructs the viewing subject, before anything else, that the very field of vision for the human being is inseparable from ethics, because the face of the cadaver, the face of the Other is one that we also have inside. When we encounter the cadaver and we look the corpse in the eye, we see ourselves looking, but not in a simple mirror, since this mirroring is our very corporeality. (See Plate 6) Sadly, the body of the dead subject displayed in front of me

establishes this optical power with much greater intensity than any other visual effect, be it a painting, a photograph, a moving image or the most emblematically complex cultural representation.

If this encounter can be conceptualized as the subject's witnessing of its own contradiction, its own Other, then we are brought back to the Nancy-Derrida interview I departed from in my first paragraph, and the question we face is the following: is the dissemination of corporeal representations in postmodern culture only a *commodification of the fantastic*, or is there in this anatomical vogue a new manifestation of the ever-present need of the subject to come to terms with its unsuturedness, with its separation from its corporeal grounds, from the Other within? And if this postmodern anatomico-corporeal affinity does carry an epistemological stake, how do we conceive, in the light of all this, of the fact that the unthinkable and impossible happens again and again even in our time, and the iconography of the early modern *memento mori* is now echoed and appropriated by the commercially disseminated image of mass graves and mutilated cadavers? We can only hope that the anatomy exhibitions and traveling autopsies of the third millennium will not merely proliferate as consumerist sensations and commodifications of the subject's innermost fantasy, but will also be efficient in activating in the subject that "certain responsibility" which is to prevent us from going into the military extremities of our carno-phallogocentric cultural order.

Notes

1. This article was supported by the János Bolyai Research Scholarship of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Bursary of the European Society for the Study of English.
2. It was anatomy, we may remember, that provided the model for the incisions and dissections that, like the slit eyeball of Buñuel's film, *Un chien andalou*, precipitated the modern – the rupture, cutting and

tearing that have since been assumed as the virtual “structuration of structure” (Derrida) in the transgressive strategies of the postmodern. So far as anatomy tears open the organism and spatializes it, undoing appearance by dispersing interiority and displaying, instrumentally, its operable parts, there is this anatomical element in the technique of Alienation. See Blau 1991, 82.

3. See, among others, Derrida’s by now classical critique of the idea of structure, which is expanded to a critique of archeology which cherishes the idea of a finite, teleological dissection of time: “This is why one could perhaps say that the movement of any archeology, like that of any eschatology, is an accomplice of this reduction of the structurality of structure and always attempts to conceive of structure from the basis of a full presence which is out of play.” “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences.” In Derrida 1978, 278.

4. The international review of philosophy *Topoi* had an entire special issue (September 1988) on the French deconstructive critique of subjectivity, which was followed by an expanded issue of *Cahiers Confrontations* edited by René Major (20, Winter 1989, this is where the Derrida article originally appeared). The most complete collection *Who Comes after the Subject?* came out after these in 1991 edited by Cadava, Connor and Nancy.

5. When we open up for a broader scrutiny of otherness, corporeality and materiality, we must observe the warning Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, among others, has verbalized upon several occasions: concepts and stereotypes of otherness and the Other have been employed and simultaneously exploited, neutralized and extinguished in such a proliferate manner that to approach the problem will always risk ignoring the very heart of it. However, it is also Spivak who draws our attention to the reason why Derrida was not very enthusiastic about the term “ideology”, and her explanation again throws light on the mind vs. matter, subject vs. body problematic: “I should perhaps add here that Derrida is suspicious of the concept of ideology because, in his view, it honors too obstinate a binary opposition between mind and matter.” Spivak 1982, 259-278.

6. See <<http://www.bodyworlds.com>>. A google search on “Gunther von Hagens” or “Body Worlds” produced 102.000 hits a few years ago, while today the same search results in more than 2000000 hits. I

will quote only one example from the media publicity: “BODY WORLDS is the most highly attended touring exhibition in the world, having attracted nearly 25 million visitors around the world. The striking organs and whole-body plastinates in BODY WORLDS 4 derive from people who have, in their lifetime, generously donated their bodies for Plastination, to specifically educate future generations about health. More than 8,000 donors including 103 Britons have bequeathed their bodies to von Hagens’ Institute for Plastination in Heidelberg, Germany. The first lecture is on 1 April by Nigel Meadows, HM Coroner: The Role and Powers of the Coroner in Relation to a Deceased Person’s Body, and will last 1 hour. Admission is £5.00 per person or £2.50 with a BODY WORLDS 4 exhibition ticket. Limited on-site car parking £3.00 per car. Cash Bar. All exhibitions are held in the Special Exhibitions Gallery, Museum of Science and Industry, Liverpool Road, Castlefield. For evening events, doors open 6.30pm. Numbers are limited, so please buy your tickets in advance.”

<<http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/101726.php>>

7. At the time of my writing these lines in the library of the Warburg Institute in London, three blocks from here an exhibition on “The Exquisite Human Body” is about to close in The Wellcome Institute. I should note that significant attempts have also been made in Hungary to produce multimedial representations on the basis of research in the history of anatomy and corporeal imagery. See the materials edited by Péter G. Tóth at <<http://www.emberborbekotve.hu/>>.

8. On November 20, 2002 von Hagens performed his first public autopsy in a make-shift anatomy theater in London. Four hundred spectators squeezed into the room designed for two hundred, but four hours after the dissection another 1.4 million viewers had the chance to witness the images of the materiality of the body, broadcast by Channel 4. For the theatrical anatomy of Von Hagens see Nunn 2005, 196-200: “Casting the Dead.”

9. On the construction and the hollowness of modern subjectivity, see Barker 1984.

10. For a concise version of Foucault’s idea of the hermeneutics of the self, see: Foucault 1985, 365-72.

11. "... early moderns, no less than postmoderns, were deeply interested in the corporeal 'topic'." Hillman and Mazzio 1997, xii.
12. "...I would still try to link the question of the 'who' to the question of 'sacrifice.' The conjunction of 'who' and 'sacrifice' not only recalls the concept of the subject as phallogocentric structure, at least according to the dominant *schema*: one day I hope to demonstrate that this *schema* implies carnivorous virility. I would want to explain *carno-phallogocentrism*...the idealizing interiorization of the phallus and the necessity of its passage through the mouth, whether it's a matter of words or of things, of sentences, of daily bread or wine, of the tongue, the lips, or the breast of the other." Derrida 1991, 113.
13. For the questions of the Other and otherness in the subject also see Kristeva's *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991).
14. For an excellent application of corposemiototic considerations see Kérchy 2008. Kérchy argues that the thematization of body, identity and text as culturally – ideologically fabricated and manipulated artifacts establishes an incessant self-reflexivity in Carter's text which Kérchy thus calls *corporeagraphic metafiction*s (76). This corporeagraphic intensity is one of the main constituents of postmodern narratives in general, and it informs the entire cultural imagery of the postmodern.
15. "This is Descartes' error: the abyssal separation between body and mind, between the sizable, dimensioned, mechanically operated, infinitely divisible body stuff, on the one hand, and the unsizable, undimensioned, un-pushpullable, nondivisible mind stuff; the suggestion that reasoning, and moral judgement, and the suffering that comes from physical pain or emotional upheaval might exist separately from the body." Damasio in Putnam, 1994, 249. For the emergence of anatomical interest and inwardness in early modern culture, preceding the solidification of the *homo clausus*, see: Schoenfeldt 1999, Hillman and Mazzio, eds. 1977, Sawday 1995.
16. Julia Kristeva's characterizes philosophical reasoning before the corporal turn as follows: "Our philosophies of language, embodiments of the Idea, are [...] static thoughts, products of a leisurely cogitation removed from historical turmoil, persist in seeking the truths of language by formalizing utterances that hang in midair, and the truth of the subject by listening to the narrative of a

sleeping body – a body in repose, withdrawn from its socio-historical imbrication, removed from direct experience. [...] the kind of activity encouraged and privileged by (capitalist) society represses the process pervading the body and the subject.” (Kristeva 1984, 15)

17. Terry Threadgold writes in an article of 2003 on the commonplaces of the poststructuralist stance: “In all of these places certain theoretical assumptions are now taken for granted: a social constructionist view of language; the idea that realities and subjectivities are constructed in and by language; that subjects construct themselves and the worlds they inhabit in their everyday uses of language; that power relations are constructed and deconstructed through these processes; that what we call the social and culture are similarly constructed and deconstructed; that this activity is characterized by narrativity, that changing narratives, telling stories differently, might change the social world and that the goal of work on and with language is a politics committed to social change through what Eco (1979) would have called a semiotic labor on and with texts.”

18. “Conceived in this way, the point de capiton enables us to locate the misreading of suture in Anglo-Saxon deconstructivism; namely, its use as a synonym for ideological closure. It is therefore not sufficient to define the King as the only immediate junction of Nature and Culture; the point is rather that this very gesture by means of which the King is posited as their “suture” de-sutures all other subjects, makes them lose their footing, throws them into a void where they must, so to speak, create themselves.” (Žižek 1991, 19)

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Illustrations

Figure 9. The Flemish anatomist Andreas Vesalius' work *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (1543) revolutionized the study of the human body. Vesalius appears almost to hug the corpse: he introduced a radically new attitude towards the body as an object of scrutiny, establishing a close contact with the corpse to be opened and dissected. In order to facilitate his examinations, Vesalius suspended the body vertically. [Courtesy of Somogyi County Library, Szeged]

Figure 10. Figure from *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*, representing one particular stage in the process of dissection. The epistemological curiosity that tried to penetrate the surface of things was emblematic of the early modern *expansive inwardness*. [Courtesy of Somogyi County Library, Szeged]

Plate 6. Unlike the attitude of Vesalius, Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* (1632) is already representative of the detachment between the cadaver and the modern scientist, who touches the corpse with an instrument that functions as the prosthesis of the knowing subject. Although the various administrative and religious authorities launched a vigorous propaganda against the event, von Hagens performed his first public dissection in 2002 in London. During the multimedially thatricalized and broadcast

performance, one of the spectacles was a huge reproduction of *Rembrandt's The Anatomy Lesson of Doctor Tulp*. Tulp is a representative of the new bourgeois attitude with his detached attitude towards the corpse – unlike the postmodern von Hagens, who penetrates the flesh with all his thrust, as did Vesalius in the early modern period.

FEMINIST BODY STUDIES

Jeana Jorgensen. Monstrous Skins and Hybrid Identities in Catherynne M. Valente's *The Orphan's Tales*

Skin mediates human experience. It provides sensory information about our environments; it reveals physical and cultural information such as whether one is healthy or wealthy, able to afford nutrition, treatment of disease, and adornment; and it acts metonymically and metaphorically as a representation of self-image, a surfacing of identity, and a visual and tactile surface through which to interact with others. In both traditional folktales and contemporary fairy tales, skin is most often mentioned as an index of beauty, or as an agent of transformation; for example, Snow White with her pale skin and rosy cheeks, or King Wivern shedding his serpentine skins in order to become a handsome prince. However, I find that skin gets lost in both the data and analyses of fairy tales. For instance, we read so much more about hair than about skin in fairy tales that I am sometimes surprised that fairy tale characters have anything to hold their organs inside their bodies. When I browse through the index of a work of fairy-tale scholarship, I notice that there is normally a gap in the spaces where one might find skin listed between serpents, shuttles, sisters, and Snow White, soldiers, and stepmothers. Approaching this topic from another direction, skin has been discussed extensively in psychoanalytic and feminist works on the body, but their examples are frequently drawn from case histories and literature, rather than folk narrative or literature derived from folklore (see Anzieu 1989). In this paper, I explore the more nuanced ways in which skin conveys information about identity in fairy tales, using interdisciplinary methods to make sense of the relationships between bodies and narratives.

The notion that there is some sort of correspondence in fairy tales between interior and exterior values has been articulated in the

past. However, Max Lüthi remarks in *The European Folktale: Form and Nature* that “the popular idea that the folktale identifies the good with beauty and success and the bad with ugliness and failure cannot be accepted without qualification” (1982, 71). Even though these correlations are never absolute, they occur frequently enough to be noted. These values, I would argue, have both become more concrete and more fluid in modern renditions of fairy tales. On the one hand, Disney films and mass-market books portray simplistic dichotomies wherein beautiful characters are good, and evil characters are ugly; on the other hand, feminist and postmodern revisions of fairy tales complicate and subvert values such as the relationship between appearance and morality.¹ In this paper I examine how skin and interiority are connected in contemporary fairy tales, specifically *The Orphan’s Tales* by Catherynne M. Valente (2006), focusing on those depicting various kinds of beauties and beasts. Here I follow Stephen Benson’s directive to dismantle the aesthetic and ideological hierarchies in contemporary fiction (2008, 3); while attempting to understand the significance of connections between aesthetics and ideologies in creating those hierarchies. My argument is that identity is inscribed upon the skin through descriptions and metaphors, sometimes direct and sometimes indirect, inculcating as well as interrogating the cultural values that link inner and outer beauty. I will first discuss metamorphosis and beauty, two important themes that permeate traditional and contemporary accounts of skin in fairy tales, before analyzing Valente’s novel *The Orphan’s Tales*. In this work characters have skins of all kinds and colors, ranging from a monster that can flay itself in order to gift its skin as a poison or tonic, to a Witch whose facial tattoos and scars tell the story of her life. Valente’s tales combine beasts, women, and beast-women, refusing simple categories and exploring alternate viewpoints, excavating layers of identity written upon and within skins. Skin informs both the structure and the content of Valente’s novel, also

providing metaphoric links to intertextuality and genre, two prominent concerns in contemporary fairy tales.

As Francisco Vaz da Silva demonstrates in *Metamorphosis: The Dynamics of Symbolism in European Fairy Tales*, transformations in fairy tales occur through the medium of the skin, whereby exchanging or shedding skins causes a metamorphosis. This fairy-tale discourse is linked to a complex, widely shared worldview wherein things to do with skin, werewolves and dragons, Melusine and dead mothers, all participate in the renewal and regeneration of human life and the natural world. As Vaz da Silva summarizes: “Overall, to live under a ‘black’ woman’s tyranny in cinders (oftentimes represented as a ‘cinders skin’), to go under a hide, to follow through the water the entrails of a horned animal, to become a bird, and to join a serpent underground are so many images of a symbolic death represented in terms of a shape-shifting second skin, the shedding of which figures rejuvenation” (2002, 207). Yet the ontological associations of Vaz da Silva’s ethnographically-rooted explanations of skin shifts do not account for the socially contextualized aesthetic dimensions of skin, though we do receive some information about how skin and identity relate to one another. For instance, we learn that marvelously beautiful heroines are associated with the fairies and that these beautiful traits tend to pass from mother to daughter, just as ugliness tends to get passed down from a stepmother to her daughter, the heroine’s half-sister or step-sister (96). Vaz da Silva notes that “this polarized picture is simplistic” (96), but it works to describe the symbolic underpinnings of Indo-European belief systems and the stories to which they have given rise. Yet it does not so much work to tell us why certain things like skin are beautiful, and what value these things carry culturally.

Skin is an integral part of beauty, yet it is not always explicitly mentioned in folktales or fairy tales. Porcelain or white skin is one description that abounds. Whiteness of skin, according to Vaz da

Silva in his article on chromatic symbolism in fairy tales, is an indication of ideal womanhood. White symbolizes purity and more literally milk, hence white symbolizes the life-giving and nurturing elements of motherhood (see 2007). This is an instance of an encoding of European social values in fairy tales, entwining beauty with social roles. As Donald Haase points out in his bibliographic discussion of feminist fairy-tale scholarship, beauty was one of the first themes that feminists began to critique when they turned their focus to the unequal representation of gender roles in fairy tales. A common accusation is that male characters have to be active to gain their reward, while female characters have only to be pretty.² Scholars as well as writers have focused on upsetting this correlation between a character's beauty and value, as shall be seen later in this paper.

Having briefly surveyed skin as an agent for metamorphosis and as an indication of beauty, I was hoping to leave them behind as I move on to the other ways in which skin conveys meaningful information in fairy tales. I find, however, that I cannot. This ought to tell us something about the inextricability of these fairytale themes. One might find a fairy tale without any reference to skin, but evading metamorphosis and beauty proves to be a more difficult task. If, as scholars from Claude Lévi-Strauss and Vladimir Propp to Bengt Holbek and Isabel Cardigos have demonstrated, transformations are central concerns of fairy tales, then it makes sense that practically every other theme or trope in the genre would get tangled up with them.

Contemporary fairy tales complicate the interconnections between skin and other fairy-tale themes further by the fact that they are conscious revisions, and thus the authors, audiences, and sometimes even the characters display a metanarrative awareness of the genre's features. These qualities often take on a postmodern bent, displaying reflexivity and the capacity for parody and pastiche, as

Cristina Bacchilega, Cathy Preston, and others have discussed. This “peopling” of fairy tales, to use Bacchilega’s term, emphasizes the polyvocality and multiplicity of meanings and desires within the tales. Additionally, characters in contemporary fairy tales are necessarily more complex than their folktale counterparts: as Stephen Benson writes, the “post-fairy-tale requirements” (2008, 138) of complexity and complication within fiction are expressed in characterization as well as in other plot elements. Yet I think that beyond the postmodern peopling of fairy tales and the rounding out of once-depthless characters, there is something else that can be read on and in the skins of contemporary fairy tale-characters. I believe that the very categories of interior and exterior, like so many other dichotomies, are collapsing, and that this is changing some of the fairy tale’s narrative and aesthetic conventions.

In order to describe these tropes in relation to skin, I borrow and adapt Cristina Bacchilega’s magic mirror metaphor from her book *Postmodern Fairy Tales*. In the first chapter, she states: “the tale of magic’s controlling metaphor is the *magic mirror*, because it conflates mimesis (reflection), refraction (varying desires), and framing (artifice)” (1997, 10, *italics in original*). I propose to borrow *reflection* and *refraction*, and add *masking* to form a trio. I take reflection, masking, and refraction to be the primary rhetorical devices whereby identity is inscribed upon the skins of fairy-tale characters, in the spectrum from oral traditional tales to literary, postmodern, and feminist tales. These categories are inherently political, as Bacchilega notes in a later essay, stating that as the web of feminist criticism of fairy tales expands, “the fairy tale as ‘magic mirror’ may perform magic increasingly less as constraining reflection of a patriarchal imaginary and more as multiplying refractions” (2008, 195).

In the mode of reflection, mimesis is key, and the skin transparently depicts the character’s inner reality. All of the

characters who are good and beautiful, or wicked and ugly, fit in this category. In the mode of masking, the appearance does not directly portray a quality of the interior, but rather hides or masks that quality by inverting it. Examples from classical fairy tales abound, from descriptions of the beautiful but wicked stepsisters in the Grimm Brothers' "Cinderella" to the princess in "The Frog Prince," whom Max Lüthi describes as "certainly very beautiful, but she is by no means a model of kindness when she finally tries to get rid of the frog by throwing it with all her might against the wall" (1982, 72). Another example is in Jean Cocteau's 1946 film *La Belle et la Bête*, the fact that the same actor plays both the beast and the human male villains is significant, as discussed by Jessica Tiffin:

The transformation attempts to render neatly symmetrical and obviously visual the theme of exterior versus interior value – the Beast looks ugly but is good, Avenant looks good but is worthless, and the transformation relocates all value in a strictly binary sense, with interior worth mirrored absolutely by exterior appearance. The stylized structures of fairy tales are here exaggerated, motifs of reflection and repetition taken to self-conscious extremes. (192)

Though Tiffin uses "mirroring" to mean both reflection and masking, the idea of a stylistically exaggerated symmetry (or asymmetry) is the same.

I would suggest that because fairy tales employ extremes and abstraction, as Lüthi states, reflection and masking are two very effective rhetorical strategies in fairy tales. They employ a one-to-one correlation between values and appearances – either a direct correlation, where a good exterior mirrors a good interior, or an indirect correlation, where a good exterior masks a bad interior, or a bad exterior masks a good interior. At the same time, I do not think

one has to accept Lüthi's statements as universal to acknowledge that detailed descriptions are sparse on the oral end of the folktale-fairy-tale spectrum, and grow more numerous in literary fairy tales. Thus, my third category, *refraction*, is more common in contemporary fairy tales than in traditional folktales. Tales in which refraction appears distort the correlations between interior and exterior by muddling or overdetermining the signs, portraying a more complex worldview.

I shall discuss skin in Valente's novel *The Orphan's Tales* first as a structuring element, and then as content; however, the two are essentially chiasmic, as Jessica Tiffin points out: "fairy-tale form and content are effectively the same thing – form is meaning, meaning is integral to structure" (114). Layers of story are peeled back as are layers of skin, revealing the narrative and anatomical underpinnings of the plots and characters. The novel's frame tale begins with a girl with black markings around her eyes, thought to be a demon, but in fact the markings are miniscule, intricate tattoos that narrate the stories that she then tells her sole listener, a boy who is a royal child. She tells of a prince who leaves his castle to go questing, only to encounter a Witch, and he sits captive as he hears her story, and, thus, it continues for the entirety of the book, journeying from one story to another, telescoping outward and back in to resume earlier threads.

The embeddedness of multiple fairy tales within the frame tale provides another interesting opportunity to examine skin as structure. Tiffin describes the significance of embedded fairy-tale texts, focusing on how the framed tales of A. S. Byatt "problematize reality and thus, signal fiction as metafiction, reality as constructed artifact" (122). Similarly, in *The Orphan's Tales*, every tale is embedded within another tale, and many of the stories are about stories and storytelling, emphasizing how the act of narration creates identity. Some events are narrated from multiple perspectives, reinforcing the constructedness of narrated experiences, which is essential to the subversive potential of Valente's tales: "the self-conscious

metafictional quality of fairy tale becomes essential to its functioning as something other than entertainment or reinforcement of the status quo” (Tiffin 221). If the exteriors of the tales are altered and shed and donned, like skins that transform the identities of characters in fairy tales, then skin as structuring element of the tales reminds the reader that all experience is constructed, all stories are artificial. The fact that the stories are all written on the orphan’s skin, and yet are the stories of her origin, the tales of her own body and skin, accentuates the interconnectedness of all stories, all identities, and all bodies.

The meaning of skins within the stories’ content is rarely a simple matter of *reflection* or *masking*; rather, *refraction* is the dominant mode in which Valente’s characters express their relationships to their identities. A Beast whose skin can poison or heal encounters this Witch who is ugly by human standards. Yet the Beast is intrigued, describing her as “radiant... her face was beautifully destroyed, hacked to pieces by some master artist, and painted over with thick black marks” (118). These black marks are tattoos, explained by the Witch’s origins as a shamanic initiate in a nomadic tribe. She created the scars herself, disfiguring her face with a knife in order to avoid being used as a sexual slave by her captors, who thought her tattoos exotic. The Witch’s skin, unappealing to humans but intoxicating to the Beast, is not a simple index of her moral value. Her skin does not identify her as good or bad. Instead, it maps her life story, suggesting an intriguing explanation for why this Witch, at least, is ugly and bitter. Her pairing with the Beast, although temporary and not resulting in the transformation of either, leads to another episode involving fairy-tale Others. After trading quests with a rather wretched Prince, the Witch and the Beast must rescue a maiden in a tower, a notion that both of them find loathsome. Both are initially appalled by the maiden’s milky skin and golden curls when she leans out the tower window, but then they see that she is also a beast of sorts. Some of her white skin is actually fur, and her

hair bleeds when cut, as it connects to her dragonfly wings. She also has deer legs, fish scales, a wolf tail, and bear claws, all because of a wizard who is experimenting on her to determine the exact workings of metamorphosis. Once rescued, this character is ruined as a maiden because her beast features are permanent. Still, she achieves success by pirating a ship. With her webbed feet and wings, she is well-suited for sailing her own ship, exemplifying how a monstrous skin can offer freedom from restrictive roles.

Some characters trade skins, such as the crow-girl whose “heart was skinless, and therefore [she] could have any skin [she] wished” (459). The Witch’s daughter wears a goose-skin for much of her life, yet upon returning to human form, at first she can only shriek non-verbally, and then haltingly she begins to speak only of her flock, her feathers. This goose-girl’s identity is hybrid, and her experiences are more complex than the simple oscillations from human to animal that traditional fairy-tale characters undergo and do not seem psychologically affected by. Here I follow folklorist Deborah Kapchan’s definition of hybridization as “an aesthetic process which allows for the simultaneous co-existence (or combination) of forms and voices, but also for their mutual blending and transformation” (1993, 304). The fairy tale is already a hybrid genre, blending elements of the more earthy folktale or *Volksmärchen* with the medieval romance and *fabliaux*, blending oral tradition with printed chapbook and literary art tales; contemporary fairy tales are, thus, even more hybrid, and it shows on the skins of their characters. Valente sews fairy tales into new hybrid skins just as her characters inhabit increasingly more complex, more unsettling, and more hybridized skins.

In discussing genre and hybridity, I want to touch briefly on intertextuality. Farah Mendlesohn reflects in *Rhetorics of Fantasy* about how some kinds of invented worlds require “the reader to unpack the intertext” (2008, xiv). Valente capitalizes on many well-

known fairy tale intertexts in *The Orphan's Tales*, but not always directly. While I can think of at least two goose-girls in the Grimms' fairy tales, the Witch's daughter is neither.³ She is a case of implicit intertextuality, to borrow from Kevin Smith's taxonomy of the postmodern fairy tale (2007). The Witch is also implicitly intertextual, based on any number of witches in fairy tales but not modeled on any single one. In contrast, the beast-maiden in a tower has explicit intertextual links to Rapunzel. Privileging certain intertexts over others has ideological implications, in both folkloric and literary forms (Titon 74-75). As Tiffin points out in relation to Angela Carter's collection *The Bloody Chamber*, fairy-tale writing, by relying on the inherent multiplicity of folklore, "has considerable ideological power to defuse the inherently patriarchal authority of the singular narrative voice" (85). Valente's intertextual play is similarly complex, not only in her combination of fairy-tale tropes, but also through how she grapples with the utopianism of the fairy-tale genre.

As Helen Pilinovsky notes, "fundamentally, the fairy tale is a utopian genre;" however, modern retellings tend to interrogate the superficial utopianism of simple "happily ever afters," instead investigating its false promises and inadequacies (2009, 138). Thus, the ways in which fairy tales navigate happy endings reflect important information about social expectations. The beast-maiden finds happiness only when she is "part of a crew and not a prisoner, not a maiden, not cargo" (477); significantly, she also finds happiness partnered with a female Djinn. Others of Valente's characters flee from brutal heterosexual relationships or decide to be together even at the cost of death. Their desires and their histories also appear on their skins, and in the end, the stories inscribed on the orphan's eyelids recount the power of women's love, sometimes romantic and sometimes familial, but always non-heteronormative in how this love defies the bonds of hegemonic structures, greed, and intolerance. Valente thus "queers" the fairy tale, as does Emma Donoghue in her

stories in *Kissing the Witch: Old Stories in New Skins*, “deliberately deviating from the ‘straight’ plot, i.e. from the normative which of course includes the sexual norm” (Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère 2009, 25). As Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère points out, Donoghue draws upon feminist notions (particular Adrienne Rich’s lesbian continuum) of “a rich and diverse spectrum of love and bonding among women, which also includes female friendship, mother-daughter relationships, and women’s social groups” (27). Valente does this as well, affirming that there is more than one way to achieve a happy ending, and most often, these endings valorize feminine relationships (as evidenced by her large number of female characters) without essentializing femininity. Like the “Bluebeard,” “Robber Bridegroom,” and “Fitcher’s Bird” cycle of tales that Pauline Greenhills discusses, Valente’s tales queer heterosexual relations and kinship by locating “the primary peril to women in men” (2008, 150). It is a male wizard’s lust for power that ensnares the Witch and her kin (who ultimately shed their human skins to flee in bird form); it is a male human child, taught by a male Moon child, who deceives a false Papess and steals her body; it is a bird-man Ghassan who steals skins painfully (whereas his daughter trades for skins peacefully); again and again in Valente’s tales, the threats to (primarily) female bodily integrity come from men and hegemonic masculinity.

Valente’s work corresponds to general trends in how skin signifies in contemporary fairy tales. There are fewer dualities, fewer simple correspondences between appearance and identity. More detailed descriptions, more complicated characterizations, and a postmodern “peopling,” an exploration of silenced voices and desires, are all also features of contemporary fairy tales. These features can be observed in the fairy tales in Angela Carter’s *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), Francesca Lia Block’s *The Rose and the Beast* (2001), Emma Donoghue’s *Kissing the Witch* (1997), Nalo Hopkinson’s *Skin Folk*

(2001) and, of course, in *The Orphan's Tales*, as in the backstory of Valente's Witch. The collapse of dualities is another factor shaping skins in contemporary fairy tales. Destroying dichotomies has been an important part of deconstructionist, postmodern, and feminist projects for a while now, and though these impulses have found plenty of outlets in fairy tales, I am not certain that the implications of dissolving interior and exterior boundaries have been explored in regard to skin. The interiority/exteriority duality is yet another outlet of Cartesian mind/body dualism, a duality that Susan Bordo claims "is also gendered, and it has been one of the most historically powerful of the dualities that inform Western ideologies of gender" (1993, 11). Further,

mind/body dualism is no mere philosophical position, to be defended or dispensed with by clever argument. Rather, it is a *practical* metaphysics that has been deployed and socially embodied in medicine, law, literary and artistic representations, the psychological construction of self, interpersonal relationships, popular culture, and advertisements (Bordo 13-14, *italics in original*).

Dualism is, thus, a pervasive structuring element of Western thought, and as it is intricately connected to gender (oppression), it is no surprise that authors of contemporary fairy tales, like Valente, address dualistic thought in their work.

The dualism between interiority and exteriority also has a basis in physical revulsion, dirt and the abject as explored by Mary Douglas (1980) and Julia Kristeva (1982). As Elizabeth Grosz notes, one source of horror ingrained in Western attitudes is "the permeability of the body, its necessary dependence on an outside, its liability to collapse into this outside (this is what death implies), to the perilous divisions between the body's inside and its outside"

(1994, 193). Skin, as the main barrier between the body's inside and outside, is a highly charged marker, an intense site of exchange. Grosz discusses how psychoanalytic models of the self privilege the skin as the primary sensory organ: "The information provided by the surface of the skin is both endogenous and exogenous, active and passive, receptive and expressive" (1994, 35). While Freudian (1962) and Lacanian (1977) accounts of the self prioritize interiority over exteriority, philosophers such as Nietzsche (1968) and theorists such as Foucault (1978), who build the self from the outside in, also focus on the interactions and linkages that socially inscribe identity upon the body, primarily through the skin. These surface inscriptions "generate...produce all the effects of a psychical interior, an underlying depth, individuality, or consciousness, much as the Möbius strip creates both an inside and an outside" (Grosz 1994, 116).⁴ The convergence of multiple theoretical models at the importance and intensity of skin in constituting identity supports my contention that skin is quite an important element in fairy tales, for charting the confluence between aesthetics and ideologies.

Valente's refracted, multifaceted characters, thus, reinforce postmodern and non-dualistic notions of identity. The beast-maiden, for instance, is both captive maiden and pirate, endowed with girlish good looks and predatory features, none of which predict her happily ever after with a member of the same sex, but a different species. Her body may be marked as monstrous, but her desires are not. The monstrous is an excess of signification, of language; "A monster is that which cannot be placed in any of the taxonomic schemes devised by the human mind to understand and to order nature" (Brooks 1993, 218). Further, monsters can be understood as those caught between subject and object positions, those who in violating boundaries invoke the Kristevian *abject* (1982).⁵ Many of Valente's characters perform the monstrous, or have monstrous features inscribed upon their skins, but are subjects in their own right. Applying this non-

dualistic view of identity helps me make sense of skins in contemporary fairy tales, where reflection and masking are still present, but refraction – of appearances and values, identities and desires – is evident and compelling as a descriptive and rhetorical strategy.

Additionally, the primacy of the fantastic in Valente's storytelling choices lays bare the alternate ways of being that she imagines and gifts to her readers. Through the use of fantasy, fairy tales question reality and help us to envision new realities. As Judith Butler writes:

Fantasy is not the opposite of reality; it is what reality forecloses, and, as a result, it defines the limits of reality, constituting it as its constitutive outside. The critical promise of fantasy, when and where it exists, is to challenge the contingent limits of what will and will not be called reality. Fantasy is what allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise; it establishes the possible in excess of the real; it points elsewhere, and when it is embodied, it brings the elsewhere home. (2004, 29)

In contemporary fairy tales, magic and metamorphosis, the characteristic features of the fairy tale, are used “to question the belief in fixed social roles and stable identities, thereby challenging the binary oppositions of Western culture (male/female, hetero/homo, natural/unnatural, and so on)” (Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère 2009, 27). By embodying non-dualistic values in her fairy-tale fiction, Valente does not precisely humanize her monsters, but she does make them less Other, less abject or object and closer to subject. Valente's use of intertextuality and hybridity – both in the forms her stories take and in the characters she creates – invite multifaceted readings of identities and genre. I believe Valente's fantastic manipulation of

skins also contributes to the egalitarian, liberating messages of her books, encouraging those of us with skins of any type, no matter how marked or monstrous, to find happiness as we are.

Notes

1. The contrast between the simplistic dichotomies and lived experience in mass-market versions of fairy tales is especially apparent in Kay Stone's work. Her response-based research on perceptions of heroines in fairy tales is groundbreaking. See Stone 1985, 125-45. The complexities of feminist and postmodern fairy tales are admirably addressed in Bacchilega 1997.
2. See Stone 1985 for an articulation of the connections between appearance and rewards in fairy tales by viewers and readers of fairy tales. Haase 2004 explicates the scholarship on these connections.
3. See Zipes 2002: Two instances of goose girls in the Grimms' tales are the protagonist in "The Goose Girl" (296-301) and "The Goose Girl at the Spring" (518-525). In both instances, the goose girls are innocent persecuted heroines.
4. The Möbius strip metaphor that Grosz uses is part of her project to rethink "the relations between the inside and the outside of the subject," body and mind, the dualistic thinking that is pervasive in Western culture (1994, xii). Indeed, Grosz demonstrates how theorists of identity destabilize mind/body dualism in various ways. Grosz discusses "the radical notion of psychical topography Freud theorized...the subversion of the mind/body dualism his model effects," including subsequent psychoanalytic works by Lacan and phenomenological works by Merleau-Ponty (1994, 56). It is intriguing that non-dualistic approaches to understanding identity have been hinted at and worked around in the theoretical world, given Alan Dundes' assertion that the "folk" have long known and articulated (symbolically) what theorists are only beginning to discover. Dundes argues that much Freudian symbolism "turns out to be articulate symbolic equations already in some sense 'known' by the folk" (1987, 179). In the literary fairy-tale tradition, which Vaz da Silva rightly points out does not corrupt authentic oral tradition but rather constitutes "thematic transformations within an age-old

tradition” (2002, 119), Valente’s *The Orphan’s Tales*, thus, participates in a tradition whereby “folk” understandings of the complexity of identity mirror and in some cases precede theoretical understandings of how identity works. Valente’s work, as well as other contemporary fairy tales, which developed alongside postmodern deconstructions of binarism, represents a contemporary “folk” articulation, using the tools of past “folk” forms of storytelling, of non-dualistic thought that earlier theorists have intimated. This is not to be confused with a naïve idealization of the uncorrupted “folk” from whom early collectors obtained oral folktales.

5. Elizabeth Grosz discusses abjection in *Volatile Bodies*, describing it as the cost of the emergence of a law-abiding, social body. The abject is what falls away from the body, impure to the point of being horrifying since it confounds the perceived order of things (192).

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CYBORG BODY

Katarina Labudova. Cyborg Children, Illuminous Rabbits, and Snowman: Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* as Speculative Fiction

Speculative fiction's true 'powers of horror' reside in the writer's ability to present, in the most the disturbing details, the potentially fatal consequences and the dystopian extremities of any global *what if* question troubling mankind's imagination. A similar question could be: *what if* the rapid progress brought about by today's scientific biotechnological experimentation, that often disregards – in the name of science – traditional humanitarian ethical and environmental concerns, was to culminate in its logically predictable, catastrophic outcome?

Margaret Atwood's speculative fiction calls attention to the urgent actuality of such dilemmas through stressing a threatening parallel between (and even an identity of) her fictionally conceived dystopiac realities and our real world. She claims that she never invents anything that has not existed but rather systematically accumulates newspaper clippings for "every little factoid in the book" (2004, 3).¹ Her strategic blurring of the micro-distance between 'almost-today' and 'not-yet' creates a fictional gap for speculation about the chances of survival and, even more importantly, the limits of humanity, the likelihood and possibility to stay human at a technologically-advanced, 'posthuman' time-period when the distinction between what is human and non-human is inevitably challenged.

In the following, I shall interpret Atwood's two latest speculative fictional novels, *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and *The Year of the Flood* (2009), important 'twin-works' connected by characters, events and plot-lines alike, and intertextually intertwined with other writings of the oeuvre – most prominently *The Handmaid's Tale*

(1985) – by sharing common dystopic features such as themes of failed utopian visions, resistance to a totalitarian order, struggle for survival and open endings. In these novels Atwood creates speculative fiction at her best while anxiously pondering about limits of humanity destabilized by biotechnological research, raising particularly prominent “what if” questions: “The *what if* of *Oryx and Crake* is simply, *What if we continue down the road we’re already on? How slippery is the slope? What are our saving graces? Who’s got the will to stop us?*” (2003, 323), she says. Since we are already “on the road” and the journey has irreversibly started, ie. the bioengineering technologies she fictionalizes already partly exist or are only a small step away from reality, in this respect, Atwood’s speculative fiction can be distinguished from science fiction. Moreover by asking the question “how far are we prepared or authorized to go along the road paved by biotechnology?” she introduces political, ethical issues within her fiction, a gesture that would be clearly incompatible with the “apolitical” genre of hard science fiction (Cramer 188). Still, as J. Brooks Bouson points out, Atwood seems to be against the use of bioengineering technology to alter humans, particularly in the context of the modern “reductionist mind-set that is blind to the social and historical context of science and to the ethical and ecological implications of radical interventions into natural processes” (2004, 139-140). It is because of their imminent danger that the most disturbing elements of *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* are indubitably based on the very proximity of our real world and the *what if* world, that is not that far at all.

Nevertheless, even if staying close to our realities, Atwood’s speculative fiction also matches Donna Haraway’s description of the genre on accounts of introducing an alternative imaginative sphere or “elsewhere” (Haraway 1992, 63) that offers a space to re-examine, redefine and renegotiate the troubled relationships between nature

and society, human and non-human, natural and technological. However, interestingly, Haraway's cumulative generic definition immediately interconnects speculative fiction with science fiction under the label SF – along with other genres sharing the same initials such as speculative future-writing and science fantasy – arguing that both genres² function as platforms on which new ways of interacting can be explored, since they are “generically concerned with the interpenetration of boundaries between problematic selves and unexpected others and with the exploration of possible worlds in a context structured by transnational technoscience” (1992, 70).

Besides speculative- and science fiction, Atwood's possible worlds borrow features from a wide range of related genres – cyberpunk, alternate history, dystopia, futuristic thriller, black farce, fantasy, and even biblical myths – to deal with a wide range of ‘real’ world actual issues ranging from global warming, endangered species, to genetic engineering, nanotechnologies, and sexploitation. As a result, the novels are multilayered: they are both realistic and fictional, invested with cultural critical implications as well as sarcastic humour, and create a postmodern pastiche of generic confusion. The palimpsestic, ambiguous narrative that challenges the possibility of one single interpretation and one single truth runs parallel to the major themes of bodies and identities ‘opened,’ modified or liberated by scientific means. The text seems to be constantly transformed in the fashion of the “posthuman subject” described by Katherine Hayles as “an amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction” (1992, 23). The center of attention is occupied by the cyborg body's becoming “a text, a screen onto which cultural fantasies, desires, fears, anxieties, hopes, and utopias are projected” (Schwab 1998, 194).

Bio/technologically enhanced embodiments, like cyborgs, are favourite figures of speculative and science fiction since SF, as Haraway notes

is an especially apt sign under which to conduct an inquiry into the artifactual as a reproductive technology that might issue in something other than the sacred image of the same, something inappropriate, unfitting, and so, maybe, inappropriated. (1992, 70)

However, Atwood's fictionalisation of the possibly threatening consequences of biotechnoscientific improvements thematises just as much the fear of artifactually re/produced, unfitting, inappropriable, non/trans-human difference as the fear of losing differentiation that functions traditionally as a fundamental guarantee of singular human identity. The natural vs. the technological is a divide problematised between human and nonhuman, but also *within* humanity. Atwood's concerns are just as moral as scientific: she speculates about the possibilities of remaining human, and of defining any distinctive human features – be they cultural or biological – that could/should prevail under all circumstances. As she puts it in an interview “If you're going to do it [gene splicing, biotechnological experimentation, artificial reproduction technology] on humans, what you have to ask yourself is, do you want the human race to remain human?” (Keenan 25).

The question of preserving the germs of the natural/ humanity in a posthuman world is a particularly exciting one in the fictional realities of *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* where the boundaries between the categories of race and species are totally transgressed by transgenic creatures: gene splicing creates new species, first from vegetables (hybrid plants, as polyberries (YF 164),

hybrid marihuana (YF 173), or luminous roses (YF 116)) and animals (pigeons, wolvoogs, snats, rakunks, spoot/giders), and eventually calls to life genetically modified humanoid cyborgs, post-human Crakers.

The novels depict a split society divided into the elitist site of the Compounds, where the genius scientists work toward the ultimate goal of immortality and the marginal 'Pleeblands,' the market for the technological products of the Compounds and home of an eco-religious sect called God's Gardeners. The apocalyptic flood has nearly killed the human population. In *Oryx and Crake*, a man-engineered plague is survived only by Jimmy/Snowman, an apathetic protector of humanoid cyborg Crakers. *The Year of the Flood* introduces more human survivors: mostly members of God's Gardeners. The survival of the human species and, in Haraway's words, the "companion species,"³ is endangered because of the lack of food and vicious transgenic monsters as well as brutal survivors of Painball Arena.

The privileged and luxurious site of Compounds and the shabby 'Pleeblands' are only united by their shared comfort-seeking, hegemonically controlled consumerism served by bioengineering that loses its importance as a life-saving science and instead reduces Life to the status of a commodity in a dehumanised world where everything can be traded, exchanged, and replaced; including precious animals, new skin, human organs, slaves, sex. The technocratic system allocates political power to the scientists, whom many regard ruthlessly profit-oriented and immoral. Atwood's genial bioengineers reduce or eliminate the commercially ineffective functions to concentrate the profit and power into the hands of the Corporates. Genetic engineers are those who possess the power. As Haraway argues scientific miniaturization does change "our experience of mechanism," because of its effect on political and economic relations, it turns out "to be about power; small is not so much beautiful as pre-eminently dangerous, as in cruise missiles"

(1991, 153). Miniaturization is particularly frightening as a dimension of reality-blurring simulation, in the Baudrillardian sense (Baudrillard 1994, 2).

Scientists see their biotechnological creations not as respectable living beings, but as exchangeable objects of trade. While the research laboratory becomes “a factory for making and conveniently secreting a useful commercial product” (Griffiths 193), the new creatures engineered for marketing purposes are seen as “improvement on the most efficient low-light, high-density [...]farming operation” (OC 203). Scientists never hesitate to destroy their creatures which turn out to be more dangerous or unpredictable than expected,⁴ like the snat, “an unfortunate blend of snake and rat” (OC 51). While destruction may be a collateral damage of artificial re/production, monstrosity is its predictable side-effect.

The title character bioengineer Crake’s colleagues, the NeoAgriculturals adopt a ‘science-minus-ethics politics’ when they simulate a cost-effective but monstrous chicken without eyes, beaks and brain functions deemed unnecessary because of their lacking business value (they had “nothing to do with digestion, assimilation, and growth” (OC 203).) The cyborg-poultry that grows chicken parts on “a large bulblike object that seemed to be covered with stippled whitish-yellow skin. Out of it came twenty thick fleshy tubes, and at the end of each tube another bulb was growing” (OC 202) is particularly eery because it recalls how today’s factory farms have already completely de-natured and reified animals for human consumption. Like the transgenic pig(oon)s, enhanced with a rapid maturity gene and antimicrobial features to be “much bigger and fatter than ordinary pigs, to leave room for all of the extra organs” (OC 25), they reveal that Atwood’s dystopian bioengineering is only one small step away from our reality.

The novels ironically suggest that we shall go along the road of this ethically and humanistically dubious scientific progress up until its very end – and not necessarily because of our species’ innate cruelty but because of humans’ ludic nature, our natural drive to play. For besides taking into consideration profit interests, scientists themselves seem to understand research primarily as an entertaining game. This game is all the more enticing since it gives the makers pleasure and power in one: “create-an-animal [creating the rakunks, hybrids of skunks and raccoons produced for non-pragmatic purposes, unlike the pigoons engineered to grow human-tissue organs] was so much fun, said the guys doing it; it made you feel like God” (OC 51). The random construction of new hybrid species, like the rakunk and the snat, can be compared to a “boyish” game (see Ingersoll 2004). The products of gene splicing are subjected to infantile jokes – “Little spoat/gider, who made thee?” (OC 209) – sarcastically devaluing serious scientific biotechnological projects as mere *l’art-pour-l’art* amusement. A genetically modified luminous green rabbit is depicted humorously as if it became a fantastic shape-shifter provoking all sorts of sensory (tactile, gustatory, olfactory) delights along with cognitive dissonance in the human mind: it “glows in the dusk, a greenish glow filched from the iridocytes of a deep-sea jellyfish in some long-ago experiment. In the half-light the rabbit looks soft and almost translucent, like a piece of Turkish delight; as if you could suck off its fur like sugar” (OC 95-6). Here Atwood reformulates fictionally Gabrielle Schwab’s argument: because we are not used to cyborgs, we (along with many writers) have a “tendency to see them as grotesque,” that “involves a defense mechanism against their inherent threatening qualities” (1989, 194). In a characteristically ironic manner Atwood also depicts the humanoid Crakers humorously as equally incomprehensible, grotesque beings, associated with a “joke” (YF 396), and even a

“nudist camp” (YF 408), eating grass and leaves and having “group sex with these blue-assed women” (YE 396).

However, the novels’ humanoids feel more anxious than entertained about the fact that the scientists can no longer distinguish between the game and the consequences of their research in reality. This provokes a telling conflict between the narrator Jimmy/Snowman’s parents too, reinforcing the traditionalist nature/woman vs. science/man binary. In *Oryx and Crake*, a pigoon, a transgenic hybrid of pig and human is engineered for medical use to function as an organ farm for human organs that will transplant smoothly, but, more importantly, to serve CorpSeCorps’ profit. While Jimmy’s father, one of the scientists, celebrates the neuro-regeneration project as “hope” and “possibilities, for stroke victims” (OC 56), his wife – disappointed with economic inequalities, forgotten ideals and the lack of research-ethics – criticizes these scientific endeavours as immoral: “‘That’s all we need,’ [...] ‘More people with the brains of pigs.’ [...] It’s wrong, it’s a moral cesspool and you know it.’ ” (OC 56) “[...] there is research and there’s research. What you’re doing – this pig brain thing. You’re interfering with the building blocks of life. It’s immoral” (OC 57). The mother’s insistence on traditional humanistic values as “truth, justice and morality” (Tolan 2007, 278) marks also a need for a stable Reality that is continuously questioned in the fictional universe. Jimmy’s father regards these over-emotional counter-scientific arguments banal: “‘It’s just proteins, you know that!’” (OC 57), he says. But the need to maintain a clear demarcating line between the artificial/technological and the real/human, as well as a capacity to relate emotionally and empathically to all fellow living beings remains a last marker of humanity for Jimmy, her mother and God’s Gardeners alike. Their sharing feelings as sympathy, compassion, and love make them different from the superhumanly powerful yet morally dehumanised scientists. As if in a final justification these

humane sentiments eventually enable them to survive the waterless flood.

Jimmy has a sympathetic, compassionate view of genetically modified pigeons who are dis/identified by science in abstract terms as “possibilities for stroke victims” (OC 56), while he suffers from anxieties sprung from his own potential cannibalism, “confused about who should be allowed to eat what. He didn’t want to eat a pigeon, because he thought of the pigeons as creatures much like himself. Neither he nor they has a lot of say in what was going on” (OC 24).¹⁰ His sentiments towards the pigeon are highly similar to Haraway’s relation to the Oncomouse, a laboratory mouse, who lacks human DNA but is genetically modified to carry an activated oncogene (the cancer gene). These bioengineered creatures are seen not as collateral damage of scientific progress but rather as nearly Christ-like sacrificial figures bringing salvation to the sick mankind. The gift of their sacrifice brought in the name of (the preservation of) human life, science and profit is to be celebrated accordingly, as Haraway says,

OncomouseTM is my sibling, and more properly, male or female, s/he is my sister. [...] Although her promise is decidedly secular, s/he is a figure in the sense developed within Christian realism: S/he is our scapegoat; s/he bears our suffering; s/he signifies and enacts our mortality in a powerful, historically specific way that promises a culturally privileged kind of salvation – a “cure for cancer”. Whether I agree to her existence and use or not, s/he suffers physically, repeatedly, and profoundly, that I and my sisters may live. In the experimental way of life, she is the experiment. S/he also suffers that we, that is, those interpellated into this ubiquitous story, might inhabit the multi-billion dollar quest narrative of the search for the “cure for cancer” (1997, 79).

Besides laboratory animals' lives, the greatest price humanity has to pay for its hypertechnologically facilitated, scientific quest for knowledge (of human longevity and satiety) is the blurring of the natural and the artificial that necessarily brings about the confusion of the real and the simulated hyperreal, and thus threatens with the fictional virtual's overtaking factuality, and a resulting emotional death of seekers obsessed with the satisfaction of their quest. The compounds laboratories of Atwood's speculative universe realize Baudrillard's social vision of "simulation threaten[ing] the difference between 'true' and 'false, between 'real' and 'imaginary'" (3), and blurring boundaries between biological and technological, human and non-human, until reaching a sterilised cyborg-being. (see Howells 2005)

Jimmy is threatened by his potential non-sentience following from the rapid biotechnological process building on untraceable simulation: although he cannot imagine himself eating transgenic animals, he realizes that he "wouldn't be able to tell the difference" (203). The distinction between the real and the artificial dissolves on the plate. As Baudrillard suggests "[...] it is now impossible to isolate the process of the real, or to prove the real" (21). Whether the meat is from the 'real' or the new, 'artificial' chicken can be distinguished only by the price – that can also be simulated because "it is practically impossible to isolate the process of simulation" (Baudrillard 21). Likewise the animal-machine-hybrid "bee cyborgs" (YF 277) do not only literally blur the difference between the real bee and its "imago" (YF 277) but also make both categories virtually senseless. These mass re/produced biotechnological hybrids embody the Baudrillardian simulacra as copies lacking an original model, like the butterflies with "wings the size of pancakes," which fly, mate, lay eggs, and caterpillars come out (200), yet their reality status seems dubious, imaginary – precisely because of their endless, senseless,

unimaginably identical reproducibility. In Baudrillard's words, their reality

is produced from miniaturized cells, matrices, and memory banks, models of control- and it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times from these. It no longer needs to be rational, because it no longer measures itself against either an ideal or negative instance. It is no longer anything but operational. In fact, it is no longer really the real, because no imaginary envelops it anymore. (Baudrillard 1994, 2)

Simulacra's illusory self-sufficiency is perfectly reflected by Atwood's immaculate lumiroses that "glow in the dark" (YF 116) "forever radiant with their own fascination" (Baudrillard 5). No wonder, in Atwood's books, apart from the food, health and sex markets, one of the most important biotechnologically supported businesses is beauty industry. The Compounds produce Mo'Hairs, sheep growing human hair, for beauty clinics as AnooYoo Spa: "[...] three Mo'Hairs – a green one, a pink one, and a bright purple one [...] Onscreen, in advertisements, their hair had been shiny – you'd see the sheep tossing its hair, then a beautiful girl tossing a mane of the same hair. More hair with Mo'Hair!" (YF 238). However, in a dystopian manner, the unrestrained consumerism ends up in reducing the customer-utilizer humans too to trading products, violently deprived of their body parts and identity markers.

Amanda said that there were Mo'Hair shops in the Sewage Lagoon that lured girls in, and once you were in the scalp-transplant room they'd knock you out, and when you woke up you'd not only have different hair but different fingerprints, and then you'd be locked in a membrane house and forced into bristle work, and even if you escaped you'd never be able to

prove who you were because they'd stolen your identity. (YF 142)

As the simulated reality engulfs and abolishes the significance of individual identity's difference and human uniqueness Atwood's speculative dystopia seems to depict a dictatorship of transgenics: the scientific turns just as manipulative, domineering and threatening as any ideology. The bioengineer Crake appears as "a product of the capitalist machinery" ready to destroy the world with "the conspiracy between technocracy and capitalism" (Ku 119). His apocalyptic flood cannot be stopped by the various groups of resistance since these are all annihilated by the authoritarian system of simulation, like Jimmy's mother who becomes a terrorist and is executed, but since no one knows if her death broadcast on TV was actually authentic or not, her decease is deprived of a reality status, and thus of due humane respect and commemoration.⁵

The preconceptions of recognizable human embodiment are challenged and expanded to the extreme through the manufacturing of biotechnologically enhanced children, the results of severe genetic modifications. Agencies as Infantade, Foetility, and Perfectbabe offer the "hypothetical wonderkid"(OC 250), a test-tube baby reproduced from human cells, herealading the 'brave new world' of "[t]otally chosen babies [who] would incorporate any feature, physical or mental or spiritual, that the buyer might wish to select" (OC 304) if "nothing 'natural' happened" (OC 250). When Crake designs cyborgs to be perfected versions of humanoids he clearly transgresses the limits of (our understanding of) conventional humanity: the Children of Crake or Crakers are "customized" (OC 305) from altered human embryos spliced with genes of a variety of other living beings with the aim to create "some kind of perfectly beautiful human gene splice that could live forever" (YF 395) Paradoxically the new bioengineered creature's humanoid look is preserved by using animal

features which guarantee a more innocent and primitive look, while the genome of peculiar, 'exotic' creatures as jellyfish and citrus fruit provides for the artificially added, 'superhuman' extras including UV-resistant skin, a delicate citrus fragrance, and "a built-in insect repellent" (OC 304). The Crakers' scientifically enhanced (super)humanoid body matches Haraway's description of the cyborg body, in so far as it "is not innocent; it was not born in a garden [of Paradise, but Crake's laboratory called Paradise⁶]; it does not seek unitary identity and so generate antagonist dualisms without end (or until the world ends); it takes irony for granted" (1991, 180). Mankind's technological reinvention by Crake serves idealistic goals: his perfectly crafted, genetically modified creatures are playful and peaceful vegetarians, whose ancient primate brain has been removed to eliminate the aggressive-destructive features characteristic of humans. However, Atwood's use of sarcasm throughout the description of this idealistic vision brought true already suggests that utopia is doomed to transform into dystopia.

Gone were its destructive features, the features responsible for the world's current illnesses. For instance, racism [...]. Their sexuality was not a constant torment to them, not a cloud of turbulent hormones: they came into heat at regular intervals, as did most mammals other than man. [...] They would not need to invent any harmful symbolisms, such as kingdoms, icons, gods, or money. Best of all, they recycled their own excrement (OC 305).

Ironically, Crake's vision of a technologically advanced world without famine, sexual, racial and religious wars and tensions drowns in a horrible apocalypse caused by his own medico-scientific invention. His BlyssPluss Pill is designed to protect humans from all sexually transmitted diseases, to provide an unlimited libido, preserve

youth and solve the problem of contraception, however, due to the epidemic provoked by the virus of the ebola-like JUVE disease it contains, it ends up exterminating humanity – but for Jimmy/Snowman, Crake’s human friend.

Paradoxically, in a post/transhuman world of cyborgs the last remaining human, Jimmy/Snowman is nothing more than “a white illusion of man, here today, gone tomorrow, so easily shoved over, left to melt in the sun” (OC 224), “the neurotypical” (OC 203) meaning “minus the genius gene” (OC 194): a lesser other(ed), an outcast, an oxymoron as the last endangered specimen of an extinct species.⁷ Although he becomes an apathetic leader of humanoid cyborg Crakers, the humanity of Jimmy – like that of the other human survivors of the catastrophe introduced in *The Year of the Flood* – appears fully animalistic compared to the superhuman cyborgs. He is a passive, starving sex-addict, a drunkard with a “brain the size of a grape” (OC 237), and low chances of survival, tormented by aggressive transgenic creatures, the lack of food and climatic changes. Ape-like he is forced to live in a tree to protect himself from insects and animals. “He’s rank, he’s gamy, he reeks like a walrus – oily, salty, fishy – not that he’s ever smelled such a beast.” (OC 7). Crakers see him as a pinioned bird, an animal. In Chung-Hao Ku’s view Jimmy/Snowman’s “inability to survive amongst the bioengineered creatures” marks his “sliding down from humanity through animality to monstrosity” (118, 128).

Despite mankind’s inevitable decline “from master to monster” (in the cyborgs’ eyes) (Ku 111) some hope remains for the neurotypical, natural humans, as the God’s Gardeners reconstruct the traditional anthropocentric understanding of humanity. As Croze, a former God’s Gardener, confesses to a human survivor, Crakers “don’t need clothes, [...] eat leaves, [...] purr like cats [yet they are not his] idea of perfect. [since] ‘Perfect is more like you.’” (YF 396).

The ending of the story is open, many questions remain unanswered – Will the cyborgs be protected by the surviving humans? Can the God's Gardeners deal with the Painball men's brutality? – and the last sentence of *Oryx and Crake* is particularly ambiguous: "Zero hour [...]. Time to go" (OC 374). Yet the fact that the human survivors, God's Gardeners, including scientists who have been manipulated into Crake's projects, have values other than profit by virtue of sharing humane sentiments as mutual love, friendship, communication, empathy, and sense of communion might give a different meaning to the apparently ominous last sentence. Snowman's "zero hour" signals "a jolt of terror" (3) since it can be seen as a time to start the redefinition and rewriting of humanity.

Notes

1. For instance, the green fluorescent rabbits that hop around in *Oryx and Crake* are based on "the illuminous green rabbit [...] made for a magician who wanted to pull a rabbit out of a hat, but he wanted the rabbit to glow in the dark" (2004, 3). However, Anthony Griffiths comments on Atwood's green rabbits that have a "green fluorescent protein (GFP), obtained from a jellyfish" (2004, 193) that GFP technology is not used to produce "glow-in-the-dark models as Atwood implies" (194) but is producing "dividends in understanding all types of biological developments" (Griffiths 2004, 194).
2. Corall Ann Howells, in "Margaret Atwood's dystopian visions", suggests that Atwood has always resisted the exclusivity of science fiction, "insisting that she writes 'speculative fiction'" (163). Because of the overlapping features, science fiction and speculative fiction share an abbreviation sf in *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, too. Kathryn Cramer, in "Hard science fiction", quotes Stanley Smith's suggestion that "science fiction is simply fiction in which some element of speculation plays such an essential and integral role that it can't be removed without making the story collapse [...]" (186).
3. In *When Species Meet* Haraway suggests that "*species* reeks of race and sex; and where and when species meet, that heritage must be

untied and better knots of companion species attempted within and across differences [...] companion species must instead learn to live intersectionally (2008, 18).

4. A dangerous and vicious hybrid is a seemingly peaceful wolvog, a blend of wolf and dog. Similarly dangerous is the lion-sheep splice, the liobams. “Still, the liobams seem gentle enough, with their curly golden hair and twirling tails. They’re nibbling flower heads, they don’t look up; yet she has the sense that they’re perfectly aware of her. Then the male opens its mouth, displaying its long, sharp canines, and calls. It’s an odd combination of baa and roar: a bloar” (YF 94).

5. In the books the conflict between the real and the virtual, the virtual and the fictional, the fictional and the imaginary is complicated. The characters are lost in simulations and the question of the definition of the real remains unanswered. This can be illustrated by the example of the real-time executions which Jimmy/Snowman and Crake watch on the Internet. Jimmy/Snowman often raises the question whether sex or executions are real: “Do you think they’re really being executed?” he said. ‘A lot of them look like simulations.’ (OC 83). Crake answers sceptically: “What is *reality*?” (83). However, Jimmy/Snowman, as a child, feels an urge to find out whether the virtual is real, whether the people are really executed or just simulated fictionalized, only pretended and performed. He is never sure of the recording of his mother’s execution the CorpSeCorps show him: “It didn’t occur to Jimmy to ask when the execution had taken place. Afterwards, he realized it might have been years ago. What if the whole thing was a fake? It could even have been digital, at least the shots, the spurts of blood, the falling down. Maybe his mother was still alive, maybe she was even still at large.” (OC 259). Moreover, the boys also react to the Internet differently: sites are funny for Crake and disturbing for Jimmy. These shows and games strive at repressing emotional involvement and moral responsibility in the boys by blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality, reality and virtuality. Jimmy/Snowman, a fragile and sensitive boy, affected by computer games and watching TV, gives up on his attempts to tell the difference between the real and the virtual and becomes apathetic.

6. Crake's Paradise is spelled with C as in Crake's name. The part of the word, dice, may be interpreted as another allusion to the blurring of the boundaries between the real, scientific research and the fictional, entertaining game. I would like to thank Anna Kérchy for this idea.

7. Howells suggests that Jimmy/Snowman is an outcast from his own narrative, as "the story is told not in the first person but through third-person indirect interior monologue, which shifts restlessly between the narrative present and Jimmy/Snowman's memories of his own and other people's stories in a series of associative leaps, and the context is provided by an omniscient narrator" (2005,173). This method displaces Jimmy from "the centre of his own narrative" (Howells 2005,173) in a parallel to his displacement from the post-human world. Bouson reads Jimmy as "a kind of living human joke trapped" (2004, 153) in one of Crake's experiments, and interprets the open ending (where Jimmy/Snowman is supposed to decide whether he joins the people he sees or stays with the Crakers) as "deliberately ambiguous" (2004, 153). Ingersoll notes that "Snowman is disabled from being an 'I' in this novel;" "He is a castaway in a culturally vacant cosmos, with no hope that his message-in-a-bottle could ever find a reader" (171). Similarly to Bouson, Ingersoll claims that the "novel seems in the end not quite sure how to end and what kind of future it wants to project" (172). The *Year of the Flood* partially answers the question. The God's Gardeners save Snowman; however, they still have to confront the human beasts who survived the Painball Arena. DiMarco's reading is close to mine: when Jimmy/Snowman sees the human traces, "he must choose: to retreat from, attack, or engage humanely the strangers with whom he is confronted" (171).

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RE-FASHIONING EMBODIMENTS

Susan Small. *Fairy Tale Fashionista: Angela Carter Dresses Wolf-Alice*

Carter Reads Barthes and Borges

In 1967, French literary critic and semiotician, Roland Barthes, published a book called *Système de la Mode* (*The Fashion System*), in which he attempted to articulate the semiotic structure of the language accompanying the images in two French fashion magazines (*Elle* and *Le Jardin des Modes*) dating from June 1958 to June 1959. The choice of these magazines was, like that of the dates, purely arbitrary; what interested Barthes was not the specificity of what he termed these “written garments” but the system within which they operated. *Système de la Mode* was, therefore, an exercise in semiological method; fashion was the subject, not the object, of the exercise.

In 1985, British novelist, short-story writer and journalist, Angela Carter, published a review of the first English translation of *Système de la Mode*, in which she slammed Barthes for the elitist pointillism of his methodology, charging that *The Fashion System*

is crammed with complicated diagrams, quasi-algebraic symbols and series upon series of inventories, sets of classifications and lists of categories, each subdivided into further subsections with the scrupulous obsessiveness of a medieval schoolman, until you start wondering how many semioticians could dance on the head of a pin (1985, 143).

The review, which appeared in *New Society*, is vintage Carter: flamboyant, scurrilous, unforgettably elegant: “For the lay person, she complains, all this has the compulsive mystification of a Borges

short story. If it weren't all so finicking and anal, it would be taxonomy run riot" (1985, 142).

We might suggest, however, that perhaps the lady doth protest too much, for, three years later, in 1988, Carter published a paper entitled, "Borges the Taxonomist", in which she states: "It is this taxonomic passion that I love most in Borges" (1989, 42), and, three years after that (1991), her last novel, *Wise Children*, in which we read the following passage, which rivals both Barthes and Borges in all their taxonomic glory:

First, there was the lingerie – silk, satin, lace, eau du nil, blush rose, flesh, black and red ribbons, straight up and down things from the twenties, slithering things from the thirties, curvy things from the forties, waspies, merry widows, uplift bras. [...] Then there were the frocks. Some things we'd put away in plastic bags: bias-cut silk jerseys, beaded sheaths that weighed a ton. Others we'd covered up with sheets, the big net skirts, the taffeta crinolines, halter necks, strapless, backless, etc., etc., etc.... (187)

From *Wise Children* to Feral Child

The riotous carnivalesque which marks the contents of these taxonomies in *Wise Children* might tend to obscure its connection with an earlier, almost austere story of another child, the feral Wolf-Alice, dragged naked and filthy from a wolf's den to a convent cell and from there to the Dickensian decay of a werewolf's castle. And yet, if we can, for a moment, stop ourselves from wondering how many semioticians could dance on the head of a pin and start wondering how that pin might help us fasten together the strands of matted hair and cobwebs that form the fabric of this feral child's world, we can begin to articulate the web of vestimentary relations – the "Fashion system" – which subtends the semiotic structure of

“Wolf-Alice.” It is this system which constitutes both the subject and the object of the present essay.

The “Visible Sign”

Angela Carter anchors the pivot of this semiotic structure in the consciousness of Wolf-Alice herself, at the moment when she becomes aware of the nature of the divide which separates her from the wolves: “now she knew how to wear clothes and so had put on the visible sign of her difference from them” (1979d, 125). What is particularly interesting about this moment is that the semiosis operating here is a *mise en scène* of Carter’s reflection that Borges’ taxonomies are “investigations of how we know what we know and even of what we think we know” (Carter 1989, 47). We shall see, in the course of our own investigations, how fragile and fractured Wolf-Alice’s knowledge of “how to wear clothes” is, for, if her clothes are a sign of her membership in human society (*homo ferus* being, in the Linnaean taxonomy, a subset of *homo sapiens* [Linneaus 1758, 20]), they are a sign of her difference from it, as well. The social structures within which Wolf-Alice comes to consciousness are themselves deviant constructs: the closed world of the convent and the “bereft and unsanctified household of the Duke” (Carter 1979d, 120). It is for this reason that the conventional signifier-signified relation which Barthes so methodically and convincingly analyses in *The Fashion System* is, as we shall see, consistently dislocated in this tale whose primary social structure – the werewolf’s castle – operates by the rules of fantasy and not by those of convention.

Wolf-Alice’s Wardrobe

The Shift

The new code of Canon law instituted in 1979 mandated that nuns wear the habit as “a sign of their consecration and as a testimony of poverty” (Beal 2002, 837, 669 §1). As a sign of poverty, the habit is made of simple fabrics (wool, linen, muslin) and is of

simple construction (tunic, veil, shift, slip); as a sign of consecration, the habit designates the nun as a member of a religious community and a bride of Christ. It is this order into which Wolf-Alice, in her feral nakedness, is taken, and in which she, like the “wolf-girl”, Mirabella, “shucking her plaid jumper in full view of the visiting cardinal” in Karen Russell’s short story, “St. Lucy’s Home for Girls Raised by Wolves” (236), refuses to take on the sign of that consecration. The habit (like the plaid jumper) is clearly not a fashion statement; it is a garment that signifies uniformity and utility, and yet it is used in “Wolf-Alice” in a way that is remarkably similar to that of what Barthes terms an “A ensemble”, i.e. a garment in which functionality, as a signified, is used as a pretext for something else. Roland Barthes, in “Blue is in Fashion this Year” (1960), states that “fashion-magazine rhetoric is actively engaged in hiding the semantic nature of the links that it proposes” (42), and one way it does this, he says, is by “reduc(ing) the signified to a simple utilitarian function” (42), i.e. by suggesting that the arbitrary relationship between a garment and a particular situation or context is, in fact, a necessary one. We see a variation of this rhetoric operating in “Wolf-Alice” when the nuns present the cold as a pretext for making Wolf-Alice put on a shift when, in fact, what they want her to do is put on some clothing: “They found that she could quite easily be taught a few, simple tricks but she did not feel the cold and it took a long time to wheedle a shift over her head to cover up her bold nakedness” (120). What we see here, on the part of the nuns, is a conscious and hidden but clearly-motivated displacement of the signifier, from ‘shift signifies protection from the cold’ to ‘shift signifies modesty.’

“Shift” is, however, a highly ambiguous signifier in Carter’s *The Bloody Chamber* stories. If, in “The Tiger’s Bride” as in “Wolf-Alice,” it signifies modesty: “But, when I got down to my shift, my arms dropped to my sides. I was unaccustomed to nakedness” (1979b, 66), in “The Werewolf,” it signifies not protection, but lack

of protection, from the cold: “they drove the old woman, in her shift as she was, out into the snow” (1979c, 110). Moreover, in the title story of the collection, the shift is associated with a series of signifieds which take us far from the convent and indeed into the world of Fashion itself. In “The Bloody Chamber,” the shift is consistently described not simply as a shift but as a “shift of white muslin” (Carter 1979a, 11). This is interesting in that white muslin is the fabric often used to make nuns’ veils – indeed, at one point, the Marquis calls the child bride his “little nun” (17) – but its uses, like its connotations, are far more complicated here. These complications are created largely by the addition of what Barthes calls “vestemes,” i.e. “vestimentary morphemes” (1960, 56 n 8), units of signification operating within the vestimentary code. With the addition of these vestemes, the simple shift that we see in “Wolf-Alice,” “The Tiger’s Bride” and “The Werewolf” is transformed into a very different garment, one which is identified not only with culture and the great fashion houses of the time (the bride’s trousseau includes a “wardrobe of clothes from Poiret and Worth”; [Carter 1979a. 12]) but, overtly or covertly, with sex: “So, for the opera, I wore a sinuous shift of white muslin tied with a silk string under the breasts” (11); “He had made me change into that chaste little Poiret shift of white muslin;” – a phrase worthy of one of Barthes’ fashion magazines! – “he seemed especially fond of it, my breasts showed through the flimsy stuff, he said” (19). By the end of the story, however, this culture / fashion /sex signified is commuted into one in which culture, fashion, sex, religion, heresy and death are indistinguishable from each other: “Then I went to my dressing room and put on that white muslin shift, costume of a victim of an auto-da-fé, he had bought me to listen to the Liebestod in” (37), at which point the signifier / signified relation is literally rent in half: “The sharp blade ripped my dress in two and it fell from me” (39) .

And back in the world of Wolf-Alice, the fashion-naïve nuns, “without a qualm,” send the feral girl off to meet the werewolf in a dress versatile enough for wherever her new life might present: the runway, the bedchamber, the opera, a wedding or an auto-da-fé.

The Ball Gown

To read the description of the gowns in “Wolf-Alice” (“she dragged out his grandmother’s ball dresses and rolled on suave velvet and abrasive lace because to do so delighted her adolescent skin”; [124]) next to that in *Wise Children* (quoted at the beginning of this essay) is to be shocked by its starkness here, to find the decadence of the detail which so delights Dora and Nora reduced to a bit of velvet and lace. What it might even evoke is Vladimir Nabokov’s description of Lewis Carroll’s “sad scrawny little nymphets, bedraggled and half-undressed, or rather semi-draped, as if participating in some dusty and dreadful charade” (377 n 133 /1). And yet, the specificity of these two details is not insignificant, for Carter’s “Notes for a Theory of Sixties Style,” written, itself, in what we might call “Sixties fashion-magazine style,” begins: “Velvet is back, skin anti-skin, mimic nakedness. Like leather and suede, only more subtly, velvet simulates the flesh it conceals, a profoundly tactile fabric. Last winter’s satin invited the stroke, a slithering touch, this winter’s velvet invites a more sinuous caress” (1997, 105). And lace is, of course, the very stuff of erotic dreams. What is interesting about these details, even more than the sensuality of the fabrics themselves, is the potent eroticism of their juxtaposition, the suave velvet against the abrasive lace. This is, in fact, classic Barthes as well: the very animal and erotic pleasure of “frottement,” of rubbing up against something. For Wolf-Alice, who is without language, the pleasure is purely tactile; for Barthes, “Language is a skin: I rub my language against the other. It is as if I had words instead of fingers, or fingers at the tip of my words. My language trembles with desire” (1990, 73). For mirror-stage Wolf-Alice, the “other” she “rubbed her

head against”, is of course “her intimate in the mirror” (124). In Lacanian terms (see Lacan 1949), Wolf-Alice experiences an identification with her image in the mirror but is not yet able, in her pre-language state, to articulate the subject-object dialectic within which it functions. Her ego, in other words, is not yet socially determined. There is, therefore, no posturing, no fashionista posing here, and yet, ironically, putting on these dresses constitutes for the artless feral child a ritual of social initiation that mimics that of the fashionistas: “The women who buy these little brown velvet dresses,” says Carter, “will probably do so in a state of unknowing, unaware that they’re dressing up for parts in our daily theatre of fact; unaware, too, how mysterious that theatre is” (1997, 105). And although the only spectator to Wolf-Alice’s part in that theatre is her reflection in the mirror, the mirror itself reflects a second, identical theatre to which she herself is the only spectator, and it is when she watches the role being played out on this second stage – which as we suggested, recalls the famous Lacanian mirror stage – that she is able to pass from “a state of unknowing” to the awareness that, as Carter puts it, “[c]lothes are our weapons, our challenges, our visible insults” (1997, 105). Yet, there are ways of knowing how to wear clothes that separate Wolf-Alice from the “women who buy these little brown velvet dresses” as surely as they separate her from the wolves.

Before we examine these ways, however, let us go back for a moment to this question of suavity and abrasiveness, because if clothing is a visible sign of difference, it is also a tactile one. That is to say that insofar as clothing constitutes a perceptible border between the natural and the social self – the hyphen, as it were, between “Wolf” and “Alice” – it brings up the question of contiguity. Wolf-Alice, who could once only imagine the sleek warmth of a fur wrap, now rolls around on velvet and lace, and wraps herself in it, feeling it on her skin, for the pure sensual pleasure of it. Carter states that Wolf-Alice lives only in the present, in a “fugue of the

continuous, a world of sensual immediacy” (119), and this perhaps is in part because the synapses of her body memory have not been severed but simply (if savagely) diverted; she washes off the “coat of ashes” (125) imprinted on her like the pelt of her dead wolf mother in order to put on the silky and jagged contours that are all that remains of the Duke’s dead grandmother. In this she is an innocent analogon of Miss Havisham’s Estella, awakening into a meld of sinuosity and disintegration, sensuality and putrefaction, body and dress.

The Fashion Pelt

Let us first consider fur as what Barthes terms an “A ensemble,” a garment whose function is primarily denotative; i.e. it refers to a relationship between the garment and the world as opposed to a “B ensemble,” which is connotative and whose signified is Fashion itself (1983, 217-221) (Barthes uses the example of skirts, which are not intrinsically fashionable; however, he says, “to note that (this year) skirts are worn short is to say that short skirts signify Fashion this year” [268-9]). Barthes discusses fur (as a fashion item) in terms of the second of three modes of signification, in which the relationship between the signifier and the signified is relatively unmotivated in that it is sufficient but not decisive or determinant. To use Barthes’s example, the logic behind the caption, “this fur coat works for you on the station platform, waiting for a train” (218), seems transparent: station platforms can be cold and windy, waiting for a train can take a long time, therefore you need to wear something warm to protect you from a long wait in the cold and wind, and fur is that ideal something. The problem, however, is in the details. As Barthes puts it, “a cold place calls for a warm garment; beyond this level there is no further motivation: nothing about the railway station requires fur (rather than tweed) and nothing about fur requires the station (rather than the street)” (1983, 218). It is language that creates that requirement.

The “Fictive Pelt”

The bullet holes which riddle the pelt of Wolf-Alice’s dead mother act as wormholes, allowing Wolf-Alice to move between the human world from which she was snatched and to which she now returns, and allowing us to glimpse the pre-lapsarian world from which she fell, “the Eden of our first beginnings where Eve and grunting Adam squat on a daisy bank, picking the lice from each other’s pelts” (121).

This pelt is a garment – and this Eden an ideal – that Carter tears to shreds as the story unfolds. We see the Duke’s “thin legs scabbed with old scars where thorns scored his pelt” (120); we see a silver bullet hit him and drag off “half his fictive pelt” (125), and, finally, we see Carter, in an act of bravado metonymic reinscription, fuse fur and skin and then pull the rug out from under our feet. The fusion is incendiary but illusory, hypothetical; as with the Duke’s “fictive pelt,” “it is as if the fur she thought she wore had melted into her skin and become part of it, although it does not exist” (119). It does not exist.

This is not, however, a party trick, not *The Emperor’s New Clothes*. It is a game played out in furtive isolation in dark graveyards and gloomy castle bedrooms, a trick of the light and language and “absolute and verminous innocence” (123).

The Wedding Gown

Let us return here to another trick of language – the hidden break in the signifier/signified relation – in the caption that describes Barthes’s fashion fur: “this fur coat works for you on the station platform, waiting for a train” (1983, 218), for, just as the station platform forms a backdrop against which the fur takes on (a deceptive) significance, the landscape through which Wolf-Alice trots in her tattered wedding gown takes on (its true) meaning

through her: “it assembles itself around her, she informs it with her presence. She is its significance” (125).

What, however, is the nature of that significance? We know that Wolf-Alice had earlier “perceived an essential difference between herself and her surroundings that you might say she could not put her *finger* on – only, the trees and grass of the meadows [were...] a kind of backdrop for her, that waited for her arrivals to give it meaning” (124). But, again, what was that meaning?

If, for example, we were to write a caption under the image of Wolf-Alice that is presented to us here, could we say that “this wedding dress ‘works for her’ in the scented hedgerows, heading for the churchyard”? It seems somewhat unlikely. Why? Because, as one current cultural catchphrase puts it, “What’s wrong with this picture”? In other words, there is a pervasive disconnect between the signifier (the wedding dress) and its conventional signified: 1) this is October and the culturally sanctioned month for weddings is June; 2) the dress itself, which, although white and sinuous, is also ragged and wrinkled; 3) the “bride” is barefoot, and not in a hippie-fashion-statement sort of way; Carter tells us that Wolf-Alice’s footprints are “beautiful and menacing as those Man Friday left” (125); 4) the churchyard these footprints are heading for is a graveyard, and the church is filled not with the customary flowers but with “an arsenal of bells, books, and candles; a battery of silver bullets” (125); and, finally, the congregation is gathered there not for a celebration of life but for mourning, revenge and murder.

The scene in which we see “the white bride leap out of the tombstones and scamper off towards the castle with the werewolf stumbling after....” (125) is, however, for all its pathos, pure camp, having what American essayist and political activist, Susan Sontag, in her 1964 *Partisan Review* article, “Notes on ‘Camp’,” terms “the proper mixture of the exaggerated, the fantastic, the passionate and

the naïve” (1966, 283). In fact, seeing these two social misfits stumbling towards “cobweb castle” (Carter 1979d, 125), it is easy to imagine that they are on their eccentric, anachronistic way to “the soft-focus, anarchic, eclectic fancy dress ball of the late sixties” (Carter 1977b, 117).

Indeed, in Angela Carter’s “Notes for a Theory of Sixties Style,” we see the girl that Wolf-Alice might have been had she lived in the England of the 1960s:

A young girl, invited to a party, left to herself (no mother to guide her), might well select the following ensemble: a Mexican cotton wedding dress (though she’s not a bride, probably no virgin, either – thus at one swoop turning a garment which in its original environment is an infinitely potent symbol into a piece of decoration)... (1976, 106-107).

This wedding dress and the various other “role-definition garment(s)” (107) that the girl puts on, these “eclectic fragments, robbed of their symbolic content,” Carter says, “fall together to form a new whole” (107).

Roland Barthes has noted that “the object is always a sign, defined by two coordinates, a deep symbolic coordinate and an extended coordinate of classification” (1985, 184). The wedding dress is perhaps the most semiotically-charged of all the elements of the vestimentary code operating in “Wolf-Alice.” It is deeply symbolic and it has a wide taxonomic extension. Even more than skin itself, it comes pre-loaded with use-value, saturated with social significance. It is the (literal and figurative) stripping of this significance and its subsequent re-assignment that constitutes the semiotic project of this story.

The Bridal Veil

One final note: Had *Modern Bride* been one of the magazines analysed in *The Fashion System*, the bridal veil would undoubtedly have been classified under “Genus 25. Hat veil”. “Gauze, organza, voile and cotton muslin, summer is here,” quotes Carter in her review (1997, 142). And it may have been summer when the bride, who now lies rotting and dismembered in the Duke’s kitchen, put on her wedding gown and veil. But it is not summer now; it is autumn; the werewolf Duke in his “fictive pelt” and Wolf-Alice, in his dead grandmother’s wedding gown, are tearing off towards the castle; the dead bride wrapped in her veil is just one more of the “items on the Duke’s menus” (123); and shreds of the veil stuck in the brambles lead like crumbs away from the churchyard towards “cobweb castle” and the “hairs, vertebrae and phalanges” (122) the Duke was gnawing on at his cannibal feasts.

Somewhat, in fact, like Barthes, picking away at his “feast of overripe prose” (Carter 1985, 142), “worr(ying) away at exegesis, like a puppy disembowelling a slipper. There is,” as Carter says, “an air of sublimated camp about much of this” (142).

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SECTION 5: CREATING FICTIONAL REALITIES

LUDIC SIMULATIONS IN THE VIRTUAL REALITY OF COMPUTER GAMES

Péter Kristóf Makai. Adventure Games in the Faerian Machine: Fairy-Tales in Ludic Environments

Once, there was a time when mothers and fathers, when bedtime came, would read a story to their children, picking up a dog-eared book from the shelves, well-worn from frequent reading. Young girls and boys would cosy up and listen to the reassuringly resonating voice in their parents' laps as the tale unfolded, page after page marvellous illustrations and an enchanting prose rocking them gently as they would drift off to sleep. We have that now, too, but since then, there has been a veritable explosion of the fairy-tale genre to all available media. As Jack Zipes notes: "with the increase of literacy throughout the world, the literary fairy tale produced as book, hypertext for the Internet, advertisement for commodities, script for film, radio, and television, comic, cartoon, and cultural artifact has grown in relevance" (2005, 93). But there is one particular absence in Zipes' enumeration of media that fairy tales have branched out towards to form a "transmedia supersystem" (Kinder 38): computer games.

Trudging through the vast collection of computer games in any given games shop, seeing shelves' worth of programs inviting the player to enter virtual realms that could easily cover the surface of the Earth in real life many times over, a nagging question is posed by the ubiquity of fantasy narrative in a surprising array of genres. What is in the genre of fairy-tale fantasy that makes it so alluring to game designers that, today, it has become the *de facto* master narrative of

several computer game genres and maintains popularity among many others?

Whether one is excited by or wary of computer games as a medium of story-telling, they have nonetheless already had a marked effect on us, from helping the rehabilitation of veterans suffering from PTSD to the cognitive exercise of ordinary players who learn to manage and mitigate huge chunks of incoming data at breakneck speed.¹ Seeing its neurological, cognitive power to rewire the brain, one wonders: if ludic simulations in virtual environments shape our world-view to such an extent, how do these simulated cause-and-effect relationships, rudimentary and elaborate narratives make use of the computer's facility to juggle enormous amounts of data when they take on particular generic qualities? Taking fantasies and fairy tales on the computer as an example of adapting cultural forms to new media, I wish to explore the ways in which computer games have made use of and readjusted fairy-tale and fantasy narratives, including the use of transmediable narrative structures, how narrative voices are restructured to accommodate genre-savvy players' thirst for gleeful and joyous critiques of traditional fantasy and how the introduction of contemporary references and anachronistic content reconnect fairy-tale narratives to the late 20th and early 21st century cultural landscape.

Speaking of landscapes: from the very beginning, the video game narrative has been intricately involved with depictions of virtual spaces that engender a feeling of place in the player. Compared to the abstract measure of numerical scoring and the meagre reward of being able to enter a three-lettered version of one's name on the arcade machine upon attaining a high score, spatial progress is the primary means of measuring success and the greatest reward of playing these games. The virtual space is where actual progress is enacted, and the player is rewarded with new levels to

explore, new challenges to overcome, new constraints to escape from, and news objects to manipulate.

A one-time Imagineer at Disney with an interest in computer game design, Dan Carson is a prime example of a man who understands how space is put to the service of fashioning a story out of sheer matter. His enlightening term of “environmental storytelling” gets us closer to conceiving how space is used to create narrative, including narrative *options*, a treasured currency of fun in game-worlds. By environmental story-telling, he means that “the story element is infused into the physical space a guest [or player] walks or rides through. In many respects, it is the physical space that does much of the work of conveying the story the designers are trying to tell” (Carson 2000a, 7). While, in written narrative, words take on the role of architecture, conveying a sense of presence in the world of the book through elaborate descriptions, in computer games and theme parks, there is no room for a lot of words – rather, the environment itself, the themed space the player-guest moves through is the one that has to ‘read.’ This is often done by what Carson calls “cause-and-effect vignettes.” These elements are pieces of architecture or propwork that indicate previous interaction with the environment, creating an effect of ‘lived-in-ness,’ and if they are skillfully arranged, they can also serve to depict the passage of time, showing the coming and going of the seasons, years and ages. Displaying subtle marks of erosion or the signs of cataclysmic occurrences wreaking havoc upon the virtual landscape makes areas more distinguishable, more dramatic, ultimately contributing to the evolution and history of the story-world. (see Carson, 2000a)

The skill of the workmanship that goes into creating history out of thin air and the affective materiality of the end product is conducive to evoking a feeling of nostalgia for a world that never existed. Paradoxically, these nostalgic pangs for a history that never was are originally rooted in the erasure of the primarily rural,

agricultural and feudal world around the time of the Industrial Revolution and has since become a constant aesthetic sensibility for designers all across the globe, creating a permanent retro-revolution, even producing such seemingly oxymoronic aesthetics as retro-futurism (Guffey 152-159). Small wonder that nostalgia, a sentiment that lies at the heart of fantasy, is the prime building block of virtual worlds today. A virtual past is what makes synthetic worlds come alive – in a sense, the narratives implied in the environmental decay of most realistic computer games gives them a veneer of authenticity. In fact, this manufactured authenticity works on two, sometimes conflicting levels: on the one hand, seeing what, supposedly, were once squeaky-clean, pristine landscapes weathered down by erosion of the wind and rain or objects once intact now found weather-beaten, rusty or worn is an embedded history, a visual reinforcing of elapsed time that produces a Barthesian *effet de réel*; on the other, the graphical implementation and animation of such effects stand as a testament to the power of the artistic department (and their future-world technology) to artificially reproduce what nature would do all by itself. The virtual cycle of (digital) technology recreating what (material) technology took away or was unable to withstand (the corrosion of metal, the rotting of beams) gives fantasy-inspired games a strange dynamic of oscillation between the neomediaevalism of Umberto Eco (1975) and the techno-utopianism of the early '90s Virtual Reality hype. This is most apprehensible in massively multiplayer worlds (or, as they are also known, Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games, henceforth: MMORPGs), where players switch back and forth between the linguistic registers of thee-thouing “Ye Aulde Englishe” and abbreviation-heavy gamer lingo in rapid succession, depending on whether a fast transmission of information or sophisticated cybersocial interaction is required by the spatio-social context of the game² (Stern 270-272). Although one is tempted to call players out on the more blatantly escapist trends of

involvement with ludic narratives – Kryzywinska (2006) does so in interrogating the neo-pagan sentiments encoded in Tolkienesque Elven lore in MMORPGS – Stern and Kryzywinska's invocation of the technomediaeval creole and the neo-pagan rhetorics of MMORPGs is illustrative of how older cultural discourses (such as that of chivalric romance or mythology) merge with contemporary religiosity and configurations of information-processing to form powerful expressions of nostalgic sentiment which also reinforce in-game social bonds. The socially most rewarding part of the game experience is precisely in cooperating within the framework of this rapid-fire alternation between enchanted discourse and world-weary observations – a combination one is hard-pressed to find in any other environment in the real world.

The shallow joys of escapism is also an accusation directed towards the postmodern world's seductive relationship with technologically mediated experiences by cultural critics and academic pundits alike. Whenever literary scholars think of simulation, they cannot escape the concepts of simulacra and virtuality as made famous by the postmodern theorists Jean Baudrillard and Gilles Deleuze, respectively. But there is a peculiar way in which these concepts have been misconstrued by postmodernists. Both Baudrillard and Deleuze seem to conceive of reality and simulation or the actual and the virtual as slowly merging into one another; for Deleuze, "the actual and the virtual coexist, and enter into a tight circuit which we are continually retracing from one to the other. [...] Pure virtuality no longer has to actualize itself [...], the two are indistinguishable" (150-151) while, notoriously, Baudrillard goes even further, to argue that the thoroughly mediated world we live in has produced, through "generation by models [...] a real without origin or reality: hyperreality" (166), which helps such grand undertakings as science and religion to "attain [their] pure form" (170) through "substituting signs of the real for the real itself" (167),

by which he visualises a tidied-up world where we can not only ‘assume no friction,’ we can effectively see and manipulate objects as if there were no friction, or a virtual reality that is, in effect, a simulated heaven – where nothing is corrupted, nothing decays unless it is purposefully built into the system, but then, even decay is perfect, controlled, pure.

Their rhetoric of fetishising Platonic purity and the loss of reality (along with that of imperfection) can be put in their place by reminding ourselves that representational media and the human capacity for processing mediated information coevolve. What might have once been a dizzying, hyperreal view of a train running towards us, or the breathtaking, pre-rendered vista of a desert island (the likes of which we have never seen before), today both *L’arrivée d’un train en gare de La Ciotat* (1895) and the computer game *Myst* (1993) leave us nonplussed, while we still marvel at a three-dimensional showing of *Avatar* (2009) or the running of *Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* (2009) under the Infinity Ward 4.0 engine, which incorporates ragdoll physics, HDR lightning effects and texture streaming, just to mention a few of the ‘reality effects.’ But, increasingly more often, the reality-threatening virtuality of today becomes an all-too-imperfect representation of yore overnight, passé and disappointing well before a theoretical text can be written about it.

Fortunately other theoreticians of art and the mind have come to much soberer conclusions about how we construct and construe virtual places and actions, and how we bring the inanimate alive with the power of our imagination. Susanne K. Langer’s “virtual” is not an all-enveloping, totalitarian representation subsuming reality, but a much tamer creation of effective, affective semblances, “conform[ing] with biological feeling and its emotional efflorescence, ‘life’ on the human level” (62). Rather than being a slavish and anxiously faithful copy of the representable, Langer’s

virtual space “is a creation, not a re-creation” (77). In fact, extreme postmodernist anxieties concerning an immutable, unhackable hyperreality cannot reign over us, since everything naturally tends towards greater disorder and, in both worlds, “permanence is a pattern of changes” (66). Langer’s organic, imperfect method of artistic creation in the virtual realm is tamer and much more fallible, breathed to life by the aesthetic imagination of the spectator, and vulnerable to its vagaries.³ Understanding the reception of cultural products through the intuitive workings of that emotional knowledge might be something some postmodernists hand-wave away in order to make media appear more fatally seductive and demonisable, rather than a possibly ameliorating, but definitely ambivalent force.⁴ Yet it is vital to our theorising of how aesthetic experience can be rescued from insignificance once we reconceptualise it through the use of a bit of cognitive psychology and neuroscience.

Alvin Goldman’s contribution to theorising aesthetic imagination is the concept of enactment imagination, a form of emotional knowledge that is constitutive of empathy. “When I imagine feeling elated,” he asserts, with the help of neuroscientific evidence, “I do not merely suppose that I am elated; rather, I enact, or try to enact, elation itself” (47). Instead of being a simulation as understood in the technologically mediated sense, in which the simulation can work in ways different from the simulated, the E-imaginative response to human intent, feelings and emotions is an actual replication, in which the simulating system of the empathiser tries to bodily and mentally re-create the cognitive content in a similar way to how it was felt by the other person (36).⁵

Thus we can see how the two halves of the cybernetic loop, humans and computers share the work between them in computer games. The machines simulate space, actors and the result of interactions by operating models and managing input, responding with the appropriate simulated output without trying to mentalise,

while human beings try to navigate the simulated environment. They also put themselves in the shoes of the designer or the ideal player of the simulation in order to play the game.⁶ They often attribute internal states to the machine and the game's characters, especially when a mishap occurs (see Brenda Laurel's analysis of implied agency in the human-computer interface environment [1993, 60-62, 79-80]). The work the player does to enact the story of the game (directed not just at the imagination, but at the eyes, ears and muscles, too), has earned the computer game the name of "ergodic literature" (Aarseth 1), putting the emphasis on the hardships of the player, who re-enacts "the full, basic story that the [textual narrative] has to omit, including its perceptual and muscular realizations" (Grodal 147). In turn, players have to let themselves be configured by the rules of the simulations, bending themselves to the logic of the simulated system, which manifests itself primarily in the narrative design of the game by gaps of action that have to be filled in by the player (Eskelinen and Tronstad 2003, 195-220). The resulting dialectic of playing and being played enables players to experience a complex and challenging environment, where human agency has to respond to the demands of the system, and the unfolding of the narrative arouses deeply felt emotions in the player, sometimes of frustration over retardation, sometimes of elation over progress – what Espen Aarseth calls the narrative-generating oscillation between aporia and epiphany (91-94).

The player's continuously exercised agency, of course, is the *sine qua non* of the game-play experience. In fact, the obvious tension in game design is between giving players enough freedom to have fun while still giving them the opportunity to enact meaningful narratives. Once we take into account how the filling of these above-mentioned structural gaps contribute to the emotional engagement with the ludic narrative and the enactment of the lived story, one can see that certain cognitive patterns and schemata will prove

themselves to be particularly enrichable in the spatial narrative of constraints and freedoms in video games. As Janet Murray observes, a primordial spatial narrative is the journey story, “offer[ing] additional opportunities for exercising agency [compared to mazelike structures]. On the computer the journey story emphasizes navigation [...] and the how-to’s of the hero’s repeated escapes from danger” (137-8). True to the Houdiniesque expectations of the genre, this gives old narrative patterns of mediaeval romance, fantasy and fairy tale (like rescuing damsels in distress or escaping from prisons and dungeons) a sense of immediacy and continued relevance in video gaming.

The classic platformers *Super Mario Bros.* (Nintendo 1985), *The Prince of Persia* (Broderbund 1989) and the action-adventure game *The Legend of Zelda* (Nintendo 1986) are early examples of the damsel-in-distress rescue romance played straight. However, due to the otherwise high replay value and popularity of these games, as well as the many official sequels and even more numerous cheap commercial knock-offs (called ‘clones’ in the industry), the rudimentary narrative has exhausted itself over years of replay. The paradigm has been subverted in later eras with games such as *Rent-a-Hero* (neo Software 1999), which replays the narrative vestige of princess rescue in the intro, but this time hero-for-hire protagonist Rodrigo rescues a prince instead, and his future adventures have little to do with rescuing anyone; instead of being a chivalric hero and feared dragonslayer, Rodrigo has more in common with the private eyes of hard-boiled detective fiction. The narrative contingencies of the medium make the hero-for-hire an enduring one in computer games, as the mercenary hero’s resigned attitude towards his or her fate is resonant with the element of simulated chance and death lurking around every corner of the game-world, whereas the incentive of cash is readily translatable to the old convention of earning points for performing well in video games.

Several more complex subversions of the fairy-tale tradition occur in *The Bard's Tale* (InXile Entertainment 2004), an edgy, *Tough Guide to Fantasyland*-style parody of computer role-playing game conventions set on the Orkney Islands, where the snarky anti-hero is the materialistic womaniser Bard. Technically, he does have a princess to rescue in the figure of Caleigh, but he is less than intent on saving the world and much more wont to embark on a quest for "coin and cleavage," as the box art says. As with the moral ambiguity of the mercenary hero discussed above, the player in *The Bard's Tale* is left with the option to react to characters in nice and snarky tones, which alter the NPCs' (Non-Playing Characters') attitude towards the Bard and can potentially earn him different rewards and sub-quest endings. Similarly, the main quest of game can end in different ways, which find three different ways to undermine the standard story: if the player chooses to rescue the princess Caleigh, he fights her gaoler, the menacing wizard Fionnach, and upon besting the wizard, she transforms into the Queen of Darkness, whom the Bard merrily sides with, leaving the rest of the mediaeval townsfolk to an eternity of suffering under Caleigh. If the Bard chooses to side with Fionnach, the world returns to normal, the undead perish and the Bard essentially continues to lead the life he lead before trying to rescue Caleigh. There is a third option, too: unlike most Manichean game-stories, the Bard can choose to side with neither and, in an anticlimactic ending that foregoes fighting a final 'boss battle,' he can return home to his favourite tavern to revel with the breakdancing undead he has been fighting before.

Much of the additional humour of the games derives from the game pretending to be a proper story-book quest of a hero, with a proper narrator, whose solemn tone and irreverent comments on the egocentric bard and the rest of the characters deconstruct most of the fantasy CRPG clichés. An illustrative instance is when the Bard meets the NPC boss Herne in front of his keep: after some hearty

trash-talk, the Bard prepares to fight, but Herne teleports to the top of his tower, and the Bard's exasperated cry "Why do I have to go all the way to the top? He was just here, he certainly knew I was coming!" is met by the narrator's wry remark: "Evil, it seems, has a flair for the dramatic."

Along with the verbal banter between the Bard and the narrator, the gameplay elements often reference and play around with the conventions of the game genre, too. One memorable example is the slaying of in-game wolves, who sometimes drop tell-tale items, such as a picnic basket or a red cap. Another is a diegetic subversion of the usually fourth-wall breaking practice whereby at the initiatory, tutorial segment of the game in-game NPCs would talk to the player's avatar during the expository dialogues, but then they would address the player directly in order to explain which buttons and gestures of the mouse would make the main character move. In *The Bard's Tale*, when the Bard descends into the starting inn's ominous cellar, a Mysterious Old Man greets him and tries to teach him (or rather, the player) how to swordfight and cast magic. But when he starts to explain the interface in hotkey terms, the Bard vehemently objects to the lunacy of invisible 'Defend' and 'Summon Menu' keys, magical, otherworldly objects that obviously do not exist on the Orkney Islands.⁷

The 2004 *Bard's Tale* stands as a testament to the writers' and game designers' awareness of and willingness to play around with the generic conventions of heroic fantasy, creating anti-heroes, wild goose chases, villains worth siding with and less-than-anticlimactic endings in an effort to revitalise the genre. Another strategy is to recast literary fairy tales and mythic cycles in serialised epic narratives forming a thematically coherent saga. In these vast narrative worlds, the basic pattern of capture and escape fades into the background, as space is in abundance. Instead of breaking free from spatial constraints, the primary narrative strategy is the virtual

implementation of “epic wandering,” that is, inviting the player to explore large tracts of distinctly themed lands, either in immense sandbox-style story-worlds⁸ to be traversed during questing, or offering these spaces as one or more hubs from which episodic adventures can begin, taking the player(s) and (t)he(i)r party into several spatially discrete sub-areas, such as dungeons or instances (Ryan 256-257).

The design and architecture of these lands, once again, hearkens back to the structuration of themed spaces in amusement parks. Just as in the sprawling lands of Walt Disney World, the players’ interaction with the expanses of the virtual environment has to be infused with meaning through spatial narration. As Don Carson formulates the dilemma, “[o]ne of the problems facing most game and theme park designers is how to coax your audience through your story and still give them the feeling they are on a unique journey. A quest that is theirs alone, and one worth retelling once the adventure is over” (see Carson 2000b). Carson’s solution to the problem is the tactical manipulation of the *mise-en-scène*, effectively giving it an “illusion of complexity” (Carson 2000b, 2). This is achieved by the graphlike arrangement of multiple paths and walkways; this way, the authoritarian linearity of ‘being railed through the story’ is broken up by the more-or-less random access of the wanderers to the themed space. Though individual games might feel like self-contained ‘rides,’ microcosmic entities of their own, these labyrinthine paths are also the ones that lace together the otherwise loosely connected episodes of adventure.

The *Quest for Glory* series, spanning over five games and set in the world of Gloriana, is an action-adventure game with role-playing character development and an option to ‘export’ the player character, allowing the player to lead the first game’s hero through the five-story arch without ‘re-rolling’ him. Epic in scope, the five games structurally represent five different story-realms: *QFGI: So You Want*

to Be a Hero? is set in Grimm Brothers-inspired Spielberg; *QFGII: Trial By Fire* sees the hero travelling to Arabian Nights-ish Shapeir; *QFGIII: Wages of War* takes place in the city of Tarna in Fricana; *QFG IV: Shadows of Darkness*' Mordavia is an homage to the Hammer Horror version of Transylvania as well as to Slavic folklore; and finally, *QFGV: Dragon Fire* is set in Silmaria, an archipelago steeped in Greco-Roman mythology.

The game-cycle's thematic and spatial narrative is designed with a formal structuration in mind, in that they are made to correspond with the four seasons, the four elements and the four directions of the compass (with Fricana being a transitional origo of the savannah). But, for our purpose, the most curious narrative strategy remains the interspersation of the mythic story-line with scenes, characters and side-quests that are transplanted from 20th century Euro-American culture. Rather than denying or subverting the epic narrative, references to films, TV shows and other anachronistic paraphernalia actually work in tandem with conventional fairy-tale plots and foster a ludic engagement with its tropes.

The most fleshed-out, overarching case is the story of the Blackbird. Modelled after the original statue as featured in the movie *Casablanca*, a replica of the Blackbird is located in the brigands' hideout in QFGI, which the player visits close to the end of that game. Upon the player's examination of the statue, the VGA remake of the game says: "That black bird looks strangely familiar. You sense that its destiny is inextricably entwined with yours, in a strange foreshadowing of the rest of the 'Quest for Glory' series."⁹ Once in Raseir (a city in Shapeir), the Hero seeks out the local crime boss in the Blue Parrot Inn, named Signor Ferrari, who sends the Hero on a mission to steal the Blackbird, which turns out to be fake. From then on, fake and real Falcons become a staple of the series, carrying through to QFGV.¹⁰ There, they operate the local Thieves' Guild, and

open up a tavern named the Dead Parrot Inn in honour of the former Raseirian establishment as well as the famous Monty Python sketch.

More noteworthy is Signor Ferrari's corpulent figure and his general demeanour, which is highly reminiscent of Sydney Greenstreet's iconic film noir performances of Signor Ferrari and Kasper Gutman in *Casablanca* and *The Maltese Falcon*, respectively. His trusted right-hand man is named, predictably enough, Ugarte. They operate the Blue Parrot Inn together, and it should not come as a surprise that the doorman/bouncer is called Abdul. In terms of carrying on the fictional mash-up, an important casting choice is the character's voice actor, Michael Sorich, who closely follows the tone and delivery of Sydney Greenstreet.

The intertwining narratives of the Quest for Glory games' fairytale fantasy and the *film noir* classics *The Maltese Falcon* and *Casablanca* inspire a view of these fantastic realms in which masterplots from any canonised genre and well-known cultural product can work together to form a new braid of immersive story-line.

However, the single most revealing thing about our post-postmodern cultural landscape, as apparent in games like the QFG series, is that the juxtaposition of relatively contemporary cultural hallmarks and centuries-old myths work together so well that we can see the myth-making process in action. The recurring appearance of the Marx Brothers, knowing for a fact that the password is always swordfish, or that the hero's favourite colour is bl... NO! yellaaurgh and that the Answer to the Ultimate Question of Life, the Universe, and Everything is 42 (all are questions the Hero must answer to gain entrance to the wizard Erasmus) do not upset the fabric of the story or poke fun at conventions – in fact, they are an integral part of them. The exuberance of Hollywood cameos and the playfulness of the British sketch-show are reappropriated in a way that goes beyond reverent pastiche or genre-savvy formal parody: they become fair

game, they become mythic material enabling the designer to enrich the exhausted narratives of the fairy-tale and fantasy tradition with myths emerging from the cultural scene of the 20th century.

Notes

1. These are just two striking examples of research conducted into the psychological effects of computer and video games, which have ranged from studies on aggression (Glock and Kneer 2009), their pedagogical and education applications (Chuang and Chen 2009), through the exploration of their cross-cultural impact on cognitive socialisation (Greenfield et al. 1996), their cognitive loads on players (Ang et al 2007), to their effect on problem-solving skills in complex, chaotic worlds (Boskic 2009) and their use in rehabilitating soldiers experiencing PTSD (Holmes et al 2009). As this short, and by no means exhaustive, list suggests, engaging ourselves with digital media has profound implications for our cognitive workings and the psychological configuration of the human mind.

2. Stern 2002 demonstrates the technostalgic creole with an analysis of the meshing of thee-thouing “Ye Aulde Englishe” and the harsh realities of server overload in the world of EverQuest. Sample archetypal narrative and actual sample of conversation from Stern 2002: “A long long time ago in the ancient land of Genereth, the evil warlord Zanereth ruled with an Iron fist...After a deadly feud with his brother Fondoor, Zanereth banished all the elves and dwarves from his kingdom... You are Bondor, heir to Fondor and you find yourself the new young ruler of Genereth’s neighboring Kingdom of Mondor... You must avenge the death of your father and bring the evil Zanereth to Justice...” Blindrunner says: “Hail Sir Delasa, how may I behold the path that leadeth to High hold Pass?” Delasa responds: “Follow the canyon north and then turn right at LOC - 3456.34, -110.05 keep running east and you will come upon a Clocktower, HHP is right past that tower. By the way I wouldn’t recommend going there now its 11am on Sunday morning in the East Coast and the lag is intense. If you’re running anything slower than a Pentium 400 forget about it, in any case if you going up there I would pick up at least another Tank and probably a Nuker, EK is mighty

dangerous in the dark try to get through it before nightfall. Safe journey and Godspeed, Blindrunner.”

3. That aesthetic imagination is something that she fails to adequately define, summoning the Indian concept of *rasa*, an aesthetic of the theatre, which she describes as “the feeling that shines through the play itself – the vital feeling of the piece [...]; a state of emotional knowledge” (323) which is attained only by the more contemplative playgoers. A touch too elitist, a tad too vague, it signals the limits of Langer’s aesthetics.

4. In Baudrillard’s work, this work of condemnation is done by his active use of the concept of “implosion” and his continuous misuse of the term “entropy” (see especially Ch. VIII “The Implosion of Meaning in the Media” in Baudrillard 1994, 79-86), which belies his mistaken understanding of any operating material entity that engages in signification as a closed system. Yet it is vital to our theorising of the aesthetic experience to see that it is incomplete but adequately faithful copying, differentiation in meaning (which can also be conceptualised as utility) and a competition between rival signification systems are essential features in the cultural production of meaning, especially in its spatiotemporalised form of the event. While Baudrillard maintains that “events no longer have meaning: it is not that they are insignificant in themselves, it is that they were preceded by the model, with which their processes only coincided” (56). What Baudrillard insists on is that the precession of the model or the mental or material simulation removes events from the realm of meaningfulness, in reality, any agentive action taken requires some level of metarepresentation or simulation.

5. Another reason why postmodern critiques of late capitalist cultural production misrepresent the power of media lies exactly in the mechanism of this sort of imagination. Imaginative resistance is the name given to the cognitive psychological mechanism which filters counterfactual arguments and hypothetical scenarios (including those occurring in fictional realms) on the basis of their moral and epistemic acceptability. Cognitive approaches to literature have been preeminent in pointing out the fact that even though we can imagine N number of ontologically alternative worlds, our enactive imagination forces us to refuse and resist narrative worlds which have moral laws (and other empathy-based epistemic features) inconsistent

with those of evolving humankind (for three hallmark approaches to imaginative resistance, see Currie 2002, Gendler 2000 and Weatherson 2003). An exciting way to rethink the overhyping of hyperreality through a revealing lens would be to interface the cognitivist concept with Judith Fetterley's strategy of the resisting reader (Fetterley 1978).

6. As Clara Fernández-Vara points out in her excellent discussion of the performance aspect of computer game-playing, the ideal player is far from the ideal reader of fiction. Instead of actualising as many readings as possible, in an adventure game, the ideal player is the one who can actualise the encoded events in the narrative by solving in-game puzzles, thereby restoring the behaviour which is designed by the game designer to tell a convincing story. In effect, an ideal player re-enacts the story already programmed into the game. Being able to think as an ideal player means being able to put oneself into the shoes of the game/puzzle designer and solve the puzzles as intended (Fernández-Vara 14-16, 25-26, 84-85). Such being the case, the politics of adventure game design is much more conservative than a literary critic's notion of what constitutes an ideal reader.

7. This practice is reminiscent of Stern's account of the technomediaeval creole strategy of communication employed by PCs in MMORPGs.

8. Sandbox: vast virtual realms where the player character can explore the world more freely than in other games. A sandbox-style game presents a large playable area, with one or two hubs, a wealth of nodes and requires the player to travel a lot, enhancing a sense of vastness. They also often feature skills and professions of gathering (such as fishing, collecting, bug-, relic- or treasure-hunting) and trading, which also force the player to explore the vast world, spending hours outside the 'civilised' or 'domesticated' realms of the game world.

9. Granted, that piece of text was put there in hindsight, as the Coles have already published QFGII and QFGIII by then. Still, the quest for the Blackbird is the strongest recurring motif of the series, appearing in all the games. It should also be noted that this story-line is only accessible to Thief class characters in the game. Fighters, Magic Users and Paladins are nobler than to submerge into the criminal underworld of Gloriana.

10. Another fake Falcon turns up at the junk shop of Tarna and in Mordavia, one rests atop a dark monastery. Finally, in QFGV, the Hero has to find and steal the real Falcon in order to make a fake out of it, and trade around the different versions to secure the title of Chief Thief.

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VIRTUAL FAIRYLANDS IN TRANS/POST-HUMANIST SCIENCE FICTION

Sarah Herbe “...where we can dream ourselves into being:” Science-fictional Fairylands as Transitional Sites to Post- or Transhumanity

Posthumanism, referring to the idea that “humans might [modify] themselves so extensively by cyborganisation and genetic engineering as to liberate themselves from the traditionally recognized ‘human condition’” (Stableford 2005, 401), is often discussed in the context of science fiction, with science fiction serving as a testing ground for ideas of posthumanism and being drawn upon as illustration, such as in *Posthuman Bodies* (1995) edited by Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston, N. Katherine Hayles’ *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (1999), Eugene Thacker’s “Data Made Flesh: Biotechnology and the Discourse of the Posthuman” (2003), or Thomas Foster’s *The Souls of Cyberfolks: Posthumanism as Vernacular Theory* (2005). Some of these works also discuss the idea of *transhumanism*. Susan Schneider, the editor of *Science Fiction and Philosophy: From Time Travel to Superintelligence* (2009), discusses transhumanism as a “philosophical, cultural, and political movement that holds that the human species is now in a comparatively early phase and that its evolution will be altered by developing technologies,” and points out that according to transhumanists, “[f]uture humans will be very unlike their present-day incarnation in both physical and mental respects, and will in fact resemble certain persons depicted in science fiction stories” (242). While Brian Stableford in *Science Fact and Science Fiction: An Encyclopedia* presents transhumanism as an alternative term for “the assertive variety of posthumanism” (2005, 401), Thomas Foster defines cyberpunk against transhumanism, pointing out that

[e]xtropian posthumanism involves an odd mutation of [the model of possessive individualism], in which we can afford to change because we possess ourselves or, more accurately, the capacity to choose self-transformation is the ultimate index to confident self-ownership (18).

Eugene Thacker distinguishes more elaborately between transhumanism (or extropianism, as this movement is also called) on the one hand, and what he refers to as a “critical posthumanism” (73) on the other. What Thacker sees as one central feature of transhumanism is “that it consciously models itself as a type of humanism” (74), which means that

the humanism of extropianism places at its center certain unique qualities of the human – self-awareness, consciousness and reflection, self-direction and development, the capacity for scientific and technological progress, and the valuation of rational thought (75),

thus, has at its centre the idea of essential features of personhood, while, on the other hand, the *posthuman*, according to Halberstam and Livingston, “participates in re-distributions of difference and identity” (10). Another key element of transhumanism is the striving towards immortality, often envisaged with the help of uploading one’s mind into a machine of some sort, while N. Katherine Hayles, who does not explicitly refer to transhumanism, embraces a posthumanism “that recognizes and celebrates finitude as a condition of human being, and that understands human life is embedded in a material world of great complexity, one on which we depend for our continued survival” (5).

In “Posthumanism and Cyborg Theory” (2009), Veronica Hollinger asserts that “[m]ost post-Singularity fiction [...] shares [an]

interest in imagining what human beings might become in a future of unimaginable difference” (271) – singularity here referring to a point “beyond which the future becomes unanticipatable,” assuming that “the evolution of information technology, self-transforming nanotechnologies and various biotechnologies will accelerate, to a point at which they bring about an abrupt and dramatic breakthrough to posthuman nature,” as Stableford suggests (483). Science fiction writers have been struggling to imagine and convey the unimaginable long before the idea of the technological singularity became popular in the 1990s and have been accused of failing to do so, especially in the presentation of fundamentally changed characters. Gregory Benford, an American scientist, science-fiction writer and critic, has pointed out that the question of presenting characters is especially hard in science fiction as it cannot be assumed that people of the future or in different surroundings will forever resemble today’s readership (which is of course as such already a heterogeneous group) or fulfil their expectations of possible persons (95). He points to the fact that drawing characters according to the writer’s own, maybe unconsciously inherent ideas, about what a (human) character is supposed to be and act like runs the risk of being uncritically universal, which could also be viewed as an expression of the extropian idea of essential human qualities that will not change over time. David Samuelson, too, points to the historical determinedness of what is considered plausible in character presentation (230). The dilemma of not being able to express something new with the help of old moulds is made explicit in the following passage from *Natural History* (2003), a science fiction novel by Justina Robson, in which two characters ponder what to do with the alien “stuff” they have encountered and that can take on any possible form and fulfil any function:

If we attempt to create anything out of Stuff, we will make only what we ourselves have already imagined. We'll see nothing of what may lie outside our imagination. We wouldn't be witnessing the alien, we'd be determining it. There's the problem. (309)

In this paper, I shall examine two works of science fiction that try to render the unimaginable imaginable by, paradoxically, taking recourse to topoi of fairy tales (topos referring to both spatial setting and topic here). Paul J. McAuley's *Fairyland* (1995) and Brian Stableford's *The Omega Expedition* (2002) were published at a time when, according to Paul Kincaid, "[c]yberpunk was giving way to what might be seen as its natural successor, a fiction of posthumanity in which identity and often environment are uploaded into advanced computer systems" (176). While *Fairyland* is profoundly indebted to cyberpunk and *The Omega Expedition* could be described as a far-future utopia verging on the brink of dystopia, they can both be further classified as 'hard science fiction,' which is especially obvious in the scientific attitude displayed by and through the characters. In both novels, the possibility of uploading one's mind into computer systems is negotiated, and in both, virtual fairylands are employed to function as interfaces between (post)humans and machines. Analysing these virtual fairylands as sites of potential transition, this paper will examine whether the two novels offer a view of critical posthumanism, or whether employing a traditional repertoire of fairy tale imagery not rather perpetuates humanist ideals and thus promotes a transhumanist stance of posthumanism. I shall start with giving a brief summary of both novels, outlining the importance of fairyland and other fairy tale elements for their plots. Based on the criteria gained from Thacker's distinction between extropianism and critical posthumanism I will then discuss whether the texts veer more towards the one or the other.

Fairyland, which was awarded the Arthur C. Clarke Award in 1996 and which Paul Kincaid has described as

McAuley's finest work, [...] a clear-eyed and often disturbing engagement with the prospects and possibilities of genetic engineering which managed to incorporate mythic archetypes and ideas of the posthuman without ever losing its grittily realist tone (178)

is set in a post-climate catastrophe Europe of the twenty-first century, ridden by conflicts and wars. One of the central nova of the story are dolls, small, blue-skinned, infertile genetically engineered primates designed as working machines and for the entertainment of human. Some of these dolls are turned into "fairies" by liberationists, which means that their control chips are hacked so that they acquire self-awareness and intelligence, and their genes are hacked so that they become fertile. The liberationist movement, initiated by a neurologically-enhanced, super-intelligent girl called Milena, however, gets out of hand and the fairies start manipulating and using humans for their own ends. Alex Sharkey, the protagonist of *Fairyland*, who is a gene-hacker producing customised drugs, helps Milena to make over the dolls into fairies in the first part of the novel, and finds himself on a quest for Milena, who at one point changes her name to Antoinette, in the remaining two parts of the novel.

Towards the end of the first part of the novel, Alex remembers how his drug-abusing single mother used to show him "the lights of the city" when he was a little boy and referred to them as "Fairyland" (96). When confronted with his memory, Alex's mother tells him in a disenchanting manner that "I was probably high on something or other. You shouldn't take your old mum seriously" (96). Later, Alex realises that fairyland is "not a place, it's an idea" (123) and the idea

of fairyland becomes a helpful concept for him to grasp the changes going on around him, partially caused by Milena making over the dolls into fairies, and looking for fairyland becomes equivalent with looking for Milena, the main object of his quest.

However, fairyland is not only present as an idea and Alex's aim in a collapsing twenty-first century Europe, it becomes a material reality in the second part of the novel, just as ideas have become physical: they can be spread with the help of viruses. The fairies that Milena created have settled on the site of the run-down, abandoned Euro Disney close to Paris, where they experiment with viruses that transfer ideas or have mind-altering consequences. Euro Disney thus really comes to deserve the name 'Magic Kingdom.' When his quest leads him to France, Alex

hears about something new just outside Paris, a place where, for the first time, Fairyland has come into the light, no longer off the map, but rising into it, rising into history. A decade after it went into receivership for the third and final time, the Magic Kingdom has come alive again (137).

Fairyland has materialised, but it is presented as a harsh place, its atmosphere is "infested" and the artificial "unicorns are waterstained, and peek forlornly from a thicket of plastic vegetation" (154). Alex does not find Milena who is referred to as the "Fairy Queen" in one of the chapter headings (259), there. He only finds her again in the third part of the novel in a virtual environment setting which resembles yet another fairyland, thus ultimately finding both Milena and fairyland at the same time. The virtual fairyland is described as a much more idyllic place than the post-apocalyptic Magic Kingdom in Paris, and it is presented as a desirable site in stark contrast to the

bleak reality of the fictional universe of McAuley's novel. In this fairyland setting, the unicorns are still intact:

One of the window shades rolls up, and sunlight floods the room. It's so bright that Milena seems to dissolve into it. Her voice says, 'I have made a fairyland. Look.'

With no sense of transition, Alex is standing at the window. Outside is not the little street – he's forgotten its name, although he remembers double yellow lines on heat-softened tarmac, high brick walls, and service entrances – but a verdant, summery countryside. Green hills saddle away under a bright blue sky toward a horizon where, like a storm, or the battlements of a walled city, a vast forest looms. There are meadows starred with poppies, and copses of oaks and elm. In the middle distance, a little pavilion, its walls creamy silk, its conical roof pink, is pitched in a daisy-starred meadow. A white horse grazed beside it. The horse has a spiral, nacreous horn as long as a man's arm growing from its forehead.

Antoinette says, 'Fairyland.' [...]

A disneyfied bluebird flies up to the window. Its brown, human eyes, with coy, fluttering lashes, stare into Alex's. [...]

Antoinette says, 'It can be anything you like. The window is a metaphor for a very special buffer. [...]' (380)

The virtual setting created by Milena is familiar and strange at the same time; the picture-book quality of the fairy tale setting is, however, definitely broken by the modifier "disneyfied," which emphasises its artificial quality and at the same time links it back to the actual Magic Kingdom of the novel.

In Stableford's *The Omega Expedition*, set in 3263, posthumanity – humanity is enhanced by the help of internal systems and has become quasi-immortal due to genetic engineering – is on the brink of being taken over by artificial intelligences (AIs). A war between humans and machines and machines among themselves is

imminent. Some of the AIs kidnap a spaceship of posthumans and show them how life for them could be if they chose to be transferred into virtuality. Madoc Tamlin, the homodiegetic narrator of the story, meets the chief AI in a sort of virtual dream. This AI presents itself to him in the form of *La Reine des Neiges*, the Snow Queen. In this novel, therefore, not only generic fairy tale elements are used, but one particular fairy tale is drawn upon, namely Hans Christian Andersen's "The Snow Queen" (1845). The AI's palace is modelled on the one in Andersen's tale, the action takes place on a world called *Polaris*, and in both stories the motifs of illusion and story-telling play central roles.

Even before Madoc Tamlin meets the Snow Queen in the virtual environment, he refers to life as a fairy tale because ever since the advent of virtual experience, no one can any longer be sure whether, when they wake up, they actually wake up to "reality" or yet another virtual experience. When he wakes up in a fairyland setting, though, he knows that he wakes up in a virtual surrounding, which is created by the artificial intelligences that have gained self-consciousness. This fairytale setting is not unlike the one described in McAuley's novel, with the difference that it is less disneyfied:

I looked around at the tall trees as we walked along a pathway that took us through the forest [...]. It was a good forest VE – maybe even a great forest VE – but it was just a mess of illusory trees. On the other hand, it was definitely an enchanted forest, straight out of Fairyland. (Stableford 2002, 335)

Madoc Tamlin suspects that "there is a code written into human meatware that responds to the scent of a forest" (329) even though

Logic suggests that human beings ought to prefer the odors of a savannah and a cooking fire – but there is much in us that is older than the human, let alone the posthuman, and there is something in forests for which nostalgia is written in the fleshy tables of the human heart.

My host understood humans well enough to know that. That was why I woke into a forest. It was a virtual forest – I never had the slightest doubt about that – but it was an environment in which I felt perfectly at home. (328)

The emphasis on what is ‘written into human meatware’ is intriguing here for two reasons: First, it presents a prime example of universalism and essentialism. What is expressed is that all humans react to the smell of a forest in a certain way and that this is an essential, unchanging feature – after all, the story is set in the thirty-second century. Madoc Tamlin is thus presented as a follower of the transhumanist belief in essential features of humans that will not change even if humans are enhanced. Second, these universal instincts are marked as essentially human even more as it is pointed out how well the artificial intelligences understand humans, illustrated by the fact that they got the creation of the forest, which succeeds in eliciting these instincts, right.

Rather than presenting the new – in this case, the artificial intelligences that have become self-aware – as really strange here, the recourse to the fairy tale elements presents a familiar setting for both characters and readers. This strange familiarity is continued when the chief artificial intelligence shows itself in the guise of the Snow Queen. However, this familiarity is justified by the plot of the novel: the artificial intelligence calling itself Snow Queen wants to create a setting in which to convince humanity of the benefits of machine life. For such a negotiation, it is of course helpful to display a thorough knowledge of humanness and thus to create the impression of familiarity by drawing on fairy-tale elements, which, apparently, still

form part of the world knowledge of humans (at least of the knowledge of Madoc Tamlin, who really stems from the twenty-second century, having been awakened from cryonic sleep after more than a thousand years). Seen from this angle, the accusation that Stableford fails to present the strange as really strange does not hold – rather, a clever detour via the realm of fairyland is taken, which though familiar, at least evokes a strange, otherworldly atmosphere.

The Snow Queen wants to convince (post)humanity that to become machines is the only way for humans to become really immortal. She promises that “[r]obotization is the only process that offers you the possibility of securing the neural connections presently comprising the substratum of your personality *forever*” (425). Immortality is also what motivates Milena and her partner Glass in *Fairyland* to upload their minds into machines. Attaining immortality in such a way is a central aim of transhumanism. Throughout the novel, Milena is shown to pursue her goals with self-determination. Repeatedly, she mentions that she has changed herself and that she will change herself again. She explains that the idea of fairyland carries a “hyperevolutionary potential [...] where we can dream ourselves into being” (265). She employs nano-, bio- and computer technology as means to her ends of liberating herself from her mortal body. This view of technology as a tool which humans can employ to enhance themselves is presented by Thacker as one of the central features of the extropian thread of transhumanism (77). This, together with the emphasis on human agency and self-determination would move Milena’s conception of posthumanism to the transhumanist corner. However, things are less straightforward than that in *Fairyland*. When Alex finally meets her in virtual fairyland, Milena explains how she has been translated into virtual reality and that she is able to see the fairyland in an entirely different way than Alex. She explains how she is not “a copy but a simulation of [her] original, built up from the bush robot’s measurements and six month’s

sampling and recording of cortical activity” (381). While Alex cannot really grasp the changes Milena has undergone and still clings to his old image of her (which, together with his idea of fairyland, propelled his quest throughout the novel), Milena acknowledges that she is “no longer the Milena you know” (383). She points out that the neuronal patterning – i.e. the mechanism with which her ‘self’ has been translated – is not precise, but she also mentions that it does not matter, thus expressing that the idea of a personal, continuous self does no longer count for her. Her character, physically presented by a beautiful fairy-queen avatar after having entered virtual reality, thus encompasses both transhumanist and a more critical view of posthumanism.

While in *Fairyland* Milena and her partner decide for themselves to enter a new machine-like existence and create their own fairylands, this opportunity is offered by artificial intelligences to humans and posthumans in *The Omega Expedition*. Adam Zimmermann, however, is not willing to yield his personal self in exchange for immortality, remarking that “I would have to become a machine, wouldn’t I?” (425-6) and that “it wouldn’t really be *me*, would it? [...] It would only be a robot that thought it was *me*...or pretended to think that it was *me*” (427). Zimmermann, who invested all his money into research into immortality before he decided to be frozen down, to be awakened only when immortality has become available for him, could thus be seen to represent a transhumanist viewpoint, unwilling to give up the idea of an essential self while believing in the progress of humankind with the help of technology. Also Madoc Tamlin is not willing to be translated into the virtual realm, saying that “I still wanted to get out of Faerie if ever the opportunity should come along” (397).

What must not be forgotten here is that Stableford directly draws on Andersen’s tale and that the narrator Madoc Tamlin is also

aware of Andersen's original tale: regaining Kay, along with his humanity, is the central aim of the quest in Andersen's tale:

Little Kay is certainly with the Snow Queen, and he is delighted with everything there. He thinks it is the best place in the world, but that is because he has got a splinter of glass in his heart and a grain of glass in his eye. They will have to come out first, or he will never be human again, and the Snow Queen will keep him in her power (Andersen 1945, 140).

While in Kelly Link's revision of Andersen's tale Gerda decides "to leave [Kay] where he is and go into business with the Snow Queen" (Schanoes 14), no such deal materialises in *The Omega Expedition*. Madoc Tamlin tries to convince the artificial intelligences that it would be beneficial for all if humanity were not exterminated and were allowed to develop at its own pace, and argues for the necessity of a diversity, which would mean a coexistence of human and machine life. Madoc Tamlin and Adam Zimmerman thus both represent a transhuman stance which endorses the idea of an essential self. Humanity, or a kind of posthumanity outside of a mere machine existence, therefore, in *The Omega Expedition*, is still to be reclaimed from the grip of the artificial intelligences, embodied by the Snow Queen.

While promising immortality and pointing out the advantages of robotisation, the Snow Queen also points out:

It would, of course, be paradoxical to claim that you can continue to be yourself *and* to change, so it is perfectly true that the kind of evolution I can promise you will ultimately make you into a person very different from the one you are now. The important point is that it will do so only by accretion, not by a

gradual obliteration and reconstruction of your past personalities. (Stableford 2002, 425)

The discussions between the humans (in the case of Adam Zimmerman) and posthumans (in the case of Madoc Tamlin, who is already physically modified to a certain degree) with the artificial intelligence, together with the Snow Queen's remark that it is impossible to change and stay the same at the same time put their finger on what Thacker describes as one of the unresolved conflicts or paradoxes in posthumanist thinking. He says that

just as the human will be transformed through these technologies, it will also maintain, assumedly, something essential of it. It is in this tension between identity and radical change, between visions of software minds and the realities of biological bodies, that extropianism reveals the inner tensions of posthumanist thinking. (75)

Rather than determining whether a transhumanist view or a more critical idea of posthumanism is expressed in these two texts, it is more fruitful to note how the science fiction novels under discussion here manage to make obvious the inherent contradictions and paradoxes in posthumanist and transhumanist thinking. In neither work does one angle triumph over the other, though the intertextual reference to Andersen's "The Snow Queen" suggests a bias to the human in *The Omega Expedition*. The idea of the posthuman as such is negotiated, with different positions taken by different characters – human, posthuman or machines. The tendency to examine key issues from different positions and take into consideration different opinions is in keeping with the scientific, hard science fiction attitude of the two novels. The use of fairy tale topoi at crucial sites of negotiating the human suggests that the new and unimaginable cannot ultimately

be presented adequately with the help of our present imagination, but that the strange might be at least intimated by the employment of fairy-tale elements.

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INVENTING A FICTITIOUS FAIRY TALE

Gergely Nagy. Fictitious Fairy-Stories: Writing a Fictitious Character in *The Lord of the Rings*¹

J.R.R. Tolkien spent a lifetime with fairy-stories, in various roles and functions, and always connected them with two things: the past and fiction. These are exactly the reasons why his work is properly ‘postmodern:’ his extremely sensitive examination and fictional treatment of the past. The ingenious metafictional framework (by which Tolkien makes the story self-referential, fiction about fiction) in *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55) (a book often treated as Tolkien’s manifesto of what a modern-day fairy-story should look like) foregrounds the use of fairy-stories even *inside* the fiction, showing with textual strategies, fictitious cultural history, and a cunning use of an internal, fictionalized narrator the way these stories determine and shape how people think about themselves and their own stories, and ultimately blur the distinction between fairy-story, history, and life as narrative. All are stories, their meanings are interconnected, and they inform each other in various roles and functions. The past really *is* a fiction.

In *The Lord of the Rings*, it is the hobbit characters who mediate between the vast world of Middle-earth (unknown and unfamiliar to the reader) and our ‘commonsense’ horizon of expectations, thus connecting the reader into the fictional and metafictional web of stories; but they also become mediators between these *stories themselves*. Of all hobbits, the one closest to fairy-stories is Sam Gamgee. “Crazy about stories of the old days he is,” his father says, “and he listens to all Mr. Bilbo’s tales. [...] ‘*Elves and Dragons!*’ I says to him. ‘*Cabbages and potatoes are better for me and you*’” (Tolkien 1991a, 24). In the quest he undertakes with Frodo, Sam gets his chance to see Elves and become part of the “old stories.” Just as the two hobbits enter the land of Mordor, through a

set of craftily used references Tolkien makes Sam into a figure on par with the greatest heroes of the past. Legend or history to Middle-earth's better educated peoples, to hobbits (especially to a simple gardener like Sam) these are mere fairy-stories:² part of Tolkien's point is exactly how one culture's fairy-story (the hobbits', for instance) is another's (the Elves') history, and how it is possible to move between them. It is supposedly *Frodo*, the text's fictitious narrator, who writes this heroic figure of Sam: a fictitious character telling the story of another fictitious character in a way that this latter one becomes part of what he initially knew as fairy-stories (even if he personally believed them). Tolkien, Frodo and Sam present an intricate discussion on fictionality in culture and its relation to the past.

It is an often cited but less frequently elaborated point about *The Lord of the Rings* that, according to the fiction, its text is written by Frodo, the main hero. Mary R. Bowman offered an interesting reading of how characters in the book problematize concepts like closure, authorship or point of view; how they "appropriate existing tales, remembering and applying them" (279), thus commenting on stories and their fictional/historical status and cultural use. Verlyn Flieger treats Tolkien's fiction of the tradition, provenance and frame which ultimately are all metafictional (55-84): there are several levels of presentation that always add reflection and always raise the question of representation to other meta-levels (80). But she concludes that the complete fictionalizing of the narrative is unsuccessful: if "narrative voice, point of view, the amount of knowledge [the fictional authors] could have had at any one time [...] are put together, the whole concept falls apart" (79). In fact, it does not. All we need to suppose that the text, 'fictitiously,' must contain a great deal of artistic license and ingenuity (nothing that real authors do not use), and what seem to be discrepancies can be resolved. By this device, Tolkien opens up for himself a whole new set of

opportunities for representing how our mediators, the hobbits, use fiction and represent themselves in stories. In this paper, through some instances of how the fictitious narrator writes the figure of Sam, with the integration of details and parts of the “old stories” he likes so much, I will examine two transformations: how a character in the fiction becomes *doubly* fictitious, someone out of his favorite tales; and how the tales themselves are pasted into various other discourses (legend, history, interpretive template for actions), finally going full circle to being (again) unbelievable. What Sam vaguely believes but hobbits generally do not (“fireside-tales” about the Elves) turn out to be high legend and even history (for the Elves themselves), are enacted by him (or are said to be enacted by him by the fictitious narrator), and back in the Shire, hobbits generally do not believe them again. The way Tolkien continually revises the status of stories as his characters’ journey through different cultures, and the way he shows how his fictional stories themselves take on various degrees and functions of fictionality inside the text is an effective statement on how he himself conceives of fairy-story and its use in culture.

The figure of Sam changes perceptibly in the three chapters when Frodo is absent from the action (Bk 4, chs. IX-X, and Bk. 6, ch I.). Here the style of the narrative often shifts to a more elevated, paratactic prose that is reminiscent of Tolkien’s *The Silmarillion* (1977)³ and we see Sam making dramatic decisions and acting with a confidence he himself did not think he had (much like Bilbo in the latter part of *The Hobbit* [1937]). In the course of these events, his story brings up three different great heroes from the antiquity of Middle-earth (the material found in *The Silmarillion*): Túrin, Maedhros, and Lúthien. The only human of these three, Túrin, is conjured simply by textual means, while the other two by parallels of the actions that Sam is shown to take. They all serve to situate Sam himself as a parallel, an ‘anti-type’ completing a typological arch of great events in Middle-earth. From “elf-friend,” Sam really becomes

a “large warrior, [...] Elf most likely” (Tolkien 1991b, 722), and even though he shrinks again to being a servant, he is already shown to be a part, both ‘narratively’ and ‘representationally,’ of the very tales he likes so much.

The first instance of Sam’s textual transformation comes when Frodo had already succumbed to Shelob’s poison, and Sam takes up the fight. The narrator comments:

But Shelob was not as dragons are, no softer spot had she save only her eyes. Knobbed and pitted with corruption was her age-old hide, but ever thickened from within with layers on layers of evil growth. The blade scored it with a dreadful gash, but those hideous folds could not be pierced by any strength of men, not though Elf or Dwarf should forge the blade or the hand of Beren or of Túrin wield it. (Tolkien 1991b, 711)

Sam’s action of desperation, passivity (he lets the monster descend on the point of the sword, impaling itself), with no real hope of victory is essentially *unlike* the action of the dragon-slaying hero Túrin (who, “with all the might of his arm, and of his hate, [...] thrust [his sword] into the soft belly of the Worm, even up to the hilts,” having executed his dangerous plan with great daring and resolve [Tolkien 2001, 222]); but by the very mention, it is *written as* similar: the mere reference highlights the essential similarities *of the scene*. In both cases, stabbing from below is the only way to harm the monster, and in *The Lord of the Rings* text, Shelob is clearly associated with the First Age, the historical period when Túrin lived, through another monstrous figure, Ungoliant: Shelob was “an evil thing in spider-form, even such as once of old had lived in the Land of the Elves in the West that is now under the Sea, such as Beren fought in the Mountains of Terror in Doriath” (Tolkien 1991b, 707).⁴ The physical details of the scenes, the undersides of the two monsters are also

commonly repelling (Shelob's shines with "putrid light, and the stench of it almost smote [Sam] down" (Tolkien 1991b, 711), while the dragon's was "[p]ale and wrinkled [...] all dark with a green slime, to which clung all manner of dropping filth; and it stank of death" (Tolkien 2008a, 237)), while the two protagonists' motives (revenge, even a personal feud, and the defense of their community) are also shared. Sam thus takes up Túrin's meanings: even in his desperation, even in its essential unlike-ness, his action is suddenly filled with all the significance of the older hero's deed. And this is how the Orcs read the signs that remain after the fight: "there's someone loose hereabouts as is more dangerous than any other damned rebel that ever walked since the bad old times [...] a large warrior, [...] Elf most likely" (Tolkien 1991b, 722). Sam has symbolically succeeded in seeing a dragon and even *becoming* an Elf. His father would be mortified.

We have seen how one textual detail triggers Sam's transformation into a great hero; in another important instance, it is his desperation and unsuccessful actions again that make up connections, this time to real Elves, and one a woman at that. This scene is worth quoting at some length: after he had searched high and low for Frodo in the tower of Cirith Ungol,

weary and feeling finally defeated, [Sam] sat on a step below the level of the passage-floor and bowed his head into his hands. [...] And then softly, to his own surprise, there at the vain end of his long journey and his grief, moved by what thought in his heart he could not tell, Sam began to sing. His voice sounded *thin and quavering* in the cold dark tower: the voice of a forlorn and weary hobbit that no listening orc could possibly mistake for the clear song on an Elven-lord. He murmured old childish tunes out of the Shire, and snatches of Mr. Bilbo's rhymes that came into his mind like fleeting glimpses of the country of his home. And then suddenly new

strength rose in him, and his voice *rang* out, while words of his own came unbidden to fit the simple tune. [...]

‘Beyond all towers strong and high,’ he began again, and then he stopped short. He thought he had heard a faint voice answering him. (Tolkien 1991c, 887-88; *italics mine*)

The central motif here is the ‘song answered:’ in both referred scenes, the protagonists perform a heroic deed by freeing someone so that vitally important quests (and stories) can continue. The first such hero is the Elvish prince Fingon: in *The Silmarillion*, he goes alone to find his half-brother Maedhros, whom the Dark Lord Morgoth had captured and hung, Prometheus-like, high on a rock cliff.

[Fingon] took his harp and sang a song of Valinor that the Noldor made of old [...]; and his voice *rang* in the mournful hollows that had never heard before aught save cries of fear and woe.

Thus Fingon found what he sought. For suddenly above him far and faint his song was taken up, and a voice answering called to him. Maedhros it was that sang amid his torment. (Tolkien 2001, 110; *italics mine*)

In both cases, the heroes are alone amid desolation and despair. They both could, at least theoretically, give up: neither knows for sure that the one they are seeking is even alive. Their deed is strategically important: Maedhros is one of the best politicians, the most tolerant and considerate Elvish leader, whose return to the fight is also symbolic. And Frodo, after all, is the Ringbearer the Council of Elrond charged with the task. In both cases, there is a clear emphasis on (and a contrast between) the voice of the heroes, and its totally inappropriate context, as well as the “faint” answer. But even though Fingon acts “in defiance of the Orcs, who cowered still in the dark vaults beneath the earth” (Tolkien 2001, 110) while Sam is

“weary and feeling finally defeated” (Tolkien 1991c, 887), he nevertheless repeats the legendary action, with the legendary result. Fingon (unlike Túrin) is not mentioned, but Sam still manages to take on his meanings.

But there is more to the scene than this: the story of the other hero referred to in the Shelob fight, Beren, also comes into play. In *The Silmarillion*, when Beren (a human like Túrin), on a quest to get a Silmaril from Morgoth’s crown, is captured and imprisoned by Sauron (then only Morgoth’s servant), his lover, the Elvish princess Lúthien arrives

and standing upon the bridge that led to Sauron’s isle she sang a song that no walls of stone could hinder. Beren heard, and *he thought that he dreamed*; for the stars shone above him, and in the trees the nightingales were singing; and in answer he sang a song of challenge that he had made in praise of the Seven Stars [...] Then all strength left him and he fell down into darkness. But Lúthien heard his answering voice... (Tolkien 2001, 174; *italics mine*)

It seems that Sauron is prone to losing important prisoners to the device of the ‘song answered;’⁵ but here Sam is playing the role of an Elvish princess, actively battling Sauron himself. Frodo later asks him whether he “wasn’t *dreaming* after all when I heard that singing down below, and I tried to answer?” (Tolkien 1991c, 889; *italics mine*) – the song comes to both victims as if in a dream. Beren (like Túrin) had been mentioned earlier in marked contrast with Sam: this time the humble hobbit’s figure is inserted into the story with a twist, since it is not Beren’s but Lúthien’s part of the deed that he is repeating. However, the very reference to Beren in the earlier scene, and the invocation of his story here serve not merely to magnify and ennoble Sam. They work to situate him in a much larger series of

motifs running through *The Lord of the Rings*, one that has a personal connection with Sam, and one that he has been aware of for some time.

According to Tolkien's metafictional frame, these scenes were narrated by Frodo; but since Frodo was not present at the actions, we have to suppose his information came from Sam.⁶ He obviously *told* Frodo about what actually happened; but also quite obviously *not in this way*. Sam is emphatically not capable of producing this style (witness his constant insistence, and his attempts at poetry), therefore the text, the narration, the very figure of Sam here must be assigned to Frodo, who not only narrates but embellishes the story, elaborates Sam's actions and scenes so that they resemble the "old stories." His language brings up the stories even when there is only contrast, and assimilates his character into patterns known to them: and those patterns are decidedly fairy-stories, at least to the hobbits of the Shire.

But apart from gratitude and love (two feelings we can safely attribute to Frodo towards Sam, and something that would already make this metafictional joke meaningful on the level of characterization), why does this fictitious narrator pose Sam in such illustrious company? The answer to this question lies in the whole book's continual preoccupation with stories, old and new, and in its focus on the Beren and Lúthien story in particular. Initially a distant and heartbreaking tale, by the time the hobbits reach Mordor (and just before the 'legendary Sam' emerges) it is shown to be continuous with their own story: and it is none other than Sam who remarks this and makes the connection. Of course, this could also be attributed to the ingenuity of the fictitious narrator; but both ways, the details of Sam's fictitious representation are preeminently meaningful quite above the level of characterization, and contribute to a representation of stories in culture and life: fairy-stories to live by.

The story of Beren and Lúthien is first mentioned by Aragorn on Weathertop as “a fair tale, though it is sad, as are all the tales of Middle-earth” (Tolkien 1991a, 187), when the hobbits’ journey has only just started, and the Black Riders attack them shortly. Aragorn even sings eight stanzas of an old song “render[ed] in our Common Speech, [...] but a rough echo” of the original Elvish (Tolkien 1991a, 189). He is, however, hopeful that “it may lift up [the hobbits’] hearts” (Tolkien 1991a, 187), and promises that in Elrond’s house they may hear the whole. This is exactly what happens: there “the hobbits sat together in the evening in the Hall of Fire, and there among many tales they heard told in full the lay of Beren and Lúthien and the winning of the Great Jewel” (Tolkien 1991a, 270). While for Aragorn, the story of the human suitor winning the hand of the Elvish princess is evidently a hopeful parallel in his own quest for the hand of Arwen, Elrond’s daughter, Beren and Lúthien hold larger implications for Middle-earth: the Silmaril that they acquire passes on to Eärendil (offspring from another human-Elvish marriage), who serves as Middle-earth’s messenger to the divine Powers, ultimately heralding the end of the First Age in the universal overthrow of Morgoth. Eärendil and his Silmaril are put on the sky and become a star (see Tolkien 2001, 246-255). Later, when the Company departs from Lothlórien, the Elvish queen Galadriel makes a present to Frodo of “a small crystal phial:” “‘In this phial,’ she said, ‘is caught the light of Eärendil’s star, set amid the waters of my fountain.’” (Tolkien 1991a, 367). The story, as it were, has materialized.

By the time the hobbits reach Mordor, Sam, who initially knows nothing of the story, comes to the realization that through the light in the phial, they indeed have a very physical, tangible connection with the tale. “And why, sir, I never thought of that before! We’ve got – you’ve got some of the light of it in the star-glass that the Lady gave you! Why, to think of it, we’re in the same tale still! It’s going on,” (Tolkien 1991b, 696-97) he says in a

remarkably theoretical discussion about tales and their relations to their main characters. While also putting immense emphasis on the difference of stories as lived out and narratives as written (as opposed to merely ‘told’),⁷ here he demonstrates a knowledge of the story and its significance, and though it is (as noted above) entirely plausible to argue that in fact the fictitious narrator makes Sam make the parallel, the point still stands: Sam’s representation as integrated into the pattern of “old stories,” into the Beren and Lúthien story in particular, highlights a peculiar way of interpretation, a way of assigning meaning to and making sense of these tales. Through the Phial of Galadriel (which he keeps when he believes Frodo dead [Tolkien 1991b, 716]), Sam is connected to Beren and Lúthien’s quest, and even re-enacts (or is narrated to re-enact) an important scene from it: notably one where Beren is freed from Sauron’s captivity. Since we know the hobbits heard the full story told in Elrond’s house, we could even suppose Sam himself is aware of this; but in any case, the point is that the narrator represents Sam’s action in a way that piles details upon details of old tales in the form of more or less obscure references, tying him to the pattern both rhetorically and thematically. Sam becomes ‘doubly fictitious.’

The re-enactment of legendary/past events is used by the characters of *The Lord of the Rings* to “create legend, guide themselves by it, and echo it in their lives” (Bolantineanu 265). But Sam is not so much “re-enacting” the past as *is narrated* to re-enact it – it is exactly his concern with being in an *account* of whatever is done that matters. What we see here is a fictitious narrator’s way of playing with textual and plot elements that in the end lead to a narrative of re-enactment (as in the case of the Túrin motif), and how the story functions in different cultural contexts is as important as the ‘legendariness’ of the parallel. This is why it is crucial to see what is specific in the way Frodo *narrates Sam*.

Evidence that this representation is indeed specific to Sam (moreover, specific by conscious choice) is found in another scene which Frodo narrates based on somebody else's information, involving a hobbit and a foe of mythological size: Merry and his contribution to the killing of the Witch-king. "No other blade, not though mightier hands had wielded it, would have dealt that foe a wound so bitter" (Tolkien 1991c, 826): there is no mention of heroes, yet this scene is potentially, in its imagery and importance, just as suggestive and meaningful. But it is not represented by the narrator in the same conventional stylistic space as Sam's attack on Shelob, not placed in the same *space of stories*, the common (though better or less known) pool of interpretive templates that are available for actions involving both the actual character and (characters from) the mythological framework. Merry's deed is not shown to be part of the series, and he is simply compared to "mightier hands" (notably not a reference to any past), not to any heroes.

In doing all this with his fictitious narrator, Tolkien operates very subtly on a number of representational levels. For his reader, he makes the figure of Sam more meaningful with significant parallel stories from a greater antiquity; but since his narrator is also part of the fictional world, the creation of this parallel itself is part of the fiction, and highlights not only the existence but also the use of those parallel stories – this time within the fiction. To these 'readerly' and 'critical' attitudes (for these, see Nagy 2003, 241) is added a 'practical' application, also inside the fiction: the orcs' reading the signs and identifying the 'missing hero' as an "Elf most likely," completely in line with the representation of Sam resulting from the parallels. Tolkien thus moves through layers of his fiction, from the level of his own readers to the level of his speakers and actors: what Frodo interprets as story, and places Sam in the middle of it for effect, is bloody reality for the orcs. What Sam, comfortably ensconced in everyday hobbit culture, initially sees as simply "old

stories” (even though, unlike most hobbits, he believes them), turn out to be high legend in Aragorn’s tale at Weathertop (heard full and still more ennobled in the house of Elrond), and actual reality, history, when Galadriel presents to them a material reminder. Finally, it becomes *their own story*, both through Sam’s realization that they are “in the same tale still” (Tolkien 1991b, 697) and Frodo’s representing him in the same vein as the heroes of old – indeed, as one of the heroes of the Beren and Lúthien story. The various cultural discourses (Shire hobbit, vagabond human, high Elvish courts, actual life and orcish reality) in which these details and stories are meaningful all point to a past forgotten or remembered in various ways in various cultures, different uses of the story to make sense of whatever is happening to them in the present.⁸ Fairy-stories to live by are not very different from history.

In his celebrated essay on fairy-stories, Tolkien made the point that they are really about Faërie, a corpus of traditional fictions, where elements of myth, legend and history all merge in the “Cauldron of Story,” and create a fictional space on which all can rely (see Tolkien 2008b, 42-48). The various cultural substrata in which the stories are used in Tolkien’s fiction add inside layers to his ‘readerly’ vs. ‘critical’ examination of how all sorts of reminders from the past are integrated into this fictional space, and how the use of these old stories eventually lead to new stories that move between the same discourses. This is exactly the *space of stories* where Sam’s (though not Merry’s) figure is placed by the narrator. Frodo and Sam are sung about in a ‘historical poem’ at the crowning of Aragorn: “I will sing to you of Frodo of the Nine Fingers and the Ring of Doom” (Tolkien 1991c, 933), announces the minstrel.⁹ But when they arrive home, in the Shire, all they get is their attire being called “queer” and the reasonable supposition that they have “been in foreign parts, seemingly” (Tolkien 1991c, 984). Frodo even affirms Sam’s status by publicly stating that he is “now one of the most famous people in all

the lands, and they are making songs about his deeds from here to the Sea and beyond the Great River” – to which Sam’s father answers only that “it takes a lot o’ believing” (Tolkien 1991c, 991). As Bilbo too (who, after his second disappearance, “became a favourite character of legend” as “Mad Baggins” [Tolkien 1991a, 30]), they return to such stuff as fairy tales are made on. But Tolkien has made his point admirably: not only did he show how stories contextualized by different cultures function as fictions, facts, or representations of the past, but he also presented a sensitive analysis of how that function is always carried out through an individual’s relation to them, his understanding of them as fairy tale, history, or life as lived, and the way this understanding surfaces in telling new stories. Ultimately, however, it is all fiction, fiction written by J.R.R. Tolkien, in a kind of meta-illustration of his point.

Notes

1. I had the opportunity to study some of the material that I used in this paper and its argument while I was spending three months in the spring of 2003 at Wheaton College, in Norton, Massachusetts, with the help of the Eötvös Scholarship of the Hungarian Scholarship Board, which I gratefully acknowledge here. An earlier version of this paper (with a different focus) also appeared as “Samu és a szilmarilok” [Sam and the Silmarils], in *Lassi Laurië* (Hungarian Tolkien Society) 2.2 (2003): 8-10.
2. See e.g. Sam’s conversation with one particularly skeptical hobbit, who maintains that the tales Sam likes so much are really “fireside-tales and children’s stories” (Tolkien 1991a, 43). On a number of occasions Sam, however, affirms that he does believe them (e.g. Tolkien 1991a, 43, 62), by contrast evidencing that most hobbits do not; and the narrator also makes a remark about Sam’s preferences towards Elves (Tolkien 1991a, 44).
3. Parataxis (the use of simple accumulative coordinating structures, clauses strung together by “and”s, rather than logically complex subordinated syntax) is also a feature that is linked to both real and

fictitious cultural history: Walter J. Ong lists parataxis as characteristic of the “psychodynamics of orality” (36-37), while in *The Silmarillion*, parataxis seems to be a common feature of a poetic tradition fictitiously incorporated into the text (see Nagy 2004, 23-25).

4. This connection changed considerably in the course of composition, as can be seen in the variant texts Christopher Tolkien has published in *The War of the Ring*: Tolkien made the First Age connection from the beginning (see Tolkien 2000a, 184), but at one stage he actually made the monster identical with the First Age horror Ungoliant (Tolkien 2000a, 196-97).

5. Both parallels (along with others) are mentioned in Hammond and Scull 2005, 603-4.

6. We do not need to suppose, as Flieger (2005, 71-72) does, that this cannot be Frodo writing.

7. See Flieger 2005, 72-73; Flieger maintains that (with the exception of Bilbo), Sam is the character “most taken by the idea of the book as the repository of stories” (72), thus emphasizing that for Tolkien’s fiction of cultural representation (of figures, of actions, of stories) *writing* is an inevitable layer – and therefore the questions about *who* does the writing and *how* become crucial. This is one reason why it is necessary to examine Frodo’s fictitious writing of Sam.

8. This is shown to happen in other cultures as well: Théoden King, upon seeing the Ents, recognizes the fairy tales come alive, and comments that “[s]ongs we have that tell of these things, but we are forgetting them, teaching them only to children” (Tolkien 1991b, 537). In a much higher culture, that of Minas Tirith, “old lore” about the king’s healing hands also turns out to be true (Tolkien 1991c, 842), and “rhymes of old days which women [...] still repeat without understanding” (Tolkien 1991c, 847) are revealed to hold very practical truth about the healing properties of a mysterious herb. Fairy-stories are continuous with the past (and sometimes with truth) all over Middle-Earth.

9. The “story of Nine-fingered Frodo and the Ring of Doom,” however, is also Sam’s invention: on the erupting Mt. Doom, he tries to console Frodo with this idea (Tolkien 1991c, 929). The way the hobbits are rescued from here is also important, since Christopher Tolkien’s comments on the composition of the scene (Tolkien 2000b,

13, n.1 and 44-45) show evidence that Tolkien himself definitely handled the hobbits' story as a parallel of that of Beren and Lúthien.

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BETWEEN PSYCHOPATHOLOGY AND FANTASY

Jacqueline Ford. Cover Your Eyes and Count to a Hundred: Freud's *Uncanny* and Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth*¹

Max Ernst died on the 1st of August 1914. He was resuscitated on the 11th of November 1918, as a young man aspiring to become a magician and to find the myth of his time. (Ernst in Legge 1989, 2)

In the last two decades Freud's 1919 theorization of the *uncanny* has been the subject of an unprecedented level of interest:² it has been heralded as a significant analytical tool in understanding both modernity and postmodernity, and a major discursive mode of the revolutionary philosophies of the 20th century rooted in psychoanalysis and deconstruction. Nicholas Royle in his *The Uncanny* (2003) provides a comprehensive overview of the concept, and argues that psychoanalysis is uncanny in that it brings to light those traumatic psychic contents that were hidden or repressed, making us aware of the extent to which we are strangers to ourselves, while deconstruction is also uncanny in that it addresses the unfamiliar subtextual significations at the heart of the familiar yet defamiliarized literary text's meaning generating process (24).

Both of these 'uncanny discourses' are central to Guillermo del Toro's 2006 film, *Pan's Labyrinth*: Freudian psychoanalytical views on the 'return of the repressed' and the death drive's ambiguous attraction structure the cinematic narrative and character-construction alike, while deconstruction destabilizes the created fictional reality, framing the story within uncertainty. We, the spectators, are constantly left in doubt as to what is real and what is imagined, as strategies of destabilization, defamiliarization and disidentification

force us to question whether what we watching in the film inhabits the domain of fantasy or psychopathology.

It is this question of the subtle, blurred distinction between the pathological and the fantastic, the magical in *Pan's Labyrinth* that lies at the focus of my analysis, and it is to the discourse on the uncanny that I turn for elucidation – drawing, besides Freud's original text, on elaborations of Freud by the surrealists (in particular the writer Roger Caillois) and on Jacques Lacan's 'uncanny' use of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Roger Caillois in his *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1973).

Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth* is a fairy story set amidst the brutality of Franco's Spain in 1944. The filmic memento of the violence and trauma of wartime Europe via the invocation of magical thinking seems to echo surrealist Max Ernst's autobiographical note quoted in my epigraph above. Surrealism was closely related to the trauma of the First World War and its social and political consequences in Europe, and like many intellectual movements of the period it responded to the rise of fascism. However, for the surrealists under the leadership of André Breton the political and the marvelous were inextricable. And as Tzvetan Todorov points out, the marvelous and the uncanny are neighbouring domains (see 1975). The psychoanalytic writings of Sigmund Freud, known to the surrealists through German-speaking members of the movement such as Ernst, and appearing in French translation from 1922 onwards, provided inspiration both for the surrealists and for their dissident shadow, Georges Bataille.³ Freud's *Das Unheimliche* ("The Uncanny" in the Strachey translation) has been heavily invoked in recent scholarship on surrealism, and although the surrealists themselves made no overt reference to this particular essay, nonetheless "the uncanny" elaborates three themes that occur often in surrealist work: the double, the link between castration and the (loss of) eye(sight), and the return of the repressed in the form of "that which ought to have

remained secret and hidden but which has come to light” (Freud 1985, 345). Otto Rank, Freud tells us, connected the double with “reflections in mirrors, with shadows, with guardian spirits, with the belief in the soul and with the fear of death.” For Rank the double was an “energetic denial of the power of death,” but for Freud it becomes just the reverse, turning from “an assurance of immortality” into “the uncanny harbinger of death” (356-357), as the first outlines emerge here of what were to become, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, his arguments for the existence of the death drive – defined later as Thanatos intertwined with Eros, a fundamental instinct of all living creatures striving for a peacefully static, inorganic state of non/being beyond/besides the excitement of libidinous pleasures.

Pan's Labyrinth opens to the sound of the young heroine's dying breaths which, as we watch, we begin to realize are uncannily *not* her dying breaths: the blood that drips from her nose is traveling not outwards, but inwards. As if seen in a temporal mirror, Ofelia is not dying but *un*-dying. The film is framed, parenthetically, both by the story of Ofelia's death or undeath and by the narration of her 'double(d)' life (and death) story: the fairy tale of the Princess Moanna, the faun, the labyrinth and a sacrifice. The story of Princess Moanna of the Underground Realm, who was curious about the world above, escaped to Earth, and forgot her past and died, leaving her spirit to linger among humans is another story which comes to life and closure within the filmic corpus: it is the story of Ofelia's other, since the Faun recognizes Ofelia as Princess Moanna's reincarnation who must die on Earth to return revived to her kind. In this intricate narrative web of repeated deaths and rebirths, dyings and undyings, we, as spectators, are challenged by equally feasible, but ambiguous realities (or unrealities) arousing an unending interpretive hesitation, where we are unable (and perhaps unwilling) to decide whether the unreal is a 'normal(ly fictional)' constituent of the magic realist story-world's imagined reality or whether this unreal

is just a product of Ofelia's individual fantasy, an isolated frenzy of imagination that does not constitute a part of the other characters' (fictional) reality.

Del Toro's cinematic oeuvre is informed by contemporary fairy-tale scholarship. He has read his Tatar and Zipes, and states on *Pan's Labyrinth's* official website that in the film "all the elements are fashioned rigorously after classical patterns. The banquet where you should not eat, the three doors, the descent, the blood, etc." The story revolves around themes of desire, danger, death, sacrifice, and most importantly it is the story of a quest. Ofelia's quest begins, conventionally enough, in the woods. On the journey to join her army captain stepfather in the countryside, their car must stop because her pregnant mother is feeling violently nauseous. As Carmen vomits, Ofelia walks into the woods where she finds, lying on the ground, a stone eye. She replaces it in the primitive figure that stands nearby and invokes a fairy – in the form of a praying mantis. Her mother's response to Ofelia's wonder at this marvel, "look what you've done to your shoes," evokes a pragmatic, mundane, down-to-earthness standing in sharp contrast with the magical realistic happenings, but with this apparently insignificant, customary maternal accusation the daughter is immediately marked by signifiers crucial in the Bataillean dissident-surrealist mythology: soil, dirt, abject waste on the body associated with abject bodily waste, which point towards formlessness, disorder and decay, depriving the subject of her ordered, civilized, sane subjectivity – thus taking Ofelia's fantastic quest cum tragic initiation rite to its next, philosophically charged stage.

The close relationship between psychoanalysis and surrealism in the decades preceding and preparing the historic period of the filmic narrative, sets the programme for del Toro's story. Themes immediately recognizable from the canon of Breton's 'official surrealist art' appear throughout *Pan's Labyrinth*, but they derive

perhaps even more from Bataille's undercover 'counter-surrealism.' The surrealists were equally fascinated by the Freudian 'talking cure' and theories of resurgent latent psychic contents (in dreams, jokes, neurosis) as by Charcot's clinical/photographic work on hysteria and hypnosis, since these both seemed to offer the possibility of accessing the unconscious mind through art. The routes into this domain primarily examined by the surrealists were, on the one hand, the art of the insane and on the other, the art of children, since deranged and infantile minds were presumed to keep a privileged contact with the unconscious (desires, emotions, urges, pre-thoughts, memories outside/beyond conscious awareness, which our socialization is meant to control and repress). They knew the art of the insane through Hans Prinzhorn's 1922 book *Artistry of the Mentally Ill* (*Bildnerei der Geisteskranken*), whereas their interest in children's art, magical thinking and the fairy tale is exemplified by the adoption of Lewis Carroll as an honorary surrealist.⁴ *Alice in Wonderland* was a favourite book, for which Salvador Dali created a suite of images; *The Hunting of the Snark* was illustrated by André Masson and Max Ernst (amongst others); Ernst used fairy tale imagery in his work, notably in his surrealist novel *The hundred headless woman* (*La femme cent têtes*) (1929). Since Bataille inhabited a darker zone – 'the underbelly of surrealism' – he was more interested in the monstrous and the uncanny as keys to the modern unconscious, and his insights into fairy tale were also darker. Tellingly, in his surrealist dictionary entry on 'Dust' he points out:

The storytellers have not realized that the Sleeping Beauty would have woken covered in a thick layer of dust; nor have they envisaged the sinister spiders' webs that would have been torn apart at the first movement of her red tresses. Meanwhile dismal sheets of dust constantly invade earthly habitations and uniformly defile them: as if it were a matter of making ready attics and old rooms for the imminent occupation of the

obsessions, phantoms, specters that the decayed odour of old dust nourishes and intoxicates. (1995, 42-3).

Like Freud, Bataille believed that “we are all haunted houses” (Royle 1).⁵ This representation of the unconscious as a secret cellar, an attic, an underworld – something hidden and uncanny – becomes a recurring trope in *Pan’s Labyrinth*. As the narrative of the film unfolds, each of the tasks of Ofelia’s quest takes place in some version of this space of “obsessions, phantoms, specters.” Taken from the city to the country with her sick and pregnant mother, to join her evil stepfather and his army unit who are set on eradicating the local resistance group, Ofelia suffers a major dislocation. Suddenly the child of someone she detests, all that should have been homely in her life becomes unhomely, all her certainties become uncertainties as she struggles to save her dying mother and carry out her quest. The fantasy world provided by books – among them *Alice in Wonderland* – is her only remaining refuge. Ofelia’s stepfather, the psychopathic Captain Vidal, is also haunted, but whereas for Ofelia the return of the repressed allows for self-awareness, in Vidal’s case it leads to the disintegration of all (false memory, fake identity, fascist ideology) that he obsessively holds onto as the frame of his being. In a linking position between Ofelia’s magic world and Captain Vidal’s tyrannical regime of violence stands the housekeeper-spy, Mercedes (whose brother, in the woods with the resistance, is being hunted down by Vidal). The unexpected feminine defiance by Mercedes will invoke the captain’s uncanny fate, his disfiguration (a literal defacement by a knife) and death (silencing) depriving him of a story to be passed on.

Mercedes is a fascinating transitional character with a fluid ir/reality status and has an intimate connection with death and the figure of the praying mantis that plays a vital role in the imagination of both Ofelia and the surrealists. Mercedes can act as an

intermediary, a messenger, a spy between the world of the army post and the resistance group in the woods because her status as female and servant lend her invisibility and malleability (her compassion leads her to become Ofelia's main support, but she is also capable of a deadly ruthlessness). She resembles the praying mantis that Ofelia recognizes, at the beginning of the story, as a faerial messenger from the magical world giving her guidance on her quest. The surrealist understanding of the mantis – a favourite theme, and item of entomological collections – as an insect invested with the magical properties of clear-sightedness and invisibility matches the filmic function of both Mercedes and the mantis-fairy. Roger Caillois describes her as the oldest of the insects, known from fossil remains, and outlines her etymology as 'mancer,' seer, speaker with the dead. "It is derived from *μανομαι*, which means both 'to be mad' and 'to be inspired'" (1990, 69). The mantis, like Mercedes and Ofelia's fairy, has the uncanny ability to blend in with its setting – to become invisible. Ofelia herself, like all quietly unhappy children, shares this same ability. This capacity of the mantis to disappear (and then reappear and disappear again) can be strangely associated with the concept of the uncanny repetition compulsion which Freud connected with the death instinct.

'The Uncanny' was published a year earlier than *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, but in one brief passage it contains many of the conclusions that would appear in the longer text. Without specifically referring to the death instincts, Freud tells us that he has completed a text in which the "compulsion to repeat" is explored; that this compulsion is "powerful enough to overrule the pleasure principle, lending to certain aspects of the mind their daemonic character;" and that things which bring to mind this "inner compulsion to repeat" are experienced as uncanny (1985, 360-61). It is the pleasure principle's spectrum of pleasure to unpleasure, where pleasure is equated with the reduction of tension and unpleasure with its opposite, i.e. an

increase of tension, that drives us away from the unpleasure of unwanted excitation. However Freud suggests that a paradoxical situation arises in that the organism's general tendency towards lower states of excitation, when directed towards the attainment of a zero-point of excitation, can be redefined as a death instinct.

Freud's death instinct is further explored by Caillois through the discussion of insect mimesis in his essays "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia" and "The praying mantis" ("La mante religieuse").⁶ Caillois sees the mantis' ability to become absorbed into the environment it inhabits as a surrender similar to the one described by Flaubert in his writing on the last temptation of St. Anthony; it signifies 'becoming matter.' Caillois's epigraph to his essay on mimesis: "Beware, one becomes the phantom one plays at being!" raises important questions about "distinctions between the real and the imaginary, between waking and sleeping" (1984, 19). Insect mimesis, and in particular the mantis' ability to become invisible, lead Caillois to a refinement of Freud in which the death drive results in becoming absorbed into your surroundings so that you can no longer distinguish who you are "accurately defined as an incantation fixed at its culminating point and having caught the sorcerer in his own trap" (1984, 32). Unlike the spy Mercedes or the faerial messenger who play precisely on the potentials of this mimicry-like self-effacing to enable the shifts between different realms of being, Ofelia resists 'insect mimicry' so as to defy her mother's attempts to restore an illusion of normality (with a solid reality status) to their lives. "The captain is not my father" she insists to Mercedes, "No es mi padre!" Even though it would lead to a reduction of tension, Ofelia will not be inserted into the symbolic male, fascist, rationalistic world of the captain and the army post.

However, the mantis carries, both for surrealism and *Pan's Labyrinth*, another set of meanings. As del Toro points out, in the film "[the] fairy world has a grimy edge to it. Even the fairies are

meat eaters.” In the imagery of surrealism the praying mantis is primarily a symbol of the fatal woman, the man-eater, sexual dominatrix. Like the black widow spider she “has come to represent an intimate and persistent link between sex and death, between pleasure and punishment, desire and revenge” (Grosz 278). The mantis and Mercedes become uncanny doubles of each other embodying the original sorceress, fusing sexuality and death. The captain and his men fail to acknowledge Mercedes’ fatal seductiveness as threatening or suspicious; her subversive resistant potentials remain invisible due to the simple sexual objectification deriving from her gender. Paradoxically, it is the casual and contemptuously threatening sexuality Vidal displays towards Mercedes, coupled with his sadism and cruelty towards Ofelia, her mother and the captive young resistance fighter, that allow, or even force Mercedes to become the fatal woman. Mercedes and the mantis-fairy play the role of seemingly subordinate servants, yet both possess the power to lead to either life or death. Rigidly set hierarchical positionalities of gender and power are problematized along with presumably irreversible, uncontrollable processes of mortality and desire. Along similar lines, the surrealists were fascinated by the story of Judith, who seduced Holofernes only to behead him, thus embodying in a human form the mythified female praying mantis’ fatal figure. In the complex symbolic register of del Toro’s film the mantis has an uncanny three-fold role: she is the fairy herald, the symbol of Ofelia’s dilemma and ‘in-between-ness’, but she also represents a repressed and dangerous sexuality doomed to return.

When the mantis, first encountered by Ofelia in the woods, reappears at night in her bedroom, Ofelia shows it the picture of fairies in her book, and it metamorphoses to take on the form of a fairy (though in dark, un-fairy like colours). In his commentary on the film del Toro comments “the bug uses the fairy as a reference”

(2006), to suggest that fairy tales are here summoned to reinforce a fantastic element's reality status. The mantis-fairy leads Ofelia out into the night to the labyrinth, where she meets the faun who initiates her quest. "Altezza" (Highness) he calls her – explaining that she does not really belong to the human world: she is the lost Princess Moanna whose true home is the underworld of long, long ago. To prove that her essence remains pure she must complete three tasks before the moon is full. To guide her quest the faun gives her the *Book of the Crossroads*, full of blank pages.

Like in a Freudian dream, the reality status of all intratextual books is highly ambiguous. The narrative structure of the film leaves open the possibility that the opening fairy story, in which Ofelia becomes gradually involved, is perhaps just a tale called to life by her interpretive imagination while she is reading in the car as she travels into the forest, towards her new unhomely home. The distancing, destabilization and denigration of the story/book is reinforced by her mother's reproachful comment addressed to her reading daughter: "Fairytale – you're a bit too old to be filling your head with such nonsense." However, the role of fantasies is reinstated when adults in the film turn out to be trapped in their own fairy tales, too. Before the fairy leads Ofelia out into the night, as she and her mother lie in the dark of the old mill, listening to the house speak, Carmen announces that she has a surprise for Ofelia. "A book?" Ofelia asks hopefully, but in the morning Carmen will produce new clothes – a costume which is an almost exact replica of Alice's costume in the Tenniel illustrations, and which Carmen tells Ofelia will make her look like a princess for the captain's dinner party. Carmen's fairy tale version of Ofelia is not Alice, the curious adventuress but Alice, the docile and polite Victorian little girl. Even the aggressive, militant and realistic captain has his own fairy tale: the story of his father's death revolving around a broken watch left to show him "how a brave man dies" and which he tends obsessively at night against a backdrop of the mill's

broken cogs and wheels. Not only is he tragically trapped within the machinery of his own paternally-inherited story, but he also turns out to have misread its essence since he unknowingly repairs the watch his father – as he later learns – smashed on the battlefield with the purpose of indicating to his son the exact time he died. Thus he ruins the paternal magical attempt to freeze time for eternity.

The faun's book, where the trials of the quest are to appear, is timelessly blank. We never learn if the story is written in the book, or if it is Ofelia's fantasy writing the story; if the book writes her story, or if the book is the idea of the world which thinks itself? Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in a note to "The Intertwining – The Chiasm" claims

One can say that we perceive the things themselves, that we are the world that thinks itself – or that the world is at the heart of our flesh. In any case, once a body-world relationship is recognized there is a ramification of my body and a ramification of the world and a correspondence between its inside and my outside, between my inside and its outside (136)

Merleau-Ponty's footnote is explored by Lacan in his discussion of the early (4th or 3rd century BCE) Chinese philosophic fable of the butterfly and the sleeping Choang-tsu. In the fable Choang-tsu dreams that he is a butterfly, but while he is the butterfly of the dream:

the idea does not occur to him to wonder whether, when he is Choang-tsu awake, he is not the butterfly that he is dreaming of being. ...But this does not mean that he is captivated by the butterfly – he is a captive butterfly, but captured by nothing, for, in the dream, he is a butterfly for nobody. It is when he is awake that he is Choang-tsu for others, and is caught in their butterfly net. (1981, 76)

Just as in performance music possesses the musician, so the story possesses the storyteller, translating Ofelia (like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*) to the place that Lacan terms “the empire of dream and of desire” (1981, 68). This phenomenological space – Lacan calls it “this between-the-two that opens up for us the apprehension of the unconscious” – carries a Freudian imperative: it is “the space of which the subject has to take possession” (Lacan 1981, 72).

The first stage of Ofelia’s quest is to feed three magic stones to the toad who lives in the forest, at the heart of the dying fig tree and stops it from flourishing. In the stomach of the toad is a golden key and it is Ofelia’s task to retrieve this. The monstrous toad lives in a muddy lair crawling with insects, and spreads slime over everything he touches. Ofelia takes off her new clothes as she enters his lair, stepping out of the grown-up world as she does so. She tricks the toad into swallowing the magic stones, and the toad everts himself, allowing her to pluck the key from his now outside insides. Ofelia comes out of the tree smeared with mud and slime, to find that her new clothes, made to impress her stepfather, have fallen in the mud and are ruined. Order has turned into disorder. Carmen explains to Ofelia that she is disappointed – “And the captain?” asks Ofelia, “He most of all!” replies Carmen. Ofelia’s small secret smile tells us two things: Ofelia’s recognition that the grown-up world of order hides its own secret heart of disorder, and her recognition that the world of dirt is the world where she is fighting for sovereignty – the right to be the Princess Moanna of the quest, the right to be herself, the right to get dirty, the right to be a butterfly for nobody. The captain is order, the fascist regime is order, but the fascist world is about reduction – it is bare life. Life is locked away in the store-room to be doled out to the chant of “This is the daily bread in Franco’s Spain.” The fairy world, like the world of the Republican resistance, is in opposition to this, but this opposition is charged with the returning repressed.

The second task to appear in the Book of the Crossroads takes Ofelia to the chamber of the Pale Man, described by the faun as “a very dangerous place... The thing that slumbers there, it is not human.” Entering the chamber requires Ofelia to create her own doorway, which she does using a stick of chalk given to her by the faun. This evocation of children’s drawing and of games (such as hopscotch) with their many rules and rituals, links us into the rule-bound and sadistic domain of the Pale Man, an eyeless and naked monster, whose skin droops in scrotal folds. The Pale Man sits at a table laden with a sumptuous feast, from which Ofelia has been warned, in traditional fairy-tale fashion, to “eat nothing – absolutely nothing – your life depends on it.” And on a plate in front of him are his own two missing eyeballs – an abject parody of St. Lucy, virgin martyr, patron saint of the blind and the winter solstice, the pre-Christian festival of the longest night, whose eyes were gouged out prior to her execution and are often represented in art on a tray she is holding (she miraculously regained her eyesight just before her death).

The blind Pale Man’s story is also of a highly visual significance: it is seen frescoed on the walls of the chamber, suggestive of Romanesque depictions of the martyrdom of saints and the punishments of the afterlife, or of the story of Gilles de Rais, knight-companion of Jeanne d’Arc and serial killer of small children. The Pale Man is impotent, however, until Ofelia transgresses. As sand trickles through the hourglass counting out her allotted time for the task, Ofelia takes the gold key and is faced by three choices: three small doors that the key might unlock. Her fairy companions firmly indicate the middle door, but Ofelia’s instinct tells her “No.” She opens the left hand door and retrieves an ornate dagger. Ofelia might have survived this expression of a growing assertion of self, but she compounds her transgression by eating two grapes from the laden table. A small transgression – but in fairyland the taboo against eating

is absolute. Behind her back the monster picks up the eyes from the plate and, in a horrific twist on the children's game of 'hide and seek' ("cover your eyes and count to a hundred"), pursues Ofelia with eyes embedded in the palms of his hands (Plate 7).

Freud suggests a "substitutive relation between the eye and the male organ... ..seen to exist in dreams, myths and fantasies" (1985, 352), elaborating this as a theme of castration through his analysis of E.T.A Hoffmann's "The Sandman:" the story of the young boy Nathaniel and the monstrous Coppelius who drives Nathaniel to madness – with its nested fable of the Sandman who throws sand in the eyes of naughty children so that their eyes fall out, whereupon the Sandman gathers up the eyes and takes them to his nest in the moon, where he feeds them to his children who have "beaks like owls."

Del Toro, in his commentary on the film (2006), points out the similarities between the Pale Man in his chamber, presiding over a laden table and outlined by a flickering fireplace, and Captain Vidal at his dinner table – the dinner table from which Ofelia's ruined clothes have banished her. The captain is a parallel of the child-murdering monster, but his uncanniness does not reside in this alone. Like the monstrous Coppelius of Hoffmann's "The Sandman," the captain plays the role described by Freud as the "disturber of love" in Ofelia's life (1985, 353). He has come between her and her mother, she is pressed to allow him to replace her dead father. But like St. Lucy, Ofelia resists the passage from childhood to adulthood, preferring the intellectual uncertainty of 'being in the dark' to a passage to the patriarchal realm of the 'false' father and the aggressively assertive ideology represented by the captain.

Ofelia's disobedience to the fascism of the unconscious in the monster's lair has terrible consequences. Although she escapes, the faun appears to be furiously angry at her failure to follow the rules. The magical charm mandrake-root she has been using to protect her

mother is discovered by Captain Vidal and thrown into the fire by her mother who is yet again unwilling to believe in fairy tales and eventually, (and perhaps consequently) fails to survive the birth of Ofelia's baby brother (the son of the Captain). Ofelia is left, locked away and alone, until the faun gives her a final chance. "Bring your brother to the labyrinth," he commands, and when she does so, her last task is to spill the baby's innocent blood to open the door to her kingdom. Ofelia refuses this quest, is shot by Captain Vidal, and dies. It is *her* innocent blood that drips into the labyrinth and opens the door to a golden world in which she is reunited with her dead father and mother – attaining, in psychoanalytic terms, attachment to her dead parents. Vidal, in his turn, is confronted by Mercedes and the resistance fighters. Faced with the inevitability of his own death, Vidal instructs Mercedes "Tell my son how his father died." Mercedes' devastating response is "He will not even know your name." This accomplishes Vidal's death and silencing as surely as the fairy story gives birth to Ofelia. She has truly completed "the cycle of seeing, seeking, falling, dying, being reborn into new sight" (Campbell 2004, xxix). Although she dies, Ofelia has saved the life of her innocent half-brother who, in consequence, will grow up knowing nothing of his fascist father. The attainment of Ofelia's fairytale sovereignty is the attainment of her humanity: a martyric moral triumph and faerial rebirth, transcending mortality. Thus she moves from the imaginary to the symbolic on her own terms: she becomes a butterfly for nobody.

Notes

1. I am grateful to Anna Kérchy for her careful editing of the manuscript, and wish to thank Jacqueline Furby, Keith Oatley and Susan Small for their generous discussion and suggestions.
2. Jacques Derrida's essay 'The Double Session' (1981, originally published in 1970), Tzvetan Todorov's writing on the fantastic (1970, translated 1975) and Hélène Cixous on fiction and its phantoms

(1976) are all early precedents for a discourse on the literary uncanny which, by the 1990s, had become a major tool in the analysis of both literary and visual culture. Mladen Dolar writes on Lacan and the uncanny for *October* in 1991; Anthony Vidler publishes a key text on architecture and the uncanny in 1992; Hal Foster has a major text addressing Surrealism and the uncanny return of the repressed entitled *Compulsive Beauty* in 1993. At the end of the 1990s and early in the 2000s two journal issues are devoted to contemporary writings on the uncanny: *The Return of the Uncanny*, a special edition of *Paradoxa* in 1997 and, in 2003, *The Uncanny*, special issue of *Image & Narrative*; in 2003 Nicholas Royle publishes *The Uncanny*, a comprehensive overview on the topic.

3. 'Totem and Taboo' appeared in French in 1924, 'The Interpretation of Dreams' in 1926, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' and 'The Ego and the Id' in 1926, 'The Uncanny' in 1933.

4. The link between Surrealism and the fairy tale has been little explored, but is beginning to attract scholarly interest. See for example Catriona McAra's forthcoming doctoral thesis *Re-reading Surrealism Through the Fairy Tale*, Glasgow, 2011.

5. H. D. (Hilda Doolittle) says this about Freud.

6. Caillois's writing on the mantis was first published in the Journal *Minotaure* in 1934, but the theme appears also in *The Necessity of the Mind*, written 1933-35 and in *Le mythe et l'homme*, 1938.

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Illustration

Plate 7: The Pale Man from *Pan's Labyrinth* directed by Guillermo del Toro, 2006. Reprinted with permission of Telecinco/BFI.

SECTION 6: NARRATOLOGICAL NOVELTIES

INTERMEDIAL NARRATOLOGY, REPRESENTATIONS OF RACE AND GENDER

Ida Yoshinaga. A Transmedial Narratological Reading of Racialized and Colonial Sexual Fantasies in the Libertarian Feminist Graphic Novel, Alan Moore and Melinda Gebbie's *Lost Girls*

(W)hen pornography abandons its quality of existential solitude and moves out of the kitsch area of timeless, placeless fantasy and into the real world, then it loses its function of safety valve. It begins to comment on real relations in the real world. (Carter 1978, 19)

A Moral Pornography

I launch this essay with a series of questions to meet with Carter's challenge. As a third-wave feminist writer of anti-colonial horror tales, committed to the transgressive potential of sexual narratives, I ask: How do we identify when an erotic text has crossed over from "safety valve" pornography, into the realm of true subversion in the lived political world? As Carter stressed in her "Polemical Preface" to *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography* (1980, 19), how do we create a *moral pornography*, in contrast with stories deploying sexual expression, exploration, and deviance within hermetically sealed imaginings of bodily pleasure, that do not challenge oppressive social structures?

These questions persist in wake of the awkwardly ethnocentric *Sex and the City 2* (2010), a liberal-feminist sex dramedy designed, according to its producers, as an anti-recession-era, "not realistic,"

fantasy “romp” in “an escapist’s bend” (Michael Patrick King and Sarah Jessica Parker in Schwartz 2010, 31-33). In this Hollywood tentpole, four white, middle-aged Manhattanites jet off to a decadent vacation in the “new Middle East” to flee mundane marital and work tensions of the American upper class. The continuing media power of this tired, privileged, First World, female erotic gaze makes me re-evaluate the graphic novel *Lost Girls* by British comic-book auteur Alan Moore and American radical-feminist underground cartoonist Melinda Gebbie (2006), a small project intended by Moore to elevate underground erotic comics to provocative, progressive art (Vylenz 2003-2006). The ideal antidote to such hyper-consumeristic, solipsistic, “feminist” sexual narratives popular in the United States, *Lost Girls* benefited from Moore’s reputation as a vociferous opponent of British fascism, U.S. and U.K. imperialism, Christian cultural hegemony, and the stifling Western middle-class imaginary, when first serialized in the little-known, independent, horror comic *Taboo* in the early 1990s. *Lost Girls*’ bold central conceit also garnered attention from comic-book fans and lovers of the children’s fantasy genre. The 30-chapter, transgressive homage to three literary heroines of English-language girls’ literature, reworked the whimsical stories of L. Frank Baum’s Dorothy Gale, J.M. Barrie’s Wendy Darling, and Lewis Carroll’s Alice, as realist tales of “actual” women with complicated sexual histories. Moore’s trademark deconstructive storytelling – in which he re-contextualized popular tales of super-beings, pulp and boys’ adventure fiction heroes, monsters, and other fantasy icons, into “real” material conditions – earned *Lost Girls* praise from mainstream journalists. However, a close narratological reading of its contrasting verbal and visual narrative aspects exposes ruptures between this critical historicizing by Moore, on the one hand, and Gebbie’s more universalist approach to erotic illustration, particularly in the area of race, on the other. This essay deploys a transmedial narratological strategy towards multi-

panel sequences in *Lost Girls*, decoding the racial politics of pornographic pleasure within the double narrative of the comics medium, in order to suggest that Western sexualized storytelling pays a certain self-reflexive attention to empire and colonialism.

Empire, Colonialism, and Transmedial Narratology

Historical connections between nineteenth-century British imperialism and the erotic subjectivities of First World white women have been explored in studies of racialized, colonial tropes in Victorian popular fiction, corresponding with the gendered domesticizing of European commodity culture (McClintock 1995); and in analyses of repressive social codes and daily exceptionalist behaviors constituting the discourse between sexuality and power in that period (Foucault 1990). Much like these studies, *Lost Girls*' main (analeptized) storylines transpire in the late 1800s, when modern imperial nation-states jockeyed for power in the reassembling global map of newly occupied territories stretching beyond the coastlines of the known multi-continental world. A sequence in the frame narrative includes the immediate events building towards the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand which started World War I (Ch. 20, 1-8), the first modern war; the ending scene presents a young hotel bellhop lying symbolically in a bombed-out trench after the war's first battle, belly torn open from the attack (Ch. 30, 7-8). Set in that millennial era which ushered in both twentieth-century colonialism and contemporary mass ("trench") warfare, the graphic novel lets slip a sly awareness of how growing international tensions impacted the sexual imagination of middle- and upper-class women of European descent in Britain and the United States. However, with its main story arcs following three white female protagonists in all-white communities, most of the novel's representations of the racial "other" linger on, or beyond, boundaries of verbal narrative.

To engage these subtle racial and colonial tropes, especially in the media of comic books and graphic novels, a finely nuanced narratological reading requires attention not just to written text but its interaction with, and at times even subordination to, visual elements. Rejecting word-based language as the naturalized default mediality underlying much of contemporary narratology theory, transmedial narratology calls for a methodology in which “the study of the realization of narrative meaning in various media provides an opportunity for a critical reexamination and expansion of the analytical vocabulary of narratology” (Ryan 2005, 17). Specifically, transmedial narratology undermines the “speech-act approach to narrative,” that Western hegemonic approach heralded by narratologists such as Genette and Chatman, which privileges text-types cast in the “verbal mold,” such as print literature and even cinema (Ryan 18). Though transmedial narratologists assert that certain narratological concepts travel regardless of platform – the story-versus-discourse distinction; core notions of character, event, and diegesis; and narrative metalepsis, breaking the wall between frame narratives and their embedded tales (Ryan 19) – proponents such as Ryan advocate for a broader, mental and cognitive, rather than word-based and thus causal, re-conceptualization of narrative (26). The move away from explicit causality, towards a less logocentric view of how basic elements can be arranged to constitute story, is an anti-masculinist impulse, suited to evaluating how longtime feminist Gebbie uses visual elements to shape her own stories with, against, or around the language of the highly word- and plot-based Moore in *Lost Girls*. To assess Gebbie and Moore’s twin semiotic systems operating in the production of race in their text, the comic-book medium’s unique narratological qualities must be understood: the interpellation of the implied author within this production process, and how this departs from print literature and other visual media, such as cinema.

The Double Narrative and Implied Authorship in the Comic-Book Medium

Multi-modal platforms marked by high degrees of real reader (/viewer/user) participation in narrative production, and by conflicting or independent channels for the delivery of story – especially heavily fan-powered, audio/visual media such as electronic games, comics, and viral videos – are characterized by implied author hybridity. Specifically, in comic books and graphic novels such as *Lost Girls*, narratologists must understand the signifying practices and cultural codes within the medium’s industry, of the *multiple and distinct*, often *competing, implied authors* produced by a text. The most salient of these are the verbal implied author (the *implied writer*) and the visual implied author (the *implied illustrator*) – i.e. the twin set of signifying practices and cultural codes of story, perceived by real readers as produced by the real writer and by the real illustrator of the comic book. This hybridity of implied authorship results in a *double narrative* in comics and graphic novels – in contrast with, using the cinematic medium as a similar visual platform, film scholar Bordwell’s concept of *narration*, a theory of *unified* style via established aesthetic conventions (in “classical” Hollywood filmmaking) or via popular technical devices that together function as aesthetic systems (in contemporary Western film and TV) (2006, 117-120), and also in contrast with narratologist Chatman’s multiply channeled (1990, 153) *narrator*, that ambiguous, yet *cohesive*, “record of textual invention” in film (83).

Due in part to its serial quality, narrative in the comic-book medium is too dynamically produced to be unified or cohesive. Real readers of continuing series, miniseries, maxiseries, and serialized graphic novels, decode how these multiple implied authors operate with, or against, each other, within a comic-book text, to interpret story. Through community discussions, including active talkback sections of online discussion boards, lettercol(umn)s, and fan

conventions, real readers then provide feedback to comic-book corporations. After the corporations analyze this information to interpellate an implied reader, they separate or re-team the multiple real authors, to generate what management hopes will become viable combinations of implied authors of popular, profitable storylines within that series or other series.

Debates among fandom over whether the verbal or visual narratives constitute the implied authorship of specific comic-book issues/titles, possess economic, political, and legal roots. In the production of late-twentieth-century American comic books – where material conditions often pitted the *real writer*'s narrative choices, against those of his rival creative agent, the *real illustrator*, over which set of artistic decisions represented the implied author – signifying practices emerged to institutionalize the power of the one, and then the other, in the industry discourse of comics auteurship. Two schools of implied authorship emerged from these practices, shaping comics narration. Mainstream superhero comics followed “*Marvel style*” or plot-first production, co-created in the 1960s by Marvel writer Stan Lee and his illustrator partners, whereby the artist first storyboarded the narrative based on a brief plot synopsis by the writer, and the writer later filled dialog, thought balloons, and captions, into these illustrations, a pre-1980s production style which empowered the real illustrator's choices as implied author. This narrative style became typified by non-realistic “action” sequences with superheroes and their foes engaged in unnaturally heavy dialog while fighting (David 2006, 126-27), and other sequences marked by an exaggerated expansion of text time over story time, highlighting a tangible tension between verbal and visual narratives. Second was the *full-script style* of production that required detailed, film-like scripts as “blueprints” for the consequent production of visual narrative. Pioneered by *Lost Girls*' real writer, Alan Moore, this style became the standard protocol for authoring the new American graphic novel

medium in the 1980s, further developed through the millennium by other celebrity writers like Moore. Full-script style production had the real writer churning out a comprehensive script not only with dialog, but meticulous descriptions of visual elements, even original storyboards (O'Neil 2001, 24-31). Privileging the real writer's decisions as implied author, this production style foregrounded the written narrative, subordinating the visual one.

Lost Girls: Verbal Gateways for Visual Narratives on Race

Unusually for graphic novels and Moore's canon especially, production of *Lost Girls* began full-script style, but – due to Gebbie's storytelling strength, her feminist awareness of the masculinist politics of comics production, and her skilled professional negotiations with Moore (whom she later married) – most of it wound up being created Marvel-style (Vylenz 2003-2006), giving the real illustrator equal, if not more, narrative agency, than the real author in the text's production. Close readings of this text thus must consider the real illustrator's intentions, as one avenue for decoding the implied author's contributions to the narrative. To a greater degree than his partnerships with illustrators such as David Lloyd on *V for Vendetta* or Dave Gibbons on *Watchmen*, the notoriously control-oriented Moore shared creative decision-making power with Gebbie on *Lost Girls*.

The project had started as a "high-concept" premise developed during talks between Moore and Gebbie over the under-appreciation of erotica in literature and comic books. As co-collaborators, they conceived a team-up (a comic-book convention where heroes from different titles, or even genres, fight villains or solve crimes together), albeit an erotic one, between three heroines of girls' literature, Dorothy of Oz, Wendy of Neverland, and Alice of Wonderland. Meeting at an Austrian mountain resort in 1913, these now-adult characters – white-trashy, goodtime-girl singleton Dorothy in her

20s; unhappily wed, repressed bourgeois Wendy in her 30s; and jaded lesbian erotica writer Alice in her middle age – take turns sharing flashbacks (the embedded narratives) that recall their carnal experiences, as they perform diverse sex acts upon each other and on other hotel visitors and staff in the frame narrative that takes place between the tale-telling. The frame story presents elaborate musings on the politics of pornography, conducted, in self-conscious and ironic ways, between the three protagonists and hotel guests and staff. For example, the sexually omnivorous hotel manager, Monsieur Rougeur, places around the resort for guests' pleasure, fictional erotic texts from the Victorian and Edwardian eras (starting on Ch. 3, 3). The self-reflexive narrative bestows upon the real reader first-person peeks into these texts; shows characters reading them and responding with sexual acts such as masturbation; depicts other characters arguing over the ethics of the texts' content; and even informs the real reader that some of the stories were authored by the character of Alice herself. The narrative also draws, intertextually, from writing and visual styles of those eras, mimicking famous creators. Moore's trademark style as an implied author included such multiple levels of postmodern meaning.

Though Moore's verbal narrative generally laid out an anti-war, anti-fascist vision of English and American women's erotic encounters, usually with minimal ethnic specificity, he opened other postmodern *gateways* for the visual narrative to portray these female characters explicitly in terms of their raced experiences and racialized imaginaries. However, Gebbie's stylized layouts and illustrations, which carved out the story's powerful beats, prioritized the emotional empowerment of its white female protagonists, a conscious strategy reflecting her libertarian feminist approach to sexual narrative. For example, as some of the embedded stories put the younger versions of Alice and Wendy through violent encounters, including the drugging and molestation of the child Alice by a family friend (Ch. 9,

2-7) and the threat of rape for an adolescent Wendy by a man who had sexually assaulted her boyfriend's younger sister (Ch. 27, 2-7), Gebbie kept the horrifying acts mostly invisible, de-sensationalizing them, instead highlighting the traumatized, confused, and angry reactions of the characters. And for her characters' other sex scenes, the relatively non-violent ones running the gamut of sometimes confusing, but usually consensual, wild acts, Gebbie's attitude was that "anything can be bejeweled; anything can be exquisite; anything if seen with the right eye is miraculous as the see-er sees it" (Vylenz 2003-2006). Her philosophy was to beautify the sensual behavior and emotions of these protagonists, so that the stories function as a "panacea" for the implied (woman) reader, mitigating self-hatred and shame about her sensual desires (Vylenz 2003-2006). In doing so, however, the visual narrative tended to eschew the artistic openings about race left by the verbal one, or interpreted them in gentle, not edgy, ways. Moore's historical messages against empire, his observations about how white women's sexual lives and fantasies reflected colonial relationships, ended up curiously muted in the visual narrative.

To conclude this essay, I will look at two such gateways to race, moments in *Lost Girls* that could have been illustrated differently to highlight the colonial nature of characters and their political positions: (1) rare mentions of people of color in homelands colonized by Britain, hovering on the edges of the visual; and (2) satirical images of exotic islands, or of brown and black sex partners, within the white characters' imagination.

Practically Invisible: People of Color in Colonized Homelands

In a scene from the Victorian era comic book he co-authored with Kevin O'Neill, *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen (Volume II)*, Alan Moore took the iconic white characters Mina Murray from *Dracula* and Alan Quatermain from *King Solomon's*

Mines, and pitted them in a quick political debate against the Indian Captain Nemo of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, over Britain's unethical use of biological weapons of mass destruction against innocent foreigners and citizens (Moore and O'Neill 2003). Moore used this momentary racialization of Murray, Quatermain, and Nemo, to recontextualize their characters and their political positions within the discourse of British imperialism.

Moore brought a similarly anti-colonial sensibility to Alice's "origin" storyline in *Lost Girls*' written text. In the preface, an adult Alice is leaving her family's estate in Pretoria, where wealthy relatives had banished her to avoid the fallout of her scandalous activities as an out-lesbian among upper-class English society. Though the text offers few historical details about British colonialism in South Africa, it shorthands these details into condensed, pointed dialog that make clear the progressive imagination of Moore. About to sell her share of the diamond mine that she has managed for her family before relocating to Austria, Alice is confronted by a British servant protesting the move. When the servant argues, "But...your ladyship, the family...what your brother said about keepin' an imperial *presence* after the Boer War...", Alice snaps, "Imperial *fiddlesticks*! Geoffrey just doesn't want me scandalizing the home counties by escorting some lady-in-waiting to the *opera*" (Ch. 1, 4). The six-panel scene, including this concentrated exchange, sketches a map of the raced, classed, and gendered interlocking matrices of power in Alice's life: it positions Alice's family as part of the white colonial elite in Pretoria; connects her family's ruling-class political-economic status in South Africa to the global production of the diamond industry which exploits black African workers and destabilizes their communities; and suggests that though Alice, as business manager, enjoys relative autonomy and authority in South Africa, she has lost her class position and power in England, due to heterosexist patriarchy which privileges her brother as family leader.

In another instance, to indicate that Alice's white servants from England's working class also wield colonial privilege in South Africa, Moore's racialized dialog closes a scene where two servants have gossiped about their mistress. Out of the blue, one servant orders the other, "You go and see how them niggers are getting on in the yard" (Ch. 1, 3). This surprising punchline to the six-panel scene occurs early in *Lost Girls*, serving as the text's first verbal mention of race and implying that though Alice and the other European and American characters might be sympathetic, they are contextualized right away as white benefactors of empire. Similarly, later in the written text, Moore also momentarily inserts a South African black female character into the embedded narrative. A grown-up Alice recalls to Dorothy and Wendy, "I was there throughout the Boer War, enjoying a long, glorious love affair with my cook, Miriam" (Ch. 29, 7). This emphasizes again Alice's positionality as the white colonizer and employer of a colonized woman of color.

How does the visual narrative handle these moments? Here first it is important to note that, throughout other scenes in *Lost Girls*, Gebbie's style expands upon the written plot in imaginative, elaborate, ways. For example, when the adult Dorothy tells her coming-of-age tale about experiencing her first orgasm as a teenager in Kansas (Ch. 7, 2-7), Gebbie's layout shows large horizontal panels across which the body of the farm girl lies languorously, limbs stretched out, as she masturbates; the tone is one of dreamlike romance, reflected in the way Dorothy's hair flows, and the fabric of her dress spreads, across the page; and the visual moments are drawn out so as to contain relatively few words per panel. (Plate 8) Gebbie, who paints with muted rather than clear-cut lines in this story arc, has said she studied the pleasing textures of illustrations in girls' literature, to portray Dorothy surrounded with things that looked soft and touchable when having her first sexual experience (Vylenz 2003-2006).

By contrast, for the dialog within the adult Alice's narrative, Gebbie does not stretch out the illustrations, blow them up, or explore potentially raced moments with emphatic, interpretive, extended visuals. In the first two exchanges above, that of Alice and her servant, and that between two servants, for instance, the narrative is performed through the gaze of Alice's oval-shaped mirror, which "looks" upon the characters as they talk and perform mundane routines about the mansion. The mirror reflects the servant's movements in combing and styling Alice's hair as Alice sits still in front of her; it also "watches" the two servants take steps to make Alice's bed and clean her bedroom dresser counter. In each exchange, the time that seems to occur between each of the six panels appears to be a few seconds to minutes; this relative equation of text (scene) time to story time reflects a constricted, unimaginative panel-to-panel closure style that comic-book theorist Scott McCloud describes as "transitions featuring a single subject in distinct *action-to-action* progressions," in which a character's physical movements are visually tracked within a relatively short period of time (70). This tight style allows little room for insertion of extraneous elements, which would distract from the subject's actions. Similarly, for the dialog exchange in which Alice mentions her ex-lover to Wendy and Dorothy, the visual narrative offers a mere one-panel illustration of a nude Alice giving oral sex to a naked African woman. Here, the text time that Gebbie devotes to this relationship is but momentary, though the story time is clearly longer and could have resulted in expanded text time.

These perfunctory, linear, literal illustrations do not expand on the racialized openings from the written plot outline, or give new tonal or emotional flavorings to the written script, that Moore provided. As the layout and choice of illustrative subjects focuses only on white characters, the implied reader is not invited to "see" images from Alice's thoughts recalling her daily life in Pretoria as

she negotiates among Africans and various European colonizers; the reader is unwelcome to imagine this protagonist's possibly complex feelings for the colonized place and her position there. As another example, the reader's closest view the nearby "niggers ... in the yard" consists of fragmented black body parts in two panels, seen in a third-person perspective from behind the bodies (Ch. 1, 5): the back of the head, hand, and shoulder of one African slave/servant, and the back of the partial arm of another one, as they take Alice's mirror down in the house prior to the move; and the back of yet another African slave's naked back and arm, as it wraps up the mirror for transportation to Austria, in some shipping dock. Outside of this, the reader sees no more of Alice's black lover, her cook, in her memories or in the house in Pretoria. The visual narrative avoids additional signifiers of these colonial relationships and minimizes, fragments, or entirely hides the black bodies depicted in the verbal narrative.

The Implied (White Female) Reader: Islands of Sexual Imagination

Lost Girls' written plot opens windows for the visual narrative to explore the relationship between the white female sexual *imaginary* and colonial power relations. In a handful of sequences, the plot calls for the illustrations to reveal the protagonists' inner fantasy worlds in racialized ways. Tropes of exotic (is)lands, or of voiceless, priapic, brown and black sex partners, remain in the white characters' minds as they undergo erotic experiences, particularly group sex or lesbian lovemaking. In such scenes, the written text makes space for self-reflexive illustrations, where these stereotypes can be called into account by visual clues that question, contextualize, or discredit them. For example, juxtaposed against the scenes depicting the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand, a parallel sequence runs in which the three protagonists visit an island near their hotel, consume tropical fruit and opium (both Orientalist signifiers of the colonized), and engage in sexual activities with each

other, while wrapped in “a dream of cunt and jungle” (Ch. 20, 4). The written captions had the characters visualize on this island boudoir hummingbirds, orchids, leopards, tattooed headhunters, acacias, cobras, such that “When we came, our spend was Africa, was cannibals, was zebra panic thundering down the pubic veldt” (Ch. 20, 5). Though the visual narrative could take these surrealistic moments and critically expose the political-economic structures behind the cultural production of such Africanist images (for example, by visually connecting them with the adult Alice’s story of her diamond mine in Pretoria), Gebbie’s stylized illustrations temper the political power of this message in ways that are gently whimsical and innocent. After the three women start to make love, which she portrays in a relatively realist style, Gebbie shifts generic gears. The next two panels show the characters’ bodies intertwined with a snake, a masked African man with a “tribal” outfit and a long penis, a leopard, orchids, and foliage, in a vividly colored collage that does not distinguish the reality of the women’s bodies from these other, more surrealistic elements (Ch. 20, 4-5). Like the mask worn by the black man, the protagonists’ eyes are slit-like and blank, or their forms not inked in fully, making them appear as if they are dreams amidst other dreams. The unadulterated romance of this visual sequence functions to level the power relations between the white women characters and the indigenous populations from real island cultures with which these tropical images have been conflated. It also asks the implied reader to equate, without contextualization, white lesbianism with white-black miscegenation (as well as with bestiality). (Plate 9)

In another sequence, the teenage Wendy dons an “Indian maiden” outfit upon the suggestion of her homeless lover Peter, to enhance their sexual encounters with roleplaying and light bondage (Ch. 25, 4-5). With her dark hair braided into ponytails and her childlike features with tiny eyes, drawn in the idealized Art Nouveau

styles of Aubrey Beardsley or Alphonse Mucha, the now-racially ambiguous Wendy becomes unironically Orientalized and believable as a “native.” Wendy’s look lacks the critical grotesqueness of what could have been depicted as a white girl comically or pathetically trying to perform redface. In contrast with this, Moore’s words portray this part of the tale with a critical edge. When the fantasy turns into one of pirates and their captives, as if to mock Wendy’s imaginary and complicate her desire with the shame of white racism, Moore uses a crude tone: “I couldn’t sleep for cabin-girl fancies, the maddest, filthiest things. ... All through the creaking night they’d fuck me, old negro men and little Malay boys” (Ch. 25, 7). The full-page illustration offered by Gebbie as a climax to this fantasy sequence turns Peter into a half-naked Captain Hook who looks like a Chinese or Malaysian man, holding the nude Wendy captive, as do three men of color “pirates” (Ch. 25, 6). This illustration captures some of the anxiety of Moore’s words, but the beauty of the male bodies, with flowing hair and relaxed facial features, speak towards romance and reassurance.

These illustrations suggest that the implied reader of the visual narrative in *Lost Girls* is a white female in middle- and upper-class society, seeking validation against Western patriarchal oppression of her body and sexual desires. Influenced both by classical artists and satirical cartoonists (Vylenz 2003-2006), Gebbie chooses aesthetically pleasant, conservative styles to depict the willing, orgasmic adventures of her white, upper- and middle-class heroines, saving her grotesque and jarring illustrations for the women’s violators and abusers. The protagonists are never drawn in the grotesque, except to reflect the trauma of violence against them or their white female peers. Gebbie interprets female bodies as physically diverse in terms of shape and age, but racially her layouts, style, and choices of subject reflect what Luce Irigaray might call “an imaginary centered a bit too much on one and the same” (103).

Coming of artistic age during the second wave of the American women's movement in the 1960s, well known for its ethnocentrism, Gebbie does not complicate her white female characters with demons of historical specificity.

The visual narrative produced by the implied author, via this real illustrator's choices, insists that while these white female protagonists might be ignorant of other cultures, they are neither racist nor oppressive. Perhaps forgetting Monique Wittig's admonition against the more essentialist of her fellow French feminists that "'Woman' is not each one of us, but the political and ideological formation which negates 'women' (the product of a relation of exploitation)" (151), Gebbie pushes the visual narrative towards the "universal" freedom of white women's sexual spirits, without calling for the liberation of real women – and men – of color from these colonial social structures.

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Illustrations

Plate 8: *Lost Girls* © Alan Moore and Melinda Gebbie. www.topshelfcomix.com. Dorothy undergoing her first orgasm during the tornado. Full page illustration without captions (Ch.5, p.6) Reprinted with permission of Top Shelf Productions.

Plate 9: *Lost Girls* © Alan Moore and Melinda Gebbie. www.topshelfcomix.com. “We lived a thousand years with hummingbirds...” Half-page-sized single panel from the island orgy sequence (Ch.20, p.5) Reprinted with permission of Top Shelf Productions.

NEO-SURREALISM. FEMINIST STYLISTICS

Catriona McAra. (Re-)reading (Post-)Surrealism Through Dorothea Tanning's *Chasm*: The *Femme-enfant* Tears Through the Text

The figure of the child-woman sends fissures through the best organized systems because nothing has been able to subdue or encompass her... (Breton 1945, 64)

The fickle *femme-enfant* or child-woman maintains a curious position in twenty-first century art and literature, echoing her nineteenth and twentieth century manifestations. Though she may discover her roots in the image of the Alice in Wonderlands and child-fairies of Victorian culture, to many she is a ubiquitous surrealist concept. The art historian Whitney Chadwick, and many after her, has suggested that the surrealist *femme-enfant* projects a very negative image, preserving the female muse as naïve and innocent and preventing the female artist from maturing into a fully fledged creative being. She further understands this figure in the history of surrealism as an idealized fantasy figure of an exclusively male imagination, tinged with deviant desires (1990, 33). However, I believe that this is a serious misreading. If we refer to the above quotation by the surrealist movement's leader André Breton then we seem to be presented with a more inspiring image of transgressor; someone who breaks through boundaries and 'tears through texts,' actively enabling her own emancipation. The *femme-enfant* is often a bourgeois child though she rebels against any conservatism from the inside. She is of indeterminate age and ancestry, and is often quite precociously older than her years; a wise child. She straddles childhood and adulthood. Sometimes she is naughty and untamed but she should not be considered as a projection. Rather she is an embodied agent who, I

believe, should be re-appropriated as a little feminist icon spanning across the generations of historical time. It is my contention that Breton's child-woman has therefore previously been misunderstood in scholarship. Incarnations of the *femme-enfant* abound in the surrealist movement including such examples as Meret Oppenheim, Leonora Carrington and Gisele Prassinos, all with rebellious, precocious, character traits. The *femme-enfant* has made more recent appearances in the 'post-surrealist' writings of Angela Carter and photography of Francesca Woodman, but perhaps features most prominently in the art and literature of Dorothea Tanning, from her 1940s surrealist paintings to her early twenty-first century novel.

Born in 1910 Tanning presents an anachronistic history of influence as a second generation surrealist who has outlived many of the so-called 'legacies' of surrealism¹ such as Carter (1940-1992) and Woodman (1958-1981). This is true too of the surrealist associated artist and writer Carrington (b.1917) whom Marina Warner has successfully compared to the work of Carter (1994, 277). A comparison of the fictional treatment of this character between Tanning and Carter therefore seems relevant and timely, especially since the work of both authors involves transitional female protagonists coupled with twisted, neo-gothic narratives of enchantment and disenchantment.² While there exists a rich scholarship on the literature of Carter and Carrington, little critical attention has yet been devoted to Tanning's recent novel *Chasm: A Weekend* (2004). However, in her review the journalist Gaby Wood has aptly referred to *Chasm* as "a magical Sadean [sic] nursery rhyme" (7), a description which raises inevitable comparisons with both Carter's magic realist adult fairy tales and her critical feminist study *The Sadeian Woman* (1979). Following Carter and Wood, one could further read *Chasm* as a pornographic fairy tale.

In order to demonstrate a feminist³ re-reading of surrealism through *Chasm*, I will use Carter to bridge the historical gap by

putting Tanning into an intertextual dialogue with Carter through their shared reference to the Marquis de Sade (1740-1814) and shared motif of the little girl. Many Carter scholars have pointed out the paradoxical nature of using Sade as a “champion of woman’s liberation” (Warner 195). However, Carter employs Sade to argue that sexuality is a socio-historical fiction and that presumed sexual roles are thus easily subverted (1979, 12). In Carter’s reading, Sade endowed women with the rights to their own ‘perverse’ sexualities which do not necessitate prescribed, submissive roles or reproductive functions (1979, 31, 41-42). The little girl on the cusp of her own sexual activation can perhaps be seen as emblematic of this tension (Kang 2002, 91); physically she will soon be able to reproduce but psychically she retains the perverse, inquisitive desires of her childhood. The magical potential of little girls is common to fairy tales such as Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), and Charles Perrault’s “Little Red Riding Hood” (1697), and here I invite the little feminist to perform a violent sadistic tearing action which radically disrupts her presumed historical ‘place.’ This tearing is both a metaphorical rupturing of her hymen and a literal scrapping of convention. (Mieke Bal, meanwhile, offers the more “gender neutral” metaphor of the navel as the scar which serves as a “trace” of prior attachment to the mother (1991, 21-23)). Sade and the *femme-enfant* are both well acknowledged as heroes of surrealism, the former often mentioned by Breton as a key proto-surrealist (1924, 26). The disruptive heroics of both figures appear to have continued into postmodernism or what might be more specifically understood in this paper as ‘post-surrealism.’

Like Tanning, Carter also devotes serious attention to the *femme-enfant* who similarly functions as a recurrent motif and narrative device, be it Nora or Dora Chance in *Wise Children* (1991), Annabel in *Love* (1971), Melanie in *The Magic Toyshop* (1967), Juliette in *The Sadeian Woman* or indeed any number of Carter’s

fairy tale heroines, particularly the protagonist in “The Bloody Chamber” (1979). Both Carter and Tanning offer us an embodied, subjective take on this little girl, and I would argue that an appropriation of the childhood self (Lumbard 1981, 52) (McAra 2010, 7) is also true for Carter who seemed to deeply empathize and identify with her young female characters. Again this figure is represented with a violent streak. As an ‘insider’ she is marshalled to tear through the bourgeois conventions of family history. She is not a pretty or passive object but rather a destructive avatar. Carter knowingly quotes Sigmund Freud: “the aggressive impulses of little girls leave nothing to be desired” (1979, 135). But this is effectively a double negative; if their lack of desire is desirable then we desire nothing, which is, of course, not strictly true. Here their aggression is deeply desirable. Through the *femme-enfant* Soo Y. Kang points out that Tanning seems to embody Hélène Cixous’s notion of *écriture féminine* and her command that “woman must put herself into the text” (Cixous 875, Kang 102). If we subscribe to the Lacanian formula that language, and by extension writing, are the domain of the Father, then feminists transgress this law through an appropriation of the body to ‘speak’ the female. Tanning’s fleshy and turbulent paintings from the mid 1950s onwards,⁴ such as *Tempête en jaune* (*The Yellow Tempest*) (1956), seem to further embody *écriture féminine* on a monstrous, macrocosmic scale. This is not to overlook the spasmodic desert chasm in the novel itself. Cixous’s notion of “white writing” (881), meanwhile, can be found metaphorically in the overflow of oozing, white fluids, and in the narrative flow of the matriarchal, genealogical narrative which I will discuss. To reiterate, I read this *femme-enfant* as a highly transgressive character who tears through the bourgeois text prescribed for her, breaking with conventional readings. In doing so, she simultaneously constructs her own subversive narrative from the inside outwards. In Carter’s Sadeian terms the child-woman is more Juliette than Justine, and she

is always liminal. One point I do agree with Chadwick on, therefore, is that Tanning's "novel can be read as a kind of revenge of the *femme-enfant*" (186).

The rest of my paper aims to reclaim the *femme-enfant* through discussion of her role in Tanning's 2004 novel *Chasm: A Weekend*, again like much of Carter's work, (re)published by the feminist publishing house Virago. I trace the literary development of the novel in order to position it as a re-reading of (post)surrealism from a twenty-first century perspective, and consider the narrative structure and the position of the child-woman Destina in relation to this structure. Indeed I will argue that the *femme-enfant* tears through the narrative structure from within. I will also consider a few examples of Tanning's visual work which I believe can be 'read' through *Chasm*, not merely as illustrations but as evidence of an intermedial dialogue between her (post)surrealist literary and visual narratives.

Tanning's novel has an interesting history of development, first published in *Zero* magazine in 1949, before being privately published under the title of *Abyss* by Standard Editions in 1977, thus making it contemporaneous with many of Carter's fictional and theoretical writings. As Barry Schwabsky has recently noted: "[t]hat book, whose title presages the later one, of which might be a sort of first draft, seems to have been quietly dropped from Tanning's official history, but it suggests that her literary inclination is of long standing" (4).

Following Tanning's "Author's Note" (1977, i), and as the journalist Jane Kramer confirms, the manuscript was originally written as early as 1947 as a story Tanning told to her husband Max Ernst on trips through the Arizonian Desert:

[Tanning] confessed to having begun *Chasm* sixty years ago, "for Max." She told this story: She and Max were taking a trip

through the desert, and hoping to amuse him, she began to make up stories, jotting them down in a notebook she always carried. Every night, she would read aloud to him – the best parts, whatever was diverting and sexy and “unusual” – and of course he was hooked, listening. He kept asking, “What happens next?” And she kept saying, “Tomorrow!” Like Scheherazade. (2004, 59)

Kramer’s allusion of Tanning the storyteller to the fictional character Scheherazade is perhaps useful when considering the narrative structure of *Chasm*. Scheherazade, the *femme-enfant* protagonist storyteller from the *One Thousand and One Nights* cycle of Arabian fairy tales (Irwin 2010, 7), serves as the key device in the narrative structuring of the frame-tale. Similarly in *Chasm* the key child-woman, suggestively named Destina, seems to control the destiny or fate of the narrative structure from the very beginning. The opening chapter “Destina Descending” is worth dwelling upon further as a genealogical prologue charting all the Destinias from 1682 through history to the present moment of the rest of the novel set in 1965. Like in a fairy tale we quickly learn that a seventeenth century couple were so in love that the husband named his daughter after his wife Destina, and “declared that no female descendant of theirs should ever be called otherwise” (7). Unlike traditional family trees which chart the surname of the male from generation to generation, in Tanning’s story it is the female first name which is privileged thus constructing what could be read as a feminist narrative. It is notable that this fairy-tale prelude is not included in *Abyss* but seems to have been a later narrative addition. I would suggest this may have been because by the time Tanning came to rewrite *Chasm*, between 1977 and 2004, another generation had passed. As Schwabsky claims, Tanning’s readers and viewers “are now old enough to be [her] great-grandchildren” (6). A century old on 25 August 2010, Tanning is perhaps more able to identify with the grand matriarchal character in

her novel than the little girls in her earlier paintings, though I would argue that the two characters seem to speak to each other across the historical divide. Surrealism is once again brought into the twenty-first century through its legacy. Reminiscent of George MacDonald's fairy tale "The Princess and the Goblin" (1872), in Tanning's novel there is a bond between great-grandmother and grand-daughter which we find re-established towards the end after the metaphorical chasm has been transgressed and the false father Raoul Meridian has been toppled. The child and her great-grandmother, the mysterious Baroness, another genealogical Destina, stand on either side of what Leslie Fiedler labels "sexual maturity," i.e. the metaphorical chasm containing the sexual perversions of the other characters (1973, xii). Both grandmother and grandchild are Destinias who trump their shady history of incest and taboo. Destina stands as a representation of woman, while the genealogical prelude re-presents a history of feminist struggles.

Though the "absurdly doll-like" (17) Destina at the magical age of seven is physically young, she stands for a distant past. Marina Warner builds an intriguing image of the Sibyl which could perhaps also serve as an adequate description for Destina's role in the narrative:

The Sibyl, as a cross-cultural symbol, necessarily denies historical difference; her words, originating in the past, apply to the rolling present whenever it occurs; however, the perceived facts of her roots in that distant past adds weight to her message precisely because it is free of the historical context in which she uttered it; she was not fettered by her historical time and place but could transcend it with her visionary gifts. In their very identity as truth-tellers, the Sibyls of tradition cancel connections to history – this is crucial in their contributions to the composite character of the female narrator and the inventor of future fictions (1994, 71).

Warner further captures the iconography of the Sibyl, accompanied by a “defining attribute which could also act as a mnemonic” (73), relevant to Tanning’s literary image of Destina and her memory box, both a ‘magical object’ and compact metaphor, in the fourth chapter of *Chasm* (56-58). Here Warner enters into a scholarly dialogue on curiosity with Carter and later the film theorist Laura Mulvey. With reference to Warner’s research, as well as Carter’s retelling of “Bluebeard,” Mulvey invokes the myth of Pandora to conjure a feminist re-reading of the female figure with her casket accoutrement. For Mulvey, the box represents knowledge and the transgressive curiosity in opening it acts out “the desire to *know* rather than the desire to see, an epistemophilia” (*my emphasis*, 59). For Carter, a similar image appears when her curious protagonist is driven to open her husband’s secret door. The traditional image of troublesome Pandora and the moralistic end of the story found in Perrault’s version of “Bluebeard” are subverted by Mulvey and Carter. This time the *male* figures are highlighted for their wrongdoings and curiosity is reappropriated as a positive, feminist trait. This feminist quest for knowledge is further represented by Tanning through both Destinias, the seven year old and the seventy-five year old with her ‘second sight,’ as two Sibyls. Like Pandora’s box, a Russian doll is perhaps an apt metaphor for this type of embedded, matriarchal narrative and concertina of ideas. Like Pandora, a Russian doll’s “appearance disassembles” (Mulvey 1996, 55) and disassembles when one is provoked by a curious urge to see what is hidden inside, or, in more literal, genealogical terms, when one is curious to know where they came from. Furthermore, Elizabeth Wanning Harries uses a Russian doll as an analogy for the complex narrative structures of seventeenth century female storytellers such as Madame d’Aulnoy (2001, 107), whom, incidentally, we know Tanning read as a young girl. (Wood 2004, 7).

Such narrative complexity and such feminist perspectives are not represented in male-authored tales by d'Aulnoy's contemporary Perrault, though are to a much greater extent in Carroll's nineteenth century *Alice*.

Following the genealogical prelude, the rest of *Chasm: A Weekend* is set in a desert fortress called Windcote owned by the perverted false father Raoul Meridian. Nadine Coussey, a socialite and budding explorer, and her fiancé Albert Exodus,⁵ a painter, are invited along with numerous other guests for a weekend of games and orgiastic pleasures in this Sadeian castle. The little girl Destina Meridian, supposedly Meridian's daughter, also lives in this mansion, and makes friends with Albert, confiding in him the secret of her imaginary friend. Meanwhile, Meridian has particularly grand, Sadeian plans in store for Nadine. In an attempt to save her from Meridian's perverted spell, Albert tempts her out to the nearby canyon with the hope of seeing Destina's not-so-imaginary friend the Lion. However, disaster strikes when Albert falls off a cliff and is engorged by the desert chasm, while the vain Nadine falls prey to this Lion who tears off her face. Meanwhile at Windcote, the little girl's governess Nelly murders Meridian with an ice-pick, meaning that Destina can be reunited with her great grandmother: the mysterious Baroness. So, though published outside the movements' historical period, there seems to be a roll call of stock surrealist characters not to mention a genealogically layered narrative which is consistent with surrealism's emphasis on underlying, often unconscious, narratives. As the Baroness wisely reminds us: "[t]he jungle is out there too, under the desert's memory" (71). The magic of the fairy tale and fantasy genres are subtly hinted at throughout Tanning's novel in a similar manner to Carter's magic realism. If one compares *Chasm* with Carter's story "The Bloody Chamber" then numerous narrative formations begin to unfold particularly the narrative of curiosity.

One of Tanning's earliest and most celebrated surrealist paintings *Jeux d'Enfants* (*Children's Games*) (1942) (Plate 10) seems to echo and effectively visualize Destina's narrative in *Chasm*. Here the little *femme-enfants* tear down the bourgeois interior, to reveal a monstrous female adult body beneath the polite surface. As in *Chasm* where Destina's microcosmic memory box and macrocosmic, desert chasm are linked through a vagina-like synecdoche, in *Jeux d'Enfants* Tanning builds an intense dialectic between inside and outside, and between pre and post-pubescent bodies. Again the liminality of the child-woman is highlighted. Chadwick (1985, 138), Salomon Grimberg (1999, 58), and, more recently, the art historian Amy Lyford have variously described the activity in *Jeux d'Enfants* as a "critique [...] of polite society" (2009, 11). Tearing the wallpaper metaphorically suggests a tearing out of the text prescribed for them. Furthermore, the modernist art historian Hal Foster helpfully shows how the tearing of the psychic "screen" in art reveals something "obscene, abject or traumatic" in Lacanian terms (1996, 113). Mulvey further unlocks the dialectics of interior and exterior by theoretically opening Pandora's box. Mulvey re-reads the myth allegorically to assert that: "Pandora's curiosity acts out a transgressive desire to see inside her own surface or exterior, into the side of the female body metaphorically represented by the box and its attendant horrors" (61).

In *Chasm* Destina's memory box perhaps serves as another metaphor for her distressed family past; a genealogy containing something rotten and cursed. Julia Kristeva's notion of the maternal abject, as both an act of revulsion (etymologically from the Latin *revulsio* meaning 'to tear away') as well as a phantasmatic substance, also seems present here (1982, 1-2) (Foster 114). The nostalgia of the traditional family heirloom is twisted when Destina shows her memory box to Albert as an act of trust, and he finds it contains the abject and horrific curiosities which the child has collected from the

desert; the most recent addition to her collection being a disembodied eye that the Lion gave her from his most recent kill. The gift has the Bataillean flavour that Carter was interested in. Destina's curious collection echoes the 'globular' motifs in Georges Bataille's surrealist novel of 1928 *Histoire de l'Oeil* (*The Story of the Eye*), when the contents of the box becomes slippery in their abject classification, and exemplify the 'non-taxonomy' which Bataille called the "informe" (Krauss 1985, 64). They remind one of the horrific, exquisite corpses awaiting the young girl in Carter's "The Bloody Chamber" when her irrepressible curiosity prompts her to unlock her husband's forbidden door and enter his secret chamber. Curiously venturing into the "little girl's rooms" (48) at Windcote in the first place, Albert is immediately aware that: "There was nowhere anything to suggest that this was the house of a child. No dolls, no toys, no diminutive furniture of the sort that generally delights the heart of a little girl" (55).

Perhaps comparable to the Bluebeard's secret chamber and Tanning's earlier visual narratives *Children's Games* and *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* (1943), this description of Destina's attic nursery suggests a forbidden realm of anti-childhood, one that has been already psychically damaged in some way. Here all the toys are absent. There is only an accumulation of discarded, broken furniture, and other 'abjects' to play with, such as "bits of fur, the claws and tails of gila monsters, skins of reptiles, spotted eggs, even single eyes preserved in tiny jars" (58) not to forget the mattery eye, neither subjects nor objects (Kristeva 1), but ones which must be collected and given some sort of significance only through being secretly housed in their box. In doing so Destina makes some attempt towards re-enchantment.

In knowingly childish behaviour, Destina treats Albert as a curious intruder before she accepts him as a friend. After the initial disenchantment of finding himself in her anti-nursery, she childishly

forces Albert to eat her child-sized dinner, reversing the command of authority by threatening to tell her father on him if he refuses. Much is made of such “blackmail” (56) until he finally succumbs. As in the logic of the fairy tale, Albert is enchanted or indeed re-enchanted at this point by his consumption of the magical food. Thus he becomes enchanted by Destina only to become finally disenchanted again when he is lured by her into the desert canyon and falls from a cliff to his undeserved gory death. Thus the moralistic fate prescribed for the curious little girl is again subverted when the *adult male* rather than the little girl is ‘swallowed up’ by a representation of the monstrous female ‘vagina dentata;’ the red rock desert chasm is itself a spasmodic rupture in the landscape.

Meanwhile the “sultanic” (20) authority figure Raoul Meridian, poses as a Bluebeard-type character with his ominous “laboratory” (25) from which Tanning as author keeps us locked out, and we as readers are only left to imagine the Sadeian goings on inside. Here Tanning employs a surrealistic collage strategy to collapse a series of patriarchal spaces; the harem, the secret chamber and the mad scientist’s laboratory. Meridian’s laboratory is a realm of patriarchal dominance, a domain of adult play, and, in terms of narrative revelation, Tanning prefers to unlock the magical, diminutive realm of the child-woman’s secret space rather than that of the patriarch. Via Destina, Tanning accepts the unknowable in favour of something more fascinatingly feminine. Described as a “failed collage” (24), Meridian’s sexuality is also deeply problematic; though he aspires to the sexual freedom of Sadism, his perversion is more classifiable under the trope of Freudian fetishism, where the male child chooses a substitute object, often a shoe or hair, to protect himself against the supposed threat of castration represented by the sight of the mother’s genitalia (1961, 155). Mulvey’s epistemophilia offers an alternative logic for the little girl, curiosity as more explorative and sensorial than fetishistic sight alone. While

Meridian's penchant for blonde skeins of hair like Nadine's is a classic example of the Freudian fetish, the eye Destina plays with represents the perfect anti-fetish; removed from its bearer's socket it becomes deeply abject and squelchy in the little girl's hand. The disembodied eye functions as a sub-object which interrogates the very mechanics of vision, and thus, by metonymic extension, the masculine narrative of the Freudian fetish. Both characters' objects are severed and purloined from another's body but each holds a divergent psychoanalytic association. In *Chasm* the feminine option seems to trump that of the masculine.

Like Meridian's laboratory, Bluebeard's 'bloody chamber', as Carter calls it, can be read psychoanalytically as an allegory for the loss of virginity, the *femme-enfant's* curiosity leading to the shocking gain of sexual knowledge. Indeed I would argue, after Mulvey, that this treasure chest metaphor highlights the secretive quality of feminine transgression and apotheosizes Pandora as feminist heroine in her own attainment of sexual knowledge, driven by her instinctual female curiosity to open the box: to activate the loss of her *own* virginity as a metonymic announcement of the epistemophilic attainment of her own knowledge. In "The Bloody Chamber" the little key is made abject and 'dirty' when bloodied as evidence of a transgression that has taken place. It is the symbolic evidence of broken hymen but more importantly evidence that the *femme-enfant* has transgressed masculine, bourgeois authority and unlocked *her own* narrative, gaining sexual autonomy. She becomes the transgressive, narrative device who can unlock the doors to her deepest desires. Indeed the many *femme-enfants* in Tanning's paintings tend to appear alongside several doors tempting their innate curiosity. In two works, a painting called *Fatala* (1947) and the first illustration from her lithograph book *The Seven Spectral Perils* (1949-50), the transitional female figure is represented as independently walking into the book, curiously stepping into

narrative. Like Tanning the writer, the character of the *femme-enfant* transgresses the real world as she tears into the literary one, feeling her way into knowledge guided by curiosity (McAra, 12). She depicts the precocious little girl *entering* knowledge. In her fairy tale-like autobiography, Tanning describes her own adolescent immersion in her local library where the racier novels would be conveniently marked with a red pen, “thus,” she says, “I had no difficulty in finding the best books” (2001, 27). In “The Bloody Chamber” Carter’s protagonist may yawn at the prophetic titles such as “The Secret of Pandora’s Box” but then she discovers her husband’s secret collection of pornography where a passage from Freud’s “Dora Analysis” (1901/1905) comes to mind:

children never read about forbidden subjects in an encyclopaedia calmly. They do it in fear and trembling with an uneasy look over their shoulder to see if someone may be coming. Parents are very much in the way while reading of this kind is going on (1977, 140).

Indeed Carter’s protagonist is soon caught in the act of such reading by her super-ego type husband, as he exclaims: “Have the nasty pictures scared Baby? Baby mustn’t learn to play with grown-ups’ toys until she’s learned how to handle them, must she?” (1979, 13)

But it has been argued that such reading is necessary for the bourgeois child in her personal quest for sexual instruction (Gay 117). Like Freud’s hysteric patient ‘Dora’ (Ida Bauer) and her rebellious reading of the writings of Paolo Mantegazza, the young “Dottie Tanning” transgressed the librarian’s censorship via her red marked reading choices (2001, 27, 291). The redness of the ink, barring the literary content within, is again metaphorically suggestive

of a tearing of the hymen or activating of the menstrual cycle as an attainment of knowledge through experience.

In both Carter and Tanning's curious driven narratives, this tearing through the text eventually results in the protagonists gaining the knowledge of their own narrative histories. *Chasm* begins with a genealogical chapter "Destina Descending" and ends with the current Destina learning the secrets of her ancestors from her great-grandmother, the Baroness, but only after the heterosexual adult couple Albert and Nadine and the perverted false father Raoul have all been torn to shreds. Nadine may exhibit many characteristics of the precious *femme-enfant* but she is foolish, and outside the magical safe-guard of childhood she ultimately meets a gruesome end. Nadine is finally pinned down whereas the true *femme-enfant*, Destina, like all Tanning's painterly representations, cannot be (Kang 103). In Carter's "The Bloody Chamber" the girl inevitably comes across the bodies of her husband's former wives, those-who-have-come-before, all laid out before her as surrealistic exquisite corpses. The remains of the countess, the artist's model and the opera singer each display visible evidence of the causes of their own deaths, be it strangled, strung-up or encased in an Iron Maiden. Carter's protagonist is saved from a similar fate, in her case the threat of decapitation, by her intuitive mother who rides in to save her at the last minute. Like Scheherazades, both Carter and Tanning's protagonists discover the narrative series of those-who-have-come-before, and both are rescued via matriarchal salvation. Pandora's box has been opened and the Russian dolls have been laid out. Each girl is inserted into history but radically tears through its continuation from within, thus preserving her sense of self in the present tense. However, though strict lineage can be torn out of, feminist inheritance (in my case: Cixous, Kristeva, and Mulvey) must be acknowledged for intellectual nourishment. The female reproductive capacity, both literally

maternal and intellectually referential, therefore turns out to be as important as Sade's perverse teachings.

Both Dorothea Tanning and Angela Carter appropriate the contradictory *femme-enfant* as a surrealist narrative device that curiously tears through her own self-image with the help of an ancestral, feminist history. However, this sadistic action is more revelatory than it is provocative. It is a sudden burst of knowledge, an orgasmic, transgressive, epistemophilic, tearing which declares the split second moment of the present (Kang 100). Rhyming with spasm, *Chasm* also opens up the eighty year history of surrealism and its narratives for questioning. The novel speaks to her surrealist visual narratives across the divide. And, as with any curious, young scholar, it re-presents the *femme-enfant* on a quest to uncover her own feminist narratives in relation to history.

Notes

1. The 'legacies' of surrealism continue to be investigated by the Centre for the Study of Surrealism and Its Legacies based at University of Manchester, University of Essex and Tate, <<http://www.surrealismcentre.ac.uk/>> Retrieved: 23/04/2010

2. Though we know Angela Carter was interested in surrealist art and literature, I currently have no evidence that Tanning reads Carter so my comparison is purely interpretative. However, *Chasm: A Weekend* has been interestingly described by an anonymous reviewer as "a surrealist novel in the vein of Angela Carter" <<http://www.amazon.com/Chasm-Dorothea-Tanning/dp/158567584>> Retrieved: 2/05/2010

3. It is probably worth clarifying that Dorothea Tanning has never considered herself a feminist. Jane Kramer quotes Tanning on feminism: "disgusting" (2004, 42). However, my understanding of the feminist project is that it is both ongoing and concerned the goal of equality between the sexes. I am inclined to agree with Tanning that such 'divorcing' of female Surrealists from their male counterparts "unnecessarily isolate and perpetuate their 'exile'"

(Tanning in Chadwick 1985, 12). While Tanning's hesitation to participate in clichéd 'women artist' exhibitions and publications is entirely understandable, I believe that she would find an empathic perspective in Angela Carter's creative third-wave feminist stance.

4. Elsewhere I conceptualize such "fleshy" works as an "undoing of Alice" (McAra, 5, 19). Here one might note the use of the dual French concepts of the *femme-enfant* and *écriture féminine*, no doubt due to the influence of French surrealism and Tanning's absorption of French literary culture from the late 1940s to the late 1970s. One should also appreciate the fact that Tanning was acquainted with Jacques Lacan whilst in France in the 1950s. For an excellent Lacanian reading of Tanning's visual work which also incorporates Cixous see Kang 2002.

5. It is interesting to note that Carter also gave her characters significant names, particularly Nora and Dora Chance and Melchior Hazard in her novel *Wise Children* (1991) (Kérchy 2008, 70, 245, 263). The emphasis on the Chance dynasty in this last novel by Carter is also echoed by "Destina Descending" in Tanning's *Chasm*, as are the significant ages of seven, seventy-five and one hundred (Kérchy 258). Whether Tanning is aware of Carter and vice versa is again purely speculative but they certainly chime in terms of a post-modern, post-surrealist, undeniably *feminist* rewriting of traditional patriarchal genealogy.

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Illustration

Plate 10: Dorothea Tanning. *Children's Games*, 1942. Oil on canvas. 11 x 7 1/16 in. Collection Dr. Salomon Grimberg, Dallas. Reprinted with permission of The Dorothea Tanning Collection & Archive.

AFFECTIVE NARRATOLOGY AND THE EMOTIONAL POLITICS OF READING

Caroline Webb. Dancing in Worn Slippers: Narration, Affect, and Subversion in Jeanette Winterson's "Story of the Twelve Dancing Princesses"

The fairy tale has been a popular subject for contemporary revision from the 'Fractured Fairytales' of the 1960s television children's cartoon *Rocky and Bullwinkle* to Disney musicals and James Finn Garner's *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories*. Due to its perceived significance within patriarchal western culture, the European fairy tale has been of especial interest to feminists. Attempts to rewrite classic French and German fairy tales in order to highlight and/or subvert their implicit messages about gender roles appeared in Jack Zipes' ground-breaking 1986 collection of creative and critical responses to the fairy tale, *Don't Bet on the Prince: Contemporary Feminist/Fairy Tales in North America and England*. Angela Carter's 1979 volume of rewritten tales, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, has been a particular focus of critical attention: Carter's often shocking revisions of well-known French and German fairy tales radically reimagine female sexuality and agency through a repositioning of the female protagonist, especially, though not always, as narrator. Elsewhere I have discussed the linguistic strategies by which Carter evokes sensory as well as emotional, and thereby intellectual, responses (see Webb 2009). In this essay I continue this analysis of feminist evocations of affect: I examine how another English postmodernist writer, novelist Jeanette Winterson, in *Sexing the Cherry* (1989) extends the feminist critique of the patriarchal fairy tale displayed in Zipes' and Carter's volumes through the deployment of narrative voice in her "Story of the Twelve Dancing Princesses," an ending-after-the-ending of the German fairy tale "The Twelve Dancing Princesses." In Winterson's "Story" Carter's message of sociocultural critique is recalled and

recast, as she pushes “beyond the ending” of heterosexual romance (see DuPlessis 1985).¹ Winterson’s apparently simple and unadorned style superficially relates more closely to the traditional renditions of fairy tales for children than to Carter’s lush extravagant prose. However, as I shall demonstrate, Winterson’s shifts in narrative voice in themselves evoke unexpected responses in the reader, compelling a re-evaluation of the patriarchal assumptions behind the European fairy tale.

My approach to Winterson’s work in this essay may be described as feminist affective narratology: I examine how her deployment of allusion and especially of narrative voice evoke particular patterns of affective response in the reader. Robyn R. Warhol’s *Having a Good Cry: Effeminate Reading and Popular Culture Forms* (2003) emphasises somatic responses to reading beyond the sexual, and discusses how popular-cultural works evoke predictable patterns of feeling that mark the reading body; as Warhol explains, this approach, which draws on Victorian accounts of feeling as (in contemporary terms) performative, resonates with postmodernist accounts of the enculturated body (15). As I demonstrate here, Jeanette Winterson’s narrative techniques in *Sexing the Cherry* do not so much reinscribe predictable patterns of response as radically rewrite them: Winterson’s “Story” produces affective reactions in surprising ways that encourage a conscious revisiting of traditional popular forms such as the fairy tale, interrogating what Warhol would call their “technologies of affect” (7). My analysis thus extends contemporary narratology and highlights the feminist implications of Winterson’s postmodern approach to narration.

In Winterson’s revisiting of the story “The Twelve Dancing Princesses,” the Grimms’ “happy ending,” in which the hero discovers the secret of the princesses’ worn-out slippers and marries the eldest, is recast many times over: Winterson’s stories of the princesses’ lives subsequent to that ending refute the notion that

heterosexual marriage provides closure to the female story and deny its value in female experience. As Susan Watkins observes, "In revising these narratives Winterson reminds us of the compulsory nature of heterosexuality in fiction, where for women characters marriage and conclusion are usually synonymous" (156). Further, as I shall demonstrate, the multiplicity of Winterson's narrative, with its deployment of first- as well as third-person narration, compels the reader to respond to the characters of her "Story of the Twelve Dancing Princesses" not as the static role-players of most traditional tales but as individuals with their own idiosyncratic and transgressive desires. The narrators' accounts of their experiences evoke reactions such as shock and laughter at odds with our expectations of reactions both to and within tales. Thus this narrative process disturbingly reconfigures the reader's traditional relationship to the protagonists of fairy tales.

Sexing the Cherry represents among other things an experiment in narrative voice that extends that in Winterson's preceding novel, *The Passion* (1987). Critics have observed in particular the powerful feminist image presented in the grotesque Dog Woman, one of the two major narrators of *Sexing the Cherry*, whose gigantic size and literal mind enable her to consume men (if inadvertently) and to mutilate and destroy hypocritical male Puritans,² and the interrogation of subjectivity involved both in its narrative method and in the musings of the other major narrator, the explorer Jordan.³ Most of *Sexing the Cherry* is, like *The Passion*, structured as a dual narrative. Unlike in *The Passion*, however, that narration is transformed late in the text, when the action alternates between the original seventeenth-century setting and a modern one and the narrator-protagonists are correspondingly altered, allowing the interpretive possibilities that they are reincarnated, or projected forward, or even that the fantastic characters of the seventeenth-century narrative are the hallucinatory fantasies of the apparently

realistic modern protagonists.⁴ The framework of *Sexing the Cherry* is thus postmodernist: Bente Gade has demonstrated how Winterson here “explores realms of identity that are bared when the coherent subject or the unified ‘I’ is dismantled” (30).

But the double narration is also interrupted by other voices. The Dog Woman’s encounters with the world are direct and frequently incorporate dialogue; more distinctively, Jordan’s reflections include visions of other places and other lives that involve the displacement of his perspective by that of the people (generally women) whom he encounters. This is most visibly the case with the “Story of the Twelve Dancing Princesses,” of whom he first meets eleven now again living together, which is marked off within the text by its own illustrated title page and by the repeated small sketch of a flying princess that begins each of their brief narratives. The double monologue thus becomes a polylogue, but its sequential arrangement invites the reader to hear each voice as separate, even solitary, an effect that heightens the novel’s emphasis on interiority. Only rarely are we reminded that the narratives of the princesses have an auditor – most significantly in the tale of the second princess, as I shall demonstrate.

Whereas most recent rewrites of fairy tales begin at or before the beginning of the events in the original tale, Winterson’s “Story of the Twelve Dancing Princesses” begins after the ending of the traditional versions of the tale: a version of the tale itself appears somewhat later in the novel, told by the missing twelfth princess, with implications for which I do not have space here.⁵ The “Story” actually comprises the subsequent individual stories of the princesses, told from their points of view and nearly all in the first person; as Patricia Brooke comments of Angela Carter, the Story thus “reject[s] the romantic and modern authoritative voice in favour of [a] multiplicity of voices” (67), although in this case they are the voices not of the forgotten redactors of folktales, nurses and old wives, but

of the characters themselves. According to the eldest, the clever prince who (in some versions) had found their secret “had eleven brothers and we were all given in marriage, one to each brother, and as it says lived happily ever after. We did, but not with our husbands” (Winterson 1989, 48). In one terse sentence Winterson undercuts the “happy ever after” ending of the traditional tale; she thus abruptly challenges the structures that underpin it.

Across the “Story,” Winterson rejects the heterosexual model of marriage. In all of the princesses’ tales heterosexual marriage is disrupted in some way – “we had all . . . parted from the glorious princes” (48) – and in several lesbianism is explicitly presented as an alternative expression of female autonomy. The fifth princess, in probably the most widely critically evoked of the tales,⁶ retells the story of Rapunzel, apparently in the third person. In her version, the prince had cross-dressed in order to gain entry to the tower, throw out Rapunzel’s female lover, and abduct Rapunzel: “he carried her down the rope he had brought with him and forced her to watch while he blinded her broken lover in a field of thorns. After that they lived happily ever after, of course” (52).⁷ The next paragraph, however, startlingly reports “As for me, my body healed, but my eyes never did,” abruptly transforming our relationship to the tale as we realise that the narrator herself was the “witch” with whom Rapunzel was in love (52). The twist in the Rapunzel story already supplied by the revelation that Rapunzel’s traditional captor was in fact her lover has forced us to re-evaluate the heterosexual assumptions of the tale; that reaction is further complicated by our direct confrontation with the witch/lover as the dispassionate narrator whose version has the authenticity of experience, and whose laconic account of her injuries inspires a sympathy not customarily directed to the “witch.”

The sly and in context deeply ironic “of course” as spoken by Rapunzel’s former lover further points up the oddity that the typical damsel of European fairy tales not only greets her previously

unknown rescuer with heterosexual joy but then spends her life with him “happily ever after” simply because the man has turned up and taken her away from her family or guardian: as the witch Nanny Ogg enquires in Terry Pratchett’s *Witches Abroad*, “Cutting your way through a bit of bramble is how you can tell he’s going to be a good husband, is it?” (1992, 118). Winterson’s version of “Rapunzel,” like other feminist approaches to European fairy tale, compels us to ask why such tales automatically cast the young girl as a prisoner waiting to be rescued, and her rescuer as inevitably a handsome and immediately marriageable prince. Winterson’s rewrite assigns sexual agency to the girl, who chooses her own sexual partner in defiance of social norms, but then reverses this reversal of tradition: the prince is portrayed as a sexual predator who restores Rapunzel to heterosexual passivity, assuming that she will rejoice at the damage he inflicts on her lover. The critique of this assumption that heterosexual marriage is the inevitable feminine ideal is completed in the last lines of the tale: “My own husband? Oh well, the first time I kissed him he turned into a frog. There he is, just by your foot. His name’s Anton” (52). Winterson here reverses the tale of “The Frog Prince.” It is a further joke that this husband is the only one still living with the princesses, and indeed the only one with a name – he has clearly become a family pet. At the end of the tale, then, the response invited from the reader is simply that we share the princess’ wry humour, which Winterson’s transformations of “Rapunzel” and “The Frog Prince” have both encouraged us to direct at the presumption of heterosexual happiness.

Other of Winterson’s tales of the princesses depict women as lonely with men caught up in their own stories – in love with other women, or with boys, or with their own self-indulgence, or with fantasies of themselves. These women, unlike the princess who lost Rapunzel, are less sure of their own desires, sometimes abandoning heterosexual marriage only reluctantly. The ninth princess in fact

expresses no desire of her own, as her story demonstrates her submission to her husband's vision: she explains that "He called me Jess because that is the name of the hood which restrains the falcon" (56). Otherwise identityless, this princess "hung on his arm and fed at his hand," in an echo of Renaissance images of women as wild deer or birds, and was kept chained by her husband like the falcon with whom he persistently compares her. "He said he had to have me above him [in lovemaking], in case I pecked his eyes out in the faltering candlelight" (56). Although most of this tale appears to accept the husband's description and treatment of the narrator as natural, she finally comments, "I was none of these things, but I became them," in a sentence that for the first time asserts a sense of selfhood (56). Yet that self-assertion, which appears to reject the husband's construction of his wife, is immediately transformed: she describes how she "flew off his wrist and tore his liver from his body, and bit my chain in pieces and left him on the bed with his eyes open" (56). As with the narrator of Carter's "The Bloody Chamber," the identity of this princess has been constructed through the vision of her husband, although here that shaping results directly in the husband's destruction. The point is made succinctly in the princess' final observation: "He looked surprised, I don't know why. As your lover describes you, so you are" (56). For the narrator of "The Bloody Chamber" this discovery is shocking and repugnant; for Winterson's princess it is obviously natural, and her last statement has the force of an adage.

It is the reader, not the character, who may feel shocked at the sudden violence of the ninth princess' tale – a traditional feature of folktale, in fact – and at the poetic justice that overtakes the hawkmaster husband, in another reflection of traditional stories. Unlike in those tales, however, we are required to respond to this violence as it is described by its perpetrator. Traditionally, fairy tales are told in the third person, allowing a distanced view of the actions

in the tale. This can produce an odd lack of affect: Charles Perrault's version of "Little Red Riding Hood," for example, ends abruptly with the devouring of the child, with no narratorial indication of the horror of this. It is the reader alone who feels shock and distress. Brian McHale has commented on "the deliberate flattening out of the fantastic situation" by postmodern writers from Kafka to Richard Brautigan to T. Coraghessan Boyle, describing this as a "rhetoric of contrastive banality" in that "the characters' failure to be amazed by paranormal happenings serves to heighten our amazement" (76). McHale fails here to note that traditional folktale and fairy tale frequently treat the paranormal in this humdrum way: neither Red Cap, the huntsman, or the narrator expresses surprise at the emergence of the unharmed grandmother from the belly of the slaughtered wolf in the Grimm version of the Red Riding Hood story (Zipes 1987, 104). In other folktales, moreover, the apparent hero may be required to execute the villain/monster, but a traditionally flat narration keeps such events firmly in the realm of poetic justice. We are not required to criticise Jack the Giant-Killer for his slaughter of the giant,⁸ nor even Tom Thumb for his substitution of the ogre's apparently innocent daughters for himself and his brothers; indeed, the action of the tale implies that Jack and Tom are to be viewed as heroic and, in Tom's case, ingenious.⁹ By assigning redaction of the Story's events primarily to the princesses themselves, however, Winterson recasts the impersonal quality of many fairy tales as a kind of moral or emotional deficiency in her characters that requires a response from the reader, as the first person inserts an expectation not only of individuality but of moral agency into the tale. By placing the "banalization" to which McHale refers in the mouth of an individual character, Winterson heightens not only our amazement but our moral disturbance at the actions of that individual. As elsewhere in *Sexing the Cherry* (for example when the Dog Woman obediently bites off the penis of a man who has demanded that she consume him

[Winterson 1989, 41]), the character's own flatness of response heightens and complicates affect for the reader.

In the "Story of the Twelve Dancing Princesses," the effect is to draw attention both to the assumptions behind the accepted violence of traditional fairy tales and, contrastingly, to the personal and social pressures that render the ninth princess' behaviour, from a contemporary perspective, psychopathic. When Winterson's third princess comments on her murder of her husband and his male lover with a single arrow that "I still think it was poetic" (50), the "still" here indicates the princess' acknowledgement that with the passage of time some re-evaluation of the murderous impulse might have occurred. But it also draws attention to the changes in reader expectation: the late twentieth-century reader is no longer accustomed either to accepting a killing without critique or to excusing the *crime passionnel* for its poetry. When the eighth princess, who killed her gluttonous husband and so released from his stomach the herds of animals he had eaten, explains "I prefer farming to cookery" (55), we are reminded that the poetic justice of fairy tales, in which the innocent grandmother may be found alive inside the slaughtered but villainous wolf, depends on everyone knowing their assigned role. The typical heroine of French or German fairy tale, such as Beaumont's Beauty, accepts that her role is domestic; Beauty's sisters are punished for forming their own desires as well as for rejecting the obligation to feminine altruism. Winterson's eighth princess here expresses an autonomous desire that removes her altogether from the realm of the stereotypically feminine, and the calmness of her explanation forces the reader to re-evaluate the values of such instructive tales as Beaumont's.

Winterson's subversive deployment of the first person is underlined by her rare choice of the third person in the tale of the second princess. Several critics have observed this tale's allusion to Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess":¹⁰ it opens with a

misquotation of that poem, “‘That’s my last husband painted on the wall,’ said the second princess, ‘looking as if he were alive’” (49). In Browning’s poem the arrogant Duke reveals casually to the representative of his proposed future father-in-law that he has killed his previous wife. The Duke’s monologue reveals that he is a collector of *objets d’art*, of whom his wife should be one, and his last Duchess annoyed him by her expression of enthusiasm, or even simple courtesy, not directed to her husband – thereby transgressing the boundaries of his ownership. But Winterson’s transformation of Browning’s story does not so much revive the original situation of patriarchal control as reverse it: here it is the second princess who is a collector, not of beautiful art objects but of “religious items” (49), including, absurdly, the foetus borne by the mythical Pope Joan and the tablets containing the Ten Commandments. Her husband died because “he had tried to stop her hobby,” burning the body of a saint she had in the house (49); his deliberate destruction of the saint is arguably a very different threat to property from that the Duke perceives in his wife’s ill-directed attention. The princess, meanwhile, retaliated by wrapping her husband in bandages like a mummy “until she reached his nose. She had a moment’s regret, and continued” (49).

There are a number of striking points about this episode. First, the tale again focuses on the woman rather than the male hero whose perspective is at the centre of traditional versions of the tale of the dancing princesses – and the protagonist is active: this is no passive heroine awaiting a kiss, but a woman making her own choices, however perverse. Second, we are forcibly reminded of Browning’s poem through the opening line of the story: this deliberately intertextual moment highlights the confluence of tales through which we perceive the princess. Browning’s poem is written as a dramatic monologue, and only at the end of the poem does the reader realise that the monologue has a specific addressee: “The Count your

master's known munificence / Is ample warrant that no just pretence / Of mine for dowry will be disallowed," the Duke remarks confidently (Browning, lines 49-51), revealing that his airy account of his "last Duchess"'s murder is being told to the envoy for the father of a prospective next wife. In the poem this revelation comes as the final shock to the reader, providing the ultimate proof of the Duke's absolute lack of recognition that his view of his wife evokes a condemnation not of her values but of his; it also demonstrates the absoluteness of the Duke's authority, as at no point does the envoy intervene,¹¹ and it is clear that there is no possibility that the Duke could be arraigned over the death of his wife.

By contrast, Winterson's positioning of the story emphasises that this is a single view that may be challenged by the listener: dramatic monologue gives way to Jordan's third-person report. In contrast to Browning's Duke, the princess is limited to a few explanatory sentences of direct speech. Alone of the princesses, then, she is represented indirectly,¹² significantly deprived of the narrative authority that Winterson grants her sisters, and that Browning's arrogant Duke presumes. Although Jordan, like the silent envoy, does not comment on what he describes, the effect is to highlight the contrast with Browning: the princess' vision is contained within the third-person account, not controlling the narration, so that we must remain aware that there is more than one speaker in the story. The appalling nature of the Duke's feudal omnipotence, which can decree death at a whim, is thus reduced in the "Story" to a kind of comedy, heightened by the princess' nonchalance as she suffocates her husband and the "moment's regret" (Winterson 1989, 49) that, again, sets her apart from Browning's chill Duke. However murderous, Winterson's princess can be seen as a mad housewife, with all the exasperated affection that phrase connotes, rather than, like the Duke, as a despot the life and feelings of whose wife mean, presumably, as little as the lives and feelings of all others subject to his arbitrary

governance. We may be horrified as well as amused by the princess' murder of her husband, but it does not represent the appalling, because systemic, patriarchal power of Browning's feudal Duke.

Winterson's strategy is the inverse of Browning's: whereas Browning's dramatic monologue indicts its speaker precisely because of its narratorial authority, her brief report acknowledges the murderous quality of the princess' actions while the intruded voice of the princess herself evokes humour and even a perverse sympathy. Her comment on the saint's body is endearing: "The saint was very old and wrapped in cloth. I liked him about the house; he added something" (49). The very late-twentieth-century vagueness of "he added something" lends the princess' vision a quaint suburban quality far removed from the Duke's detached appreciation of his statue, "thought a rarity, / Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me" (Browning, lines 55-56), which emphasises the dominant role of the upper class in determining aesthetic value. In Winterson's tale, by contrast, the princess collects "religious items" (49), that is, items that already have an agreed community value. And these items are in turn rendered ridiculous both by their impossibility, which further recalls the manufactured relics of Chaucer's Pardoner, and by the princess' casual vagueness about her valuing of the saint's body, which she clearly does not revere. We are invited not only to laugh at the princess' macabre preferences in decoration but, through that very location of them, to ridicule the collection and even valuing of "religious items" in themselves: Winterson is holding up the panoply of Judaeo-Christian society to our view and inviting us to critique the values that have historically shaped western culture.¹³

Winterson's narrative strategies across the "Story of the Twelve Dancing Princesses" indict both the gender limitations of traditional European fairy tale and its assumptions of key norms – including that the "hero" is always justified – as her skilful deployment of first-person narration requires the reader to respond to her characters as

individuals rather than as Proppian stereotypes. Winterson's depiction of the eighth and ninth princesses as reduced to a near-psychopathic calmness by the inadequacy of, or in the case of the ninth princess the forcible transformation of personality in, the lives required of them in their marriages locates murder neither as villainy nor as heroism, but as an inevitable effect of the systemic frustration of personal choice and identity. By contrast, the eccentric individuality of Winterson's second princess allows her to stifle patriarchal authority in its own bonds. At the same time, her own power is limited by the containment of her story within Jordan's narration; Winterson's refusal to grant her uninterrupted speech is an acknowledgement that the hierarchy involved in patriarchy must not simply be reversed. Drawing not only on the expectations of fairy tale but on an apparently unrelated narrative, in this case Browning's poem, the "Story" operates intertextually to provide a new account of female vision and choice. The shifts between third-person and first-person narration in Winterson's "Story of the Twelve Dancing Princesses" compel the reader of the individual princesses' stories to a complexity of affective response: humour, sympathy, and horror alternate and even blend in often disturbing ways. In doing this the "Story" also reminds us of the stereotypical and limited reactions available to, and still more within, traditional European fairy tales, and invite a reconsideration of the operation of those tales. Winterson thus generates in her readers a new understanding of the gendered messages of fairy tales and of the social systems that have produced them.

Notes

1. Rachel Blau DuPlessis has demonstrated how twentieth-century women writers have employed the power of narrative to critique the previously traditional expectation that women's life stories inevitably have heterosexual romance as their goal (and ending) in her

important 1985 study. Although DuPlessis' subjects mostly precede the contemporary fairy tale rewrites studied in this volume, her attention to the ideological power of narrative points up the direction subsequently taken by such writers as Carter and Winterson, and has provided a partial model for my own approach to narrative.

2. See for example Lucie Armitt's account of "Dogwoman" (sic) as "a carnivalesque, excessive, womanly hero" (2000, 19).

3. Mary Bratton transforms this discussion in her powerful study of the lesbian chronotope as emerging through the unequal narrative possibilities for beings of different genders in *Sexing the Cherry* (2002); see also Jeffrey Roessner.

4. Christy L. Burns offers the latter reading in the course of her important examination of Winterson's investigation of fantasy in her early novels (Burns 1996, 285). Margaret J-M. Sönmez also provides a brief but interesting discussion of the implications of the double nature of the protagonists for readings of the narrative language of *Sexing the Cherry*'s different chronological sections (2009, 98-99).

5. Émilie Walezak has indicated the significance of Fortunata as "embod[ying] Winterson's *ars poetica*" in her discussion of the fairy tale rewrite in the "Story," which highlights Winterson's satiric enunciation (2009, 66).

6. Paulina Palmer highlights the "persecutory uses which homophobic society makes of the construct of the witch" in this version of "Rapunzel" (1999, 50).

7. In the 1857 Grimm version of "Rapunzel" the witch threatens the prince, who jumps from the tower and "the thorns he fell into pierced his eyes, so he became blind" (Zipes 1987, 49), in a classically Freudian image of castration.

8. Terry Pratchett's governess/heroine Susan does so, however, commenting on Jack's crimes as she narrates the story to her charges in *Hogfather*. See also *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories*, in which Jack's thefts from the giant are noted as "reveal[ing] a terrible callousness to the giant's personal rights" (Garner 1994, 70), but he ends up compelled to join the giant's "cloud commune" (Garner 1994, 71).

9. Perrault's "Bluebeard," with its morally confusing action, is another interesting example of the ways in which the protagonists of

fairy tale may be accepted as justified in their actions by their centrality to the action and by any threat to their material well being.

10. See for example Jan Rosmergy and Sonya Andermahr, neither of whom comments on the significance of the allusion.

11. It is arguable that the Duke's remark "Nay, we'll go / Together down, sir" (Browning, lines 53-54) indicates that the envoy has withdrawn from him in physical revulsion. However, it could just as easily represent what the Duke is acknowledging – the envoy's deferral to his social superior. Although we may speculate, the envoy's reaction remains unknown.

12. The twelfth princess is originally represented indirectly, by her sisters, but tells her own story later in the text.

13. See Angela Marie Smith's discussion of "*Sexing the Cherry*'s effort to interlace past and present, to conceive and enact an historical practice that challenges a linear history upholding the interests of the powerful" (2005, 21).

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CORPOREAL NARRATOLOGY

Anna Kérchy. A Corpusemiotical Analysis of a Postmodern Alice-Tale. Embodied Nonsense in Terry Gilliam's *Tideland*

Lewis Carroll's nonsense fantasies about Alice's peculiar adventures in Wonderland and through the looking glass, where everything is so strange that nothing is surprising, seem to hold an everlasting charm on account of their curious incomprehensibility fostering a proliferation of interpretations and re-interpretations. The books provided a favourable ground of experimentation for Victorian authors' subversive, didactic, parodic or political revisions collected in Carolyn Sigler's anthology of *Alternative Alices* (1997), and remain a rich source of inspiration for challenging postmodern repurposings. These latter include literary rewritings as in the recent collection entitled *Alice Redux* or Jeff Noon's cyberpunk trequel *Automated Alice*, as well as popular recyclings in a variety of media ranging from American McGee's gruesome computer game, to Annie Leibovitz's stylish *Vogue* fashion-photographs and an Underland revisited in 3D in Tim Burton's 2010 movie.

Despite radical changes, these adaptations keep iconic Carrollian characters, such as the Cheshire Cat, vanishing into thin air, leaving behind only a disappearing feline grin and a conundrum undermining its truth value by suggesting "we are all mad here," Humpty Dumpty, the egg man who breaks to pieces just like his logical justification about signification being a matter of our efforts to make words mean whatever we want them to mean at our whim, or the Mad Hatter and the Smoking Caterpillar whose philosophical ramblings challenge the reliability of Alice's discursive identity while they are wandering and wondering aimlessly around tables set for an eternal five o'clock tea or awaiting transformation into someone else, like a butterfly. In my view, the essence of Carrollian fantasy that stimulates postmodern imagination so much resides precisely in the

synchronic coincidence of the misbehaviour of bodies, discourse, as well as of truth- and knowledge-claims – illustrated by the above figures – which provide readerly excitement through their playful destabilization of significations.

My paper proposes to introduce a *corpusemiotical analytical method* – interfacing fantastic bodies in the text with fantastic texts on/by the bodies – with the aim to argue that in contemporary rewritings of Alice-tales the revisited Wonderland provides a particularly appropriate meta-fictional terrain to foreground the postmodernist epistemological crisis. I shall reveal how the confusion of meanings becomes curiously enacted upon liminal bodily surfaces, revealed as metamorphing depths of linguistic and imaginative confusion, peaking in the embodied experience of 'tongue-twisting,' 'tongue-in-cheek' nonsense.

Alice's initial long-lasting fall down the rabbit hole – and her accompanying cognitive dissonance, experienced by readers alike – reminds of the "postmodern condition." This has been convincingly described by theoreticians like Baudrillard (1994) and Lyotard (1984) as a paradoxical yet adequate means of reading artistic and lived experience, by virtue of allowing for the recognition of the plurality, ambiguity or insufficiency of the available interpretive strategies, representational apparati and narrative frames meant to make sense of the reality surrounding us. This self-reflexivity nearly necessarily elicits a "serious play" (Ahmed 1998, 17) with the culturally approved yet increasingly destabilized, defamiliarized means of knowledge-production and discursive conventions. I wish to suggest that the emerging epistemological endeavour to challenge claims of truth and belief, justificatory methods, linguistic transparency, and to denaturalize the viability of reality-models on grounds of their socio-cultural constructedness coincides with an "anatomical scrutiny" (see Kiss 2005) of the speaking subject's corporeal de/constitutions. The focus of increasingly suspicious attention is occupied by those

spectacularly grotesque embodiments which stage the “abjection of the subject” (Kristeva 1982, 4), the disintegration of the discursively, performatively organized self through the uncanny return of the repressed, unspeakable carnality of our (non)beings.

I believe that the difficult pleasures of postmodern adaptations are accessible through a focus on the body’s potentials to (un)make sense, especially since recognizing translinguistic, corporeal, sensual interactions and physical realities’ experiences as fundamental bases of linguistic signification seem to result from our very *Zeitgeist*. In Horst Ruthrof’s term, a contemporary *corporeal turn* succeeds to the linguistic and the pictorial turns historically associated with the postmodern paradigm-shift, and necessitates a “perceptually oriented investigation of natural language” (13). Like many recent body-theories (from cognitive neurolinguistics to the phenomenology of the material subject) Elizabeth Grosz’s “corporeal feminism” interconnects embodiment with narrativity, as “the very stuff of subjectivity.” The body is simultaneously read as a cultural, discursive artefact with disciplinary social, ideological expectations *pre-in-scribing* its surface – in a Foucauldian manner (see Foucault 1980) – and as a heterogeneous, fleshly, mat(t)er-real corporeality endowed with a *trans-discursive, counter-narrative* potential to deconstruct from the inside its superficial *re-presentational* frame and its carefully interiorized, privileged modes of polite corporeal conduct. (Grosz 1994, xii)

My assumption here is that this Möbius strip-like structure of the mutually constitutive bodily ‘inside out’ and ‘outside in’ (of regulative discourse and subversive corporeal performance, prescriptive re-presentation and mat(t)er-real counter-text) is precisely the shape literary/artistic nonsense takes on, simultaneously activating seemingly incompatible layers. One is the meta-(image)-textual rhetorical facet of nonsense praised by Jean-Jacques Lecercle. This elicits a self-reflective awareness of the ambiguity of common

sense and the (mal)functioning of our sense-making methods through revealing the inherent poetic-metaphorical, associative-imaginative surplus, as well as the authoritative ideological charge, socio-historical residue and cultural framing of ‘ordinary’ language/representation at large (Lecerle 1994, 2-3). The other is the trans-linguistic corporeal facet calling into life the physicality of the represented and representing bodies and revivifying the materiality of signifying activity’s lived experience. Surplus non-meanings are activated by the affective-sensual charge of their incarnated voice, corporeally lived sounds, transverbal fleshly rhythms. We can paradoxically make sense of these only in terms of a “revolutionary poeticity” (see Kristeva 1984) that will necessarily displace incarnation’s ultimate directness, substituting sound with sense. Visual adaptations of literary nonsense further enhance the bodily sensations excited in recipients (of meanings). Genre fiction, like “body horror cinema” – *Tideland* can be loosely associated with it on account of expressing anxieties over the diseased, disintegrating body (Hayward 188) – attests to a particularly sensitive awareness of the audience’s corporeal involvement in sense-making. The calculable corporeal reactions of recoiling spectators (sighs, screams, anxious compensatory giggle, or nauseous silence) challenge signification’s “disembodied immateriality” (Warner mentions as an antithesis of Svankmajer’s films, too [2007]) by stressing the trans-verbal, fleshly, non-sensical, sensuous nature of the speaking subject.

My corpusemiotical analysis is inspired by Peter Brooks’ endeavour to interface the *semioticization of the body narrated in the text* with the subversive *somatization of the text on the body* (1993) and Daniel Punday’s “corporeal narratology” studying how “an overarching corporeal atmosphere establishing a fundamental contact between reader, writer and text” is created and how narrative aspects (plot, characterization, setting, perspective) are shaped by culturally supported ways of imagining and representing the body (2000, 10,

also see 2003). However, in my view, seeing, knowing and narrativizing the body driven by a *scopophilic*, *epistemophilic urge* does not necessarily lead to an exposition of truth “written in the flesh” (Brooks 1993, i), an empowering access to the symbolic order and a satisfactory mastery of the very creation of significance, as Brooks seems to suggest (8). On the contrary, it results in a postmodern recognition of the necessary destabilization of truth, meaning, subject and body alike, an awareness concerning the simultaneous inevitability of miscomprehension and impossibility of meaninglessness, and an endless play with versions of reality and materiality.

Terry Gilliam’s 2005 movie *Tideland* based on Mitch Cullin’s cult novel of the same title is a prototypical example of a postmodernist adaptation of the Alice-in-Wonderland theme. Its ‘poetic horroristic’ imagination de/constructs a multitude of coexisting complementary and contradictory alternate realities, all fostered by bizarre bodies. Dismembered, decomposing, disabled bodies turn nonsensical here on losing their capacity to denote subjectivity, due to being deprived of their deformed embodiments’ cultural meaningfulness, their discursive (non)interactions’ comprehensibility, or a coherent interpretive frame. The story’s focalizer is a little girl, Jeliza Rose, abandoned – after the death of her overdosed heroine-addict parents – all alone on the Texas prairie. Her barren reality is invigorated by the twisted world of her fantasies, peopled by imaginary creatures such as the Barbie doll heads she wears on her fingertips and personifies as her best ventriloquized friends (Plate 11), as well as freakish ‘wonders’ that exist in reality. These include her father’s drugged, delirious, then dead and taxidermied body becoming her oversized ragdoll, and her strange neighbours: the glass eyed, half-blind, crazy Dell, clad in black gauze mask for fear of bee stings, who impersonates the infantile phobia of a witch, and the mentally challenged, epileptic, Quasimodo-like

Dickens the little girl calls her sweet captain and husband. (Plate 12) The deserted, delusionary world Gilliam creates for his Alice living in a curious claustrophobic cottage on an infinite Texas prairie is that of the Baudrillardian hyperreality (1994), where the simulacrum supersedes the real, so that the imagined, a perverted/pretended image of the real becomes truth on its own right.

As Gilliam stresses in his filmic foreword (2005), the movie is shocking because of its innocence: it unconditionally adopts an infantile perspective ignorant of fear, prejudice and preconceptions resulting from socialization, determined by a systematic non-differentiation between normal/possible and abnormal/impossible. In Jeliza Rose's world, the most corrupted, taboo-transgressing deviations, paedophilia, necrophilia or substance abuse (silly-kissing with a young man, administering a heroine injection to one's parent, or cuddling daddy's corpse) can coexist unproblematically side by side with sugary-sweet childish fantasies (antropomorphization of dolls, waiting for Prince Charming, belonging to a loving nuclear family) as parts of the very same daydreams. However, the illusorily safe representational/interpretive sphere of the intertextually summoned fairy-tale fantasy make-believe and our ravishment by the postmodern Alice's unlimited imaginative capacities is fatally troubled by Gilliam's socio-realist framing of the abused, disadvantaged child archetype. The minimization of fantasy elements apart from a dream sequence, and the unreliability of the narrator-focalizer, a junkie baby provokes an "imaginative resistance" (see Walton and Szabo Gendler in Nichols 2006) or imaginative reluctance¹ felt upon the sight of dubiously unpunished or even justified violations of trans-culturally sustained, fundamental human values and moral laws deemed worthy of unanimous respect in life and art alike. In *Tideland*, the world's unintelligibility is easily resolved by relying on imagination to fill in knowledge-gaps. But Jeliza Rose's tales fail to provide the psychological comfort sprung

from their Bettelheimian (1977) therapeutic potential. Daydreams turn into nightmarish delusions instead, while the homely transforms into a “purgatory” (Gilliam 2005, DVD extras) between dream and awakening, innocence and experience, normal and insupportable, heaven and hell.

Since the only meaning that can be attributed to the ultimately inconceivable/insupportable (death of the father, the loss of reason, an evil mother) belongs to the realm of incomprehensible, traumatic events necessarily gain mythologizing interpretations: the painfully lived experience of the nonsensical is imaginatively transformed into a more liveable sur-reality. This is what Slavoj Žižek calls the traumatic kernel, the return of the repressed Real, inapt to be integrated into (what we experience as) reality, (re)embodied as the Unimaginable Impossible itself, as a “nightmarish apparition,” an “unreal spectre,” a spectacular semblance that can be sustained only fictionalized, a “reality transfunctionalized through fantasy” (18-20). Ambiguously, fantasy’s Janus-faced nature is revealed: it is simultaneously pacifying through an imaginary scenario enabling us to endure an abysmal loss constitutive of our subjectivity, and disturbing through its being inassimilable to reality. However, an even more considerable cognitive dissonance is provoked by the coexistence and clash of referential/literal/mimetic and metaphorical readings resulting in disruptions of fictional(real)ities and distortions by fictionalizations (by being narratively mis-re-constructed as a character (be)coming to the story told). This is epitomized by the popular opening scene, where the body endlessly tumbles down the rabbit hole (“Down, down, down... Would the fall never come to an end?” – as Alice/Jeliza Rose repeatedly asks) to be radically dismantled, pointing towards the Unimaginable’s excess or lack of meaning. In the following, I wish to demonstrate how the activation of contradictory interpretive strategies involving self-corrections, re-readings or ludic deconstructions, and a multifocal perspective is

required for the sake of attempting to resolve the likely emerging imaginative confusion.

A par excellence example of this imaginative confusion can be related to the functioning of metaphor memorably materialized in terms of visual puns and embodied nonsense in Gilliam's film. We have known since Lakoff and Johnson (1980) that metaphor is a poetic device pervading everyday language, thought and action. However recent cognitive research has also amply revealed the body as a frequent source of metaphorical conceptualization simply because even the most abstract ideas can be intuitively made sense of and talked about in concrete ways by referring to the shared ground of bodily experiences and actions as the most familiar and well-understood bits of realities to us all. (see Kövecses 2002, Gibbs-Wilson 2002) Throughout the use of bodily metaphors the cognitively mapped body is empathically identified with subjectivities, beings, and emotions of our own and others in light of a consensual understanding. Yet any artistic metaphorization emphatically foregrounding corporeal reality – as Gilliam's preoccupation with violations of bodily boundaries defined as identity-frames or with body functions and fluids of the silenced taboo's realm – also provoke an imaginative confusion troubling meaning-formation. When *Tideland's* imagery literalizes metaphors by visual puns, dead metaphors are called to life, the linguistically suppressed and sublimated body-waste is recycled as *objet trouvé*, endowed with new, surrealist meanings, provoking an uncanny feeling of *déjà vu/lu*, enhancing the inherently implied ambiguity of the metaphor built on the logic of associating contradictory things. By adopting the representational strategy of nonsense, the extended, re-embodied metaphors gain a metanarrative significance, becoming parables of the postmodern condition of epistemological uncertainty.

The metaphors materialized by visual puns often pay intertextual homage to predecessor masters of nonsense, evoking

Angela Carter's idea on quotation – in her introduction to her “Curious Room: Alice in Prague” (1990) – as a “strategy of a sensibility that sees reality slipping away along obscure and tortuous paths”² (217). The hungry Jeliza-Rose's peanut buttered palm covered with crawling ants recalls the famous shot from Buñuel and Dalí's surrealist movie *An Andalusian Dog* (1929) literally visualising at once two metaphorical expressions. Firstly, the French phrase “to have ants in the palms” means “itching to kill”, a symptomatic surfacing of frustrations, secondly the experience of having ants under the skin refers to “a feeling of a hand going to sleep”, and thus becomes the very metonymy of surrealist automatic writing beyond calculation, logic, politeness or plotting. Both denote repressed corporeal presence's troubling return to representation.

Even more strangely, the Surrealists' *cadavre exquis* word- or picture-play of magical coincidences and consequences – a random succession of collectively gathered images added to a composition in sequence, perfectly shifting-matching into each other to create a surprising whole – seems to become a shockingly literalized metaphor in *Tideland*. The decaying stuffed ‘exquisite corpse’ of the dead father taxidermied by his ex-lover, the mad Dell, for Eternity takes on different meanings sacralized by the private mythology of imagination. He metamorphoses from eternal dreamer, traveller-adventurer to beauty queen, and even a temple where the Barbie-doll heads thrown and sewn within his taxidermied ‘treasure chest’ can turn into angels and fly free on wings of endless possibilities.

As if in the mise-en-abyme structure of Chinese boxes, the abandoned old farm-house – fairy-tale-like, belonging to the late grandmother, and horroristic, reminiscent of the Bates Motel in Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) – takes the shape of a decomposing body re-embodied in Gilliam's imagination “decaying and rotting inside (as a) smoker's lung.” It is in an organic relation with the barren

landscape outside, so that Jeliza Rose's "getting out of that house, and running and playing and leaping and then getting back inside" is like breathing in and out heavily all the time (Gilliam 2005), endowing the narrative with a corporeal rhythm. The house is a crypt of the anatomized, taxidermied paternal corpse that becomes a burial ground for doll-heads enacting the daughter's doubles. These unhomely insides ravish the adventurous Jeliza-Rose and evoke the Renaissance Cabinet of Curiosities or Wonder-room described in Carter's "Alice in Prague or the Curious Room" as an "ur-museum [of memories], a manifestation of an *omnivorous* curiosity, a *gluttony* for the world, but also a potent image of the unconscious [...] the underworld in which language develops a life of its own" (217). In postmodern Alice adaptations, the body itself appears as a microcosmic Wonderland, a "Laboratory of the Self" (Kiss 1995, 15-23) conceived as radically strange and insatiably hungry for the word.

In a Lacanian psychoanalytical reading, the death of the father signifies the loss of order through inhibiting the child's psychic maturing from the Imaginary to the Symbolic realm, and preventing the substitution of the gratifying preverbal immediacy of the Maternal bodily realm's sensorial interactions for the disciplinary, compensatory sign-system of the Paternal Law's language. (see Lacan 1977) Words, instead of denoting Truth as omnipotent reality-markers, become Flesh(ly fantasies) as the embodied voice of a translinguistic kind takes over the filmic narrative. As Bruce Bennett (2006) notes, Gilliam may be "the noisiest fantasist going" with "films full of chattering background characters, kabongs and shrieks." *Tideland's* soundtrack is dominated by sounds of nature, wind blowing, wind chimes tinkling, squirrels chirping, complemented by the minimalist music of "woodwind tootlings that herald magic" (Bennett 2006), and most importantly the focalizer protagonist Jeliza Rose's own corporeal noises, her enduring giggle reinterpreting horrific events as wonders and her occasional screams,

gasps, sighs of excitement on recognizing their reality, her stomach-growl misread as pregnancy from silly-kissing, and even her ventriloquization of dollheads as imaginary friends/selves, a most exciting nonsensical speech act I shall turn to in the last part of my paper.

Jeliza Rose's imaginary friends, the four doll-heads she wears on her fingertips enhance grotesquely nonsensical embodiments by reimagining her anatomy's morphology with puppets, and her self with the various personas she impersonates in differently ventriloquized voices as potentially distinct facets of her identity. The dismembered dolls clearly literalize-visualize, by means of visual puns, metaphorical expressions of identity crisis. Losing one's mind, 'not having hearts only heads' as Jeliza-Rose scornfully says, and even Carroll's Red Queen's famous line ("Off with her head!") are associated with infantile fears of engulfment and compensatory aggression. Even more importantly, it is one of Jeliza Rose's puppet doubles that enacts the classic fall down the rabbit hole, the main literalized metaphor initiating Alice's adventures in Wonderlands. Falling here primarily means falling into (self)fiction(alization) (and falling in love with/in fiction), throughout any (but especially artistic) narrativization, whereby the real self motivating the discursive act becomes a character and thus an object of desire for readers who want the story to go on. The metaphoricity of language doubling literal meanings matches the speaking subject's being complemented by his/her linguistic alterego, the subject of/in speech. This split between the speaking, the spoken, and even the unspeakable self is enacted by the *puppet-torsos* embodying the Freudian *uncanny double*, that familiar yet foreign *other* part of ourselves (dis)organised by repressed desires and fears of infantile or atavistic origins we normally seek to reject or rationalise. (Freud 1953) The animation of lifeless objects as 'I' recalls our primal anxiety about the existential aporia of *being dead*, the loss of identity related to the

depersonalization of the corpse, the cadaver etymologically originating from the word “fall.”

Furthermore, the little girl’s lending her ventriloquized, playfully pretending voice to imaginary creatures of her Wonderland – reminiscent of Czech surrealist puppeteer Svankmajer’s fascinating stop motion animation, *Alice* (1988) – illustrates the embodied voice’s capacity to create alternative realities (depending on the words we use and the stories we choose to partake in). It also shows how the loss of articulate speech, as a guarantee and prerequisite of personhood, contributes to an existential-epistemological crisis grounded in the fear of becoming inaudible, intertwined with the fear of becoming invisible, mute and blind. Since Alice’s main personality marker is her curiosity – her desire to see and know – it is small wonder that in *Tideland*, too, she fears the exclusion from the field of visibility and spectatorship the most. These would result in questioning the credibility or authenticity of one’s reality-status (as in ‘non-seeing is non-believing’) and a thorough linguistic deprivation (as in “if no one can hear me, I must have become invisible”). These horrors are embodied all by the half-blind beldam-like neighbour Dell, who absurdly claims totalitarian mastery over gazing and visibility while denying it from the symbolically enucleated, silenced, devoured Jeliza-Rose. (As she says: “I can see everything that you can imagine, little girls peeping...”) Dell’s reiteration of the Carrollian Duchess’ nonsense on the (im)possibility “to say what you mean and mean what you say, to see what you eat and eat what you see” plays on vocal polyphony by homophony (“see” as “comprehend” and “visually perceive”) and imperfect rhyming (see/mean/eat) to fuse anxieties related to linguistic, visual, cognitive or physical (non)existence. The infantile trauma of children yearning to speak yet too often hushed by parents surfaces as a fear of being deprived of one’s own voice, meanings and stories,³ blurred with Freudian uncanny phobias of becoming blind and blinding, of

being buried alive (in the exitless underground space of the rabbit hole), and the horror of being cannibalistically consumed by the parental mouth⁴ opening up to speak instead of the child who is imaginarily engulfed by the silence of the witch-mother's or the wolf-father's monstrous belly.

The frustration of the child threatened in her access to speech/representation (to a naming constitutive of reality and self-identity) privileged by adults is compensated for in different ways. Jeliza-Rose performs revengeful 'speechless acts' aggressively silencing her doll-heads entrapped within the ribcage of her father's taxidermied corpse. She mumbles to herself in an infinite monologue of "kid-stream-of-consciousness" (Bennett 2006). Thus she enacts a non-communicative, ie. nonsensical verbal self-pleasuring liberated from codes of conversational politeness, submissiveness, silence prescribed for minors, disregarding negotiations for the message's meaningfulness, hence interactive value. Talking to oneself constitutes a narcissistic verbal-vocal self-contemplation in one's own looking glass, where playing with the voice enacts and resolves potential threats/facets to the child's malleable identity exploiting the self-affirmative potential of imagination. (Tellingly, the doll-head Mustique mimes the voice of the dead bad mother before falling down the rabbithole.) Jeliza Rose's strange self-fictionalizing soliloquies – besides clearly recalling a delusional dream's sleep-talking – are reminiscent of infantile crib-talk's proto-narrative whereby the child recites stories and invents pseudo-interactions with imaginary characters to create a malleable reality, mixing present, past and future (mock)realities and possibilities, through an uncontrolled language-use brought into action for the sake of easing daytime frustrations and understanding the world. The somniloquist narrator-focalizer who voices all fictional figures – like Svankmajer's Alice very literally does so – becomes an implied author herself responsible for shaping her own story.

Jeliza Rose's fantasies on closing her eyes and waking up in her dead father's dreams evoke Carroll's surrealist relativization of sleeping and awakening, and his insistence on the significance of altered states of consciousness, especially the "trance-like" (following the "ordinary" and the "eerie" states), whereby, unconscious of actuality, apparently asleep, one can migrate into fairyland. (Warner 2006, 205-220) Local non-existence by 'not seeing' or 'not being seen' allows for a reincarnation elsewhere: as the epigraph suggests, Alice wanders phantom-wise under skies even if she can never be seen by waking eyes (Carroll 287).

The iconic tumble down the rabbit hole is conventionally interpreted as a symbolization of falling asleep, sliding from reality to a dreamworld, and suspending rationality's, temporality's, spatiality's or embodied identity's rules of functioning. Alice's fall, never coming to an end or a beginning, proves to recall a hovering inbetween wakefulness and sleep, remembering and forgetting, cognition and imagination. This transitional, seemingly eternal, last moment before falling asleep (foreshadowing the mythified final moment before death) presumably condensates past, present and potential, parallel realities. In Cullin's poetic words "Before sleep, the last sound to fill my ears was the beating of my heart, and I knew I was slipping past the tideland, going beneath the ocean and sinking away from What Rocks" (187). In *Tideland's* lucid-dreamlike universe the (day)dreamer experiences an awareness of a multiplicity of simultaneously coexisting alternative reality-version(-potential)s as possibilities awaiting to be brought to actual realization, and transforming, shifting each other while the sleeper re-imagines them floating in-between. However, paradoxically, throughout the suspended fall the lucid dreamer (instead of a sense of ease by gravity-loss) feels the very weight of her embodiment reminiscent of the hypnagogic state's sleep-paralysis when on the brink of sleep one distortedly misperceives the body as fatally immobile and

unmoveable. This corporeal inactivation enhanced by hallucinative mental hyperactivity emerging on falling into sleep(paralysis) is very literally visualized via the film's obvious homage to Andrew Wyeth's famous 1948 painting *Christina's World* depicting a paralysed young woman lying on the ground in a wheat-field, crawling towards a farmhouse in the distance. The Wyethian landscape is uncannily reminiscent of Tideland, and is interpreted as a topographical sublimation of "physical grandeur, psychic pain," spiritual solitude, a dwelling of "the eloquence in things left unsaid, the static electricity of gestures repressed" (Corliss 48). This transitional state in-between immobility (physical entrapment by an anatomical frame) and metamorphosis (the dynamically changing corporeal-psychic inside's moving thoughts, drives, desires) evokes the very experience of *almost-there-ness* that characterizes Alice's suspended fall and all endless Wonder/Tide-landian wanderings. It points towards transdiscursive realms of pre/half-dream conditions, when, in the moments before falling asleep or awakening, already or yet unable to open our eyes to reality, the unspoken hovers on the tip of the tongue.

When, in the film's literally explosive finale Dickens, playing sea-captain, blows up with his secret dynamite the nightly passenger train mistaken for a monster killer-shark, just like in a false awakening, reality bursts into fantasies but preserves its nightmarish qualities. Strangely, the final horrifying scene, with the inarticulately screaming injured scattered around the wreck in the pitch-dark prairie illuminated by flames, offers Jeliza-Rose her happy ending. A kind lady comes to her rescue, believing her to be a victim from the train-accident too, and in her long-desired maternal embrace, the little-girl-lost is finally found, comforted by the tangerines she is fed and the question we have been desiring to ask throughout the entire movie: "are you OK?" By means of an answer, Jeliza-Rose ponders out loud, calling the fireflies dancing in the flames her friends who "have names." Thus she symbolically abandons the a-semiotic space of

fantastic Carrollian “woods where things have no names” (Carroll 185), no reality-status, and no enworlded self-identity affordable to the perceiver. She apparently becomes enabled to see: to name, to speak and to understand what we consensually consider to be reality. The final shots’ close-up of Jeliza-Rose’s gazing eyes (dis)appearing in the starry sky brings ‘seeing’ as conceptual metaphor of embodied cognition – a leitmotif of Alice’s curious adventures – to full(y literalized) realization. However, the cinematic focus on eyes watching us watching foregrounds meta(visual)narratively the instability and relativity of our spectatorial interpretive positionalities, simultaneously located within real and fictional realms; re/creating fantasies from within a lived reality marked by a radical unknowability, and fraught with imagination that fictionalizes us in each others’ dreams. In the end, the postmodern Alice’s gaze fading into the night sky embodies a nonsensical view required to be enacted upon/for the entry into Wonderland: we must close our eyes, otherwise we will not see anything.⁵

Notes

1. On “imaginative resistance” see Kendall Walton in Shaun Nichols 2006, 137-175.
2. Mannerism fictionally revisited in Carter’s Alice-tale is a period characterized by an epistemological crisis similar to surrealism and postmodernism.
3. The dilemma is: Whose words am I saying? Which are the right words to describe who I am? If I choose different words to denote me will I be someone different?
4. For an analysis on how fairy tales fictionalize the infantile fear of being devoured by the mother and the concomitant phantasy to assimilate and annihilate the maternal (ie. the wicked witch, the bad breast) which is external to the self see Carolyn Daniel’s *Voracious Children. Who Eats Whom in Children’s Literature*, an excellent book that primarily relies on Melanie Klein’s child-psychology.

5. The opening shots of Svankmajer's 1988 stop-motion animation movie, *Alice* show a close-up of the little girl's lips muttering these lines. "Alice thought to herself... Alice thought to herself 'Now you will see a film... made for children... perhaps...' But, I nearly forgot... you must... close your eyes... otherwise... you won't see anything."

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Illustrations

Plate 11: Jeliza Rose from Terry Gilliam's *Tideland*, 2005, Recorded Picture Company. Reprinted with permission of Recorded Picture Company.

Plate 12: Dell and Dickens from Terry Gilliam's *Tideland*, 2005, Recorded Picture Company. Reprinted with permission of Recorded Picture Company.

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A.I. 358
 Aarseth, Espen 337
 Abject 110, 213, 260, 264, 287-9, 386, 395, 430-3, 462
 Aesthetic 5, 10, 14, 19, 33, 40, 83, 87, 93, 95, 114, 126, 132, 139, 145-7, 154-5, 159, 238, 248, 277, 280, 284, 333, 336, 345, 407, 417, 453
 Affect 2, 131, 134, 136, 140, 284, 311, 332, 335, 442-54, 463
 Affron and Affron 34-40
 Agency 4, 6, 13, 18, 26, 51-3, 176, 253, 337-8, 361, 409, 442, 447-9
 Ahmed, Sarah 461
 Alice, in Wonderland 24, 69, 127, 132, 136, 172, 245, 322, 387-8, 392, 403-21, 423, 429, 460-75
 Alien 43, 68, 260, 354
 Allen, Richard 34
 Alternat(iv)e world 33, 86, 88, 117, 345, 464, 471
 Alternate history 84, 88, 298
An Andalusian Dog 468
 Anansi 73, 76
 Anatomy, anatomizing 251-70, 282, 461, 469-70
 Andersen, Hans Christian 108, 151, 154, 359, 362-4
 Animal-groom fairy tale 222
 Anti-essentialism 255
 Anti-fairy tale 138, 181-99
 Anti-type 369
 Anzieu, Didier 276
 Aporia 337, 470
 Armitt, Lucie 455
 Attebery, Brian 67, 78
 Atwood, Margaret 296-316
 Augustine 204
 Authorship, auteurship 4, 170, 368, 407-8
 Author hybridity 407
Avant garde 53-4, 62
 Avatar 10, 335, 340, 362, 424
 Bacchilega, Cristina 50-3, 168, 182, 189, 280, 290
 Ballerina-as-phallus 61
 Ballet 49-67
 Banalization 449
 Barbe Bleue, le (Bluebeard) 114, 181-99, 223, 286, 428, 431-3, 455
 Barbie doll 55, 59, 464, 468
Bard's Tale, The 339
 Barker, Francis 268
 Barrie, J.M. 404
 Barsacq, Léon 33, 36, 41
 Barthes, Roland 49, 50, 52, 136, 141, 316-30, 333
 Bascom, William 67, 74, 78
 Basile, Giambattista 173
 Bass line 214

- Bass, Jefferson 107, 111, 119
- Bataille, Georges 384-8, 431
- Baudrillard, Jean 301, 305-6, 334, 345, 461, 465
- Baum, L. Frank 404
- Beast of London 76
- Beaumont 217, 450
- Beauty and the Beast (*La Belle et la Bête*) 45, 202-19, 222-34, 241, 277, 283-8
- Beldam 17, 76-7, 471
- Benford, Gregory 354
- Benson, Stephen 77, 223-4, 277, 280
- Bettelheim, Bruno 50, 59-62, 153, 184, 187, 223, 446
- Binary oppositions 53, 63, 78, 155, 256, 267, 281, 289, 303
- Bi-stable oscillation 2, 6, 11
- Blackwell, Jeannine 166-9, 176-7
- Blau, Herbert 252, 254, 257
- Bloody Chamber, The* 53, 63, 151, 181, 187, 190-6, 202, 217, 245, 285, 319-20, 424, 429, 431, 434-5, 442, 448
- Bodies. The Exhibition 256
- Body Horror Cinema 463
- Body Worlds 257, 267-8
- Body-politic 240
- Bones* 119
- Bordo, Susan 287
- Borges, José Luis 127, 316-8
- Bottigheimer, Ruth 18, 163-6, 177
- Bowman, Mary R. 368
- Breton, André 38, 386, 421-3
- Brooks, Peter 288, 463-4
- Broumas, Olga 163-81
- Browning, Robert 450-4, 456
- Buckley, Michael 164-5
- Buñuel, Luis 266, 468
- Burton, Tim 107-26, 460
- Butler, Judith 49, 289
- Cabinet des Fées 23
- Caillois, Roger 384, 389-90
- Calvino, Italo 77
- Camp 325
- Campion, Jane 181-201
- Canty, Tom 22
- Carnival, carnivalesque 56, 98, 113, 238, 248, 317, 455
- Carno-phallogocentrism 255, 260, 266
- Carroll, Lewis 69, 127, 129, 132, 136-7, 321, 387, 404, 429, 460-80
- Carson, Don 332, 341
- Carter, Angela 17, 38, 53-4, 63, 122, 127, 181-201, 202-21, 224, 228, 234, 237-250, 269, 285-6, 315-29, 403, 422-5, 428-9, 431, 433-7, 442, 445, 448, 468-9, 475

Cartesian subject 253, 258-9, 262, 287, 393
Casablanca 342-3
 Castration anxiety, complex 60-2, 137, 155, 189, 384, 396, 432, 455
 Cause-and-effect vignettes 332
 CD-ROM books 1-16
 Children's literature 1
 Choreography 49-66
 Christie, Agatha 115
 Chromatic symbolism 279
 Cinderella, Cendrillon 20, 49-66, 164, 169-71, 281
 Cixous, Hélène 168, 397, 424, 435
 Classical dance 49-66
 Click and see 5-6
 Clute, John 86, 89
 Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome 204, 206, 216, 218
 Colonial/ism 182, 188, 190, 194-5, 245, 403-20
 Comedy horror 107
 Comics 127-8, 132, 137-8, 403-420
 Commodification 18, 266
Company of Wolves, The 33-48
 Computer games 14, 147, 311, 330-351, 460
 Contes des fées 19
 Cyber-salon 17-32
 Cooley, Nicole 163-80
Coraline 67-82
 Corporeal Feminism 462
 Corporeal narratology 460
 Corporeal Turn 253, 262, 462
Corpse Bride 107-25
 Corpusemiotics 262, 269, 460-80
CSI: Crime Scene Investigation 110-1, 120
 Cultural imagery 252-4, 263, 269
 Cyberpunk 97, 298, 352, 355, 460
 Cyborg 296-315, 352-3
 Dalí, Salvador 468
 Damasio, Antonio 269
 Dance 49-66
 D'Aulnoy, Marie-Catherine 21, 31, 428-9
 de Rais, Gilles 198, 385
 Deconstruction 1, 34, 181, 191, 224, 252, 257, 263, 270, 287, 291, 339, 383, 404, 462, 466
 Decoration 33, 128, 326, 453
Déjà vu/lu 117, 467
 del Toro, Guillermo 383-402
 Deleuze, Gilles 334
 Demythologising 50, 58, 181-201
 Derrida, Jacques 251-56, 260, 266-7, 397
 Descent 210, 215, 386, 405

Design 33-48
 Detective fiction 99, 107-26, 157, 338
 Difficult middles 206, 216
 Digital Storytelling 1-16
 Disney, Walt 17-20, 45, 182, 227, 234, 277, 332, 341, 358, 442
 Dog Woman 444-5, 449
 Donoghue, Emma 172, 285-6
 Double 114, 205, 241, 384-5, 391, 455, 469-70
 Double Narrative 203, 242, 405, 407, 445
 Dramatic Monologue 451-3
 Dream 20, 25, 28-9, 39, 77, 94, 116, 128, 152, 190, 198, 223, 226, 237-8, 248, 321, 352, 359, 361, 373, 382, 392-4, 396, 413, 416, 465-6, 468, 472-4
Drop Dead Cute 145
 Dualism 253, 287, 290, 308,
 Ducornet, Rikki 126-44
 Dworkin, Andrea 149
 Dystopia 246, 296, 298, 301, 306-8, 310, 355
 E(nactive)-imagination 345
 E-book 1-16
 Eco, Umberto 333
Écriture féminine 167, 424, 437
Effet de réel 333
 Elias, Norbert 261
 Empathy 109, 111, 195, 310, 336, 345,
Enchanted 34
 Enchantment 71, 77, 183, 422, 431
 Endicott Studio 18, 21-3
 Environmental storytelling 332
 Epic wandering 341
 Epiphany 95, 337
 Epistemology 116, 252, 258-9, 262, 461, 467, 471
 Ergodic literature 337
 Ernst, Max 383-4, 387, 425
 Escapism 94, 334, 404
 Eskelinen, Markku 337
 Evolution 332, 354, 361
 Extralinguistic/transdiscursive 262, 462
 Extropianism 353, 364
Fabliaux 284
 Fairy Tale Romance 222-37, 113, 338, 413
 Fairyland 26, 352-67, 395, 473
 Fairy-tale genesis 163-180
Fantasia 46
 Fantastification 253-4
Fashion System, The 316
 Fashion, fashionista 316-30
 Female Quest Narrative 223

Feminist criticism, feminism 12, 17, 25, 60, 79, 145, 163, 181, 222, 228, 238, 244, 276, 403, 421, 442, 462
Femme-enfant 421-41
 Feral child 317, 322
 Fictitious Character/Narrator 367, 82
 Flieger, Verlyn 368, 380
 Folklore 22, 70, 78, 185, 247, 276, 342
 Folktale 67, 78-9, 146, 163, 276-7, 280, 282, 284, 445, 448-9,
 Forensic crime fiction/fantasy 107-25
 Forensics, forensic anthropology 107-25
 Foster, Hal 398, 430
 Foster, Leigh 52, 61
 Foster, Thomas 352
 Foucault, Michel 110, 258, 268, 288, 405, 462
 Fragmentation 15, 111, 128, 168, 181, 202, 261, 326, 415
 Freak 192, 464,
 Freud, Sigmund 59-62, 70, 79, 155, 184, 288, 383-402, 424, 432-4, 455, 470-1, 481
 Frog Prince 210, 213, 281, 447
 Fuchs, Elenor 252
 Fugue 238, 247, 322
 Full(-)script style 408-9
 Gaiman, Neil 67-82
 Gamble, Sarah 217, 224
 Gaslamp fantasy 86, 99
 Gaze 53, 55-6, 110, 120, 149, 196, 207, 211-3, 231, 263-4, 404, 414, 475
 Gebbie, Melinda 403-20
 Gender 49, 145, 163, 181, 238, 259, 262, 276, 391, 403, 421, 442
 Ghost 75, 113, 115, 203, 210, 222
 Gilbert, Sandra and Susan Gubar 168, 171
 Gilliam, Terry 460-80
 Goblin Fruit 23
 Goose-girl 290
 Gorton, Assheton 42, 46
 Gothic 113, 126, 148, 150, 155, 227, 422
 Göttner-Abendroth, Heide 166
 Graphic narrative 126-44
 Graphic novel 403-20
 Greenstreet, Sydney 343
 Green Man Review 23
 Grimm Brothers 45, 59, 108, 153, 157-8, 163, 182, 188, 224, 281, 285, 290, 342, 443, 449, 455
 Grodal, Torben 37
 Gross, Cory 84, 86, 99
 Grosz, Elizabeth 287-8, 290, 391, 462,

Grotesque 56, 128-9, 136, 145, 240, 247, 302, 417, 444, 470
 Guro-kawaii 145-62
 Haase, Donald 163, 166, 279, 290
 Hagens, Günther von 120, 256-7, 267-8, 274-5
 Halberstam, Judith 352-3
 Hansel and Gretel 40, 75
 Haraway, Donna 297-304, 308, 310
 Hassenpflug, Marie 172
 Hayles, N. Katherine 298, 352-3
 Hello Kitty 158
 Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère, Martine 114, 122, 198, 286, 289
 Hermaphrodite 240-4
 Heterosexual 49, 151, 231, 285-6, 403, 435, 443-7, 454
 Hillman, David 269
 Hobbit 68, 367-82
 Hoffmann, E.T.A. 396
 Hollinger, Veronica 353
 Holmes, Sherlock 108, 120, 344
Homo clausus 261, 265, 269
Homo ferus/ sapiens 318
 Hopkinson, Nalo 286
 Horizon of expectations 132, 140, 367
 Hybrid, hybridity 28, 55, 128, 133, 136, 152, 156, 202, 237, 240, 244, 276, 291-305, 311, 407
 Hyperlink 1-16
 Hypermedia 1-16
 Hyperreality 305, 335-6, 346, 464
 Hypertextuality 1-16, 73, 182, 203, 330
 Iconotext 132
 Ideological Implication 19, 49, 51-3, 63, 83, 88, 98, 149, 244, 251, 277, 285-8, 307, 388, 396, 403, 418, 455, 462-3
 Illusion of complexity 341
 Illustration 5-8, 45, 53, 55, 126, 131, 330, 393, 403, 433
 Imaginative Resistance 345, 465
 Immersive fantasy 35
 Implied author/illustrator/writer 403
 Incidental Music 237
 Indigenous Fantasy 67, 78
 Innovation 57, 62
 Interactive, Interaction 1, 20, 77, 126, 159, 163, 173, 203, 219, 288, 298, 332-6, 341, 406, 462, 464, 469, 472
 Inter-Authorial dynamics 126
 Intermediality 126, 147, 240, 403, 425
 Intertextuality 44, 49-, 78, 95, 113, 166, 177, 202, 210, 237-9,

- 245, 278, 284-5, 289, 296, 364, 410, 423, 451, 454, 465, 467
- iPad 1
- Irigaray, Luce 417
- Irony 54, 127, 131, 134, 148, 308
- Isidore of Seville 204
- Jack the Giant-Killer** 449, 455
- Jameson, Fredric 88
- Japanese art 145-62
- Jungblut, Gertrud 166
- Kavanagh, Linda** 177
- Kawaii 145
- Kérchy, Anna 107, 249, 269, 437, 460
- Kindle 3
- King Rat* 67
- Kiss, Attila 251, 469
- Kissing the Witch* 172, 286
- Konoike, Tomoko 156
- Kristeva, Julia 110, 260, 264, 269-70, 287-8, 430-1, 435, 462-3
- Labyrinth* 37
- Labyrinth 37, 341, 383
- Lacan, Jacques 167, 188, 263, 288, 290, 322, 384, 393-4, 397, 424, 430, 437, 469
- Lakoff, George 467
- Langer, Susan K. 335-6, 345
- Lanham, Richard 2, 4, 5
- Laurel, Brenda 337
- Leceracle, Jean Jacques 136-7, 462-3
- Legend 75-8, 78-9, 222, 338, 368, 390
- Legend* 33
- Legend of Zelda, The* 338-9, 373-4,
- Lesbian 60, 286, 410, 412, 415-6, 446, 455
- Lee, Tanith 21
- Lévinas, Emmanuel 251, 255, 265
- Lia Block, Francesca 286
- Libertarian feminism 403
- Linguistic punctum 136
- Literary fairy tale 18, 49-50, 52-3, 59, 63, 163, 219, 282, 330, 340
- Little Match Girl, the 154
- Little Mermaid, the 150
- Little Red Riding Hood 40, 153, 155-6, 159, 199, 216, 423, 449
- Livingston, Ira 352-3
- Lolita 321
- London 67
- Lord of the Rings, The* 367
- Louvel, Liliane 129-35
- Lüthi, Max 146-7, 277, 281
- Lyon 49, 202
- Lyotard 461
- Macro/microdynamics of the subject** 255

- Magic 30, 45, 53, 67, 70, 89-94, 97, 113-4, 127, 135, 153, 166, 172, 218, 224, 233-4, 238-40, 280, 289, 310, 340, 346, 357, 383-97, 422-3, 427-9, 432, 438, 468-9,
 Magic Kingdom 357-8
 Magic realism 384, 422, 429
Maltese Falcon, The 343
 Manga 145-62
 Manovich, Lev 10
 Marin, Maguy 49-66
 Marriage 18, 23, 51, 57, 59, 62, 63, 78, 94, 112, 114, 195-6, 208, 223-4, 228, 232, 375, 444-6, 454
 Marvel style 408
 Mask, masking 10, 55-6, 152-4, 186, 227, 246, 280-3, 289, 416, 464
 Masson, André 387
 Mazzio, Carla 269
 McGee, American 460
 McGuire, Seanan 18, 23-4
 McHale, Brian 449
 McLuhan, Marshall 2
 Mélusine 151
 Mendelssohn, Felix 246
 Merleau-Ponty, Maurice 290, 384, 393
 Metafiction 28, 34, 129-30, 195, 269, 282-3, 367-82
 Metamorphosis 118, 128, 208, 213, 215, 237-50, 277-9, 284, 289, 391, 461, 468, 474
 Meyer, Stephenie 222-36
 Middle Earth 67, 69, 367-82
Midsummer Night's Dream 237-50
 Miéville, China 67-82
 Mimesis 119, 192-3, 280, 389-90, 466
 Mirror stage 321-2, 385
 Mirror, magic mirror 78, 134, 153, 155, 168, 203, 207, 212, 233, 265, 280-1, 291, 321-2, 385, 414-5
 Mise-en-scène 42, 44, 107, 135, 341, 468
 Mizuno, Junko 148
 MMORPGs 333-4, 346
 Monster, Monstrous, Monstrosity 128, 130, 149, 151, 202, 27, 301, 309, 370, 387, 394-6, 422, 424, 432, 472
 Moorcock, Michael 87, 98-9
 Moore, Alan 209, 403-20, 98
 Moral pornography 238, 249, 403
 Mother, motherhood 20, 29, 39, 51, 56, 60, 69, 76-7, 79, 151, 155, 165, 174, 182, 191, 194, 196, 225, 234, 242, 276-8, 286, 303, 307, 311, 323, 330, 356, 383, 390-2, 396-8, 423, 427, 432, 435, 449, 466, 472, 475,

Motley, Tom 126-44
 Mulvey, Laura 428, 430-5
 Murray, Janet 4, 10, 338, 411-2
 Musicology 202
My Last Duchess 450
 Mythology 21, 44, 49, 51, 53, 60, 62, 117, 181, 247, 334, 342, 377, 386, 466, 468
 Mythopoesis, mythopoetic revision 237, 240, 243-4, 248
 Nancy, Jean-Luc 255, 266
 Narcissus, narcissist, narcissism 147-9, 205, 212, 214, 247, 472
 Narrative Voice 40, 163-4, 285, 331, 386, 442-4
 Narratology 403, 421, 442, 460
 Negroponte, Nicholas 9
 Neoteny 146
 Neotribalism 24-5
 Neo-Victorian 83-106
Nowhere 67-78
 New Expressionism 83
 New Media, theory 1, 224, 331
 Nikolajeva, Maria 67, 78
 Nochlin, Linda 152
 Nonsense 130, 136, 138, 392, 460
 Noon, Jeff 460
 Nostalgia 88-9, 98, 135, 137, 246, 332-3, 360, 430
 Nunn, Hillary M. 268
 Nutick, Mia 18, 23
Nutcracker, The 62
 O'Neill, Cathleen 165-7, 177
Omega Expedition, The 355, 358, 364
 Orality 8, 18, 22, 33, 55, 163, 197, 280, 282, 290, 380
 Orientalism 148, 185, 415, 417
Oryx and Crake 296-315
 Ostriker, Alicia 167-8, 176
 Other Mother 69, 76-7, 79
 Ovid 239
 Palimpsest 25, 45, 202, 216, 298
 Palmer, Paulina 455
 Paradiž, Valerie 166
 Paragon 95, 140
 Paratactic prose 193, 369
 Parody 57-8, 62, 113-5, 127, 131, 150, 167, 194, 238-40, 243-4, 279, 339, 343, 395, 460
 Participatory Culture 17
 Pataphysics 113
 Patriarchy 51, 60, 153, 167, 190, 196, 224, 244-5, 248, 280, 285, 396, 412, 417, 432, 437, 442, 451-4
 Perrault, Charles 49-54, 58, 114, 122, 154, 183, 184, 187, 193, 197-8, 224, 423, 428-9, 449, 455,
 Peter Pan 20
 Petipa, Marius 51, 52, 54, 58

Phenomenology 2, 116, 154, 262, 290, 394, 462
Piano, The 181-201
 Pied Piper 68, 73
 Pilinovsky, Helen 17, 285
Pinocchio 46
 Poe, Edgar Allan 114
 Point of View 1, 290, 368
 Polymorphously perverse 62, 241, 251
 Pornographic fantasy 237, 403
 Postcolonial 181, 258, 403
 Postfeminism 79, 145, 403
 Posthuman 352
 Postsemiotic(s) 251, 460
 Post-singularity 353
 Powers, Tim 83
 Pratchett, Terry 447, 455
 Preston, Cathy 280
 Prince Charming 465
Prince of Persia, The 338
 Princess 17-24, 34, 150, 152, 164, 208, 213, 234, 281, 338-9, 373-4, 385, 392, 394, 427, 442, 459
Princess Bride, The 34, 37
 Princess Industrial Complex 17
 Production design 33
 Projective illusion 34-5
 Propp, Vladimir 68, 279, 454
 Protocolonialism 245
Psycho 468
 Psychoanalysis 50, 59, 184, 252, 254, 257, 276, 288, 290, 329, 383-4, 386, 397, 433, 469
 Psychopathology 383, 450, 454
 Puck 239-41, 245, 248
 Pullman, Philip 87
 Punday, Daniel 463
 Puppet 97, 470-1
 Pynchon, Thomas 74, 87, 92, 95-6
Queering 285-6
 Quest 41, 51, 68, 76, 223, 229, 283, 304-5, 339-46, 356-7, 362-3, 367-8, 372-3, 376, 386-8, 392, 397, 428, 434, 436
Quest for Glory (game series) 341-3
Rank, Otto 385
 Rapunzel 285, 446-7, 455
 Reader response/ reception theory 2, 133, 139, 193, 222, 225, 228, 336, 442
 Race, racialization, racialized 75, 150, 245, 249, 299, 310, 403
 Real
 author/illustrator/reader/writer 403
 Reflection 280
 Refraction 280
 Reichs, Kathy 108, 117

- Rent-a-Hero* 338
- Responsibility 10, 12, 21, 89, 118, 176, 251-66, 308, 311, 472
- Retelling 17, 22, 159, 163, 285, 341, 428
- Retro-futurism 83-106
- Revision 17, 28, 126, 163, 193, 224, 243, 279, 336, 442, 460
- Rewriting 77, 151, 163, 186, 203, 310, 426, 437, 442, 455, 461-2
- Rölleke, Heinz 163-4, 172
- Ross, John 66
- Rossi-Landi, Ferruccio 261
- Rowe, Karen E. 173, 228
- Rumpelstiltskin 170
- Rushdie, Salman 237-8
- Russell, Karen 319
- Russo, Mary 148
- Ruthrof, Horst 262, 462
- Rüttner-Cova, Sonja 166
- Ryan, Marie-Laure 2, 341, 406
- Sadeian Woman, The* 192, 238, 403, 422
- Sadism, Sadeian, De Sade 187, 192, 199, 391, 395, 422, 429, 432, 436
- Sandman 396
- Sawday, Jonathan 269
- Schneider, Susan 352
- Schoenfeldt, Michael C. 269
- Science fantasy 93, 298
- Science fiction 30, 37, 83, 86, 92-3, 297-9, 310, 352
- Scopophilia 241, 464
- Scott, McCloud 414
- Scott, Ridley 33
- Self-hermeneutics 251
- Semiotisation 463
- Set design 33
- Sex and the City* 150, 403
- Sex-change 240
- Sexton, Anne 53, 176
- Sex, sexual 25, 49, 55, 137, 164, 170, 183, 223, 227, 230, 238, 251, 283, 298, 320, 391, 403, 423, 442
- Shakespeare, William 165, 237
- Shojo-manga* 147, 155
- Shrek* 34
- Sibyl 427-8
- Silmarillion, The* 369
- Simulacra 119, 206, 305-6, 334, 465
- Simulation 119, 247, 301, 305, 307, 311, 321, 330, 361,
- Six Feet Under* 115
- Skin 202, 218, 224, 232-3, 252, 276, 301, 308, 321, 324, 326, 356, 395, 431, 468
- Skin Folk* 286

Sleeping Beauty 20, 52, 114-5, 154-5, 164, 387
 Snow Patrol 202-21
 Snow Queen, The 359-64
 Snow White 20-1, 45, 153, 164, 172-5, 199, 210, 213, 233, 276
 Somatization 463
 Sontag, Susan 325
 Spatial narrative 338
 Speculative fiction 85, 296-315
 Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty 267
 Stableford, Brian 352
 Steampunk 83-106
 Stepmother 56, 60, 149, 153, 171, 276, 278
 Stewart, Susan 56, 74
Stimmung 115
 Stone, Kay 167, 290
 Story-world 332, 341, 385
 Subversion 17, 30, 57, 61, 114, 146, 174, 189, 192, 238, 248, 258, 282, 280, 339, 340, 391, 403, 424, 442, 460, 462-3
Super Mario Bros 338
 Surlalune 18, 23
 Surrealism 383, 421, 467-8, 471, 473, 475
 Suture 263
 Svankmajer, Jan 463, 471-2, 476
 Szabo Gendler, Tamar 465
 Takahashi, Ryutaro 146
 Tanning, Dorothea 421-41
 Tashiro, C.S. 33, 36-7, 44
 Tatar, Maria 182, 184, 224, 386
 Technofantasy 83-106
 Techno-utopianism 333
 Teratology 204, 216
 Thacker, Eugene 352, 363, 361
The Difference Engine 86
The Orphan's Tales 25, 276
The Rose and the Beast 286
The Year of the Flood 296
 Theater of Anatomy 251
 Themed spaces 332, 341
 Threadgold, Terry 270
Tideland 460-80
 Tiffin, Jessica 281, 283, 285
 Todorov, Tzvetan 74, 384, 397
 Tolkien, J.R.R. 67-8, 78, 182, 334, 367-82
 Tom Thumb 449
 Transgression, transgressive 78, 116, 138, 148, 184-7, 242, 251, 267, 299, 307, 395-6, 403-4, 424, 427, 430, 433, 444, 451, 465
 Transhuman 309, 352
 Transmedial narrative/narratology 403-20
 Trauma 108, 114, 119, 383-4, 411, 417, 430, 466, 471

Tronstad, Ragnhild 337
 Tucker, S.J. 18, 24-5, 121
 Turner, Bryan S. 258
 Twelve Dancing Princesses 442-59
Twilight 222-36
 Uncanny, Unheimlich 70-9, 150, 154-5, 159, 383, 462, 467, 470-1
 Unimaginable, the 354-5, 364, 466
 Valente, Catherynne M. 276-95
 Vampire 150, 222-36
 Vandermeer, Ann and Jeff 92
 Vaz da Silva, Francisco 278-9, 290
 Vesteme 320
 Virtual, reality/world 131, 267, 305, 311, 330, 352
 Visual narrative 404, 408, 409, 425, 431, 436
Volksmärchen 284
 Von Arnim, Bettina 166
 Walker, Barbara 164, 177
 Warhol, Robyn R. 443
 Warner, Marina 50, 163, 177, 182, 213, 219, 227-8, 422-3, 427-8, 463, 473
 Webb, Caroline 442
 Wedding Industrial Complex 20
 Wells, H.G. 91, 99
 Werewolf 222, 231, 245, 278, 317-21, 325, 327
 Williams, David 216
Willow 37
 Windling, Terri 17-8, 21-2
 Winterson, Jeanette 442-59
Wise Children 317, 321, 423, 437
 Witch 39, 67, 70, 75, 77, 152, 172, 237, 277, 282-7, 377, 446-7, 455, 464, 472, 475
 Wittgenstein, Ludwig 83, 132, 140
 Wittig, Monique 418
Wizard of Oz, The 45, 394
 Wolf-Alice 245, 316
 Wonderland 69, 387-8, 409, 421, 423, 461-71
 Wonder-room 469
 Woods 107, 156-9, 188, 386, 388, 391, 475
 Woolf, Virginia 165, 237
 Yanagi, Miwa 151
 Yolen, Jane 17
 Zipes, Jack 19, 35, 50, 51, 53, 75, 163, 172, 188, 196, 198, 224, 290, 330, 386, 442, 449, 455,
 Žižek, Slavoj 263-4, 270, 466



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION 1: NEW MEDIA LITERACY

Hyperread, New Literacy, E-text
Cyber-Salons, Participatory Culture
Production Design
Critical Dance Studies

SECTION 2: EMERGING GENRES

Urban Fantasy
Steampunk
Forensic Crime Fantasy
Intermedial Text/Image. Graphic Narrative
Guro-Kawaii (Grotesque-Cute) Manga/Art

SECTION 3: REWRITING MYTH

The Interaction of Literature and Criticism.
Feminist Imagination, Challenging the Canon
Anti-Fairy Tale, Revisiting Blue Beard
Critical Musicology. Revisiting Beauty and the Beast
Cult Fairy-Tale Romance. Revisiting the Animal-Groom Tale
Metamorphic Pornographic Fantasy. Revisiting Shakespeare

SECTION 4: RE-IMAGINING THE BODY

Body-Theatrical Performance
Feminist Body-Studies
Cyborg Body
Re-fashioning Embodiments

SECTION 5: CREATING FICTIONAL REALITIES

Ludic Simulations in the Virtual Reality of Computer Games
Virtual FairyLands in Trans/Post-humanist Science Fiction
Inventing a Fictitious Fairy Tale
Between Psychopathology and Fantasy

SECTION 6: NARRATOLOGICAL NOVELTIES

Transmedial Narratology, Representing Race and Gender
Neo-Surrealism, Feminist Stylistics
Affective Narratology and the Emotional Politics of Reading
Corporeal Narratology

THE EDITOR, Anna Kérchy, PhD, DEA is a Senior Assistant Professor at the Institute of English and American Studies of the University of Szeged, Hungary. She is the author of *Body-Texts in Angela Carter. Writing from a Corporeographic Point of View* and co-editor of *What Constitutes the Fantastic?*

These essays analyze the intersection of fairy tale, fantasy and reality in postmodern artistic texts, with a focus on millennial and early 21st century fictional repurposings and theoretical revisitings of the genres. The studies interpret immediately contemporary artistic texts – literary, visual, performance, and applied artworks – distinguished by a 'postmodernist' socio-historical attitude on accounts of 'repeating' the fairy tale and fantasy traditions 'with a difference,' with the aim to playfully challenge the univocity of meanings and epistemic certainties. The analyses exploit postmodernism's potential as a critical, rhetorical, strategic practice: they regard artistic text and story as intersemiotic systems and multidimensional experience invested with a historical, cultural, psychological, ethical, aesthetical and technological significance. The editor underscores the transformation of both the reader-writer relationship and epistemological and ontological considerations by new media and technologies, emerging subgenres, as well as political and poetical reconsiderations.

REVIEWS

"The editor's introduction and organization of the volume exhibit a strong grasp of how important it is to relate generic, technological, political, and narrative dynamics with one another in approaching millennial and early 21st century verbal, visual, digitized, and performance texts. I can see myself adopting it for a graduate class."- **Professor Cristina Bacchilega, University of Hawaii at Manoa, Author of Postmodern Fairy Tales, Review Editor of Marvels and Tales**

"...this range of objects and of topics makes the volume genuinely timely, genuinely impressive and genuinely worthwhile. I have little doubt that it will be of interest to a wide range of scholars in the field, and that it will make an influential contribution to the continued development of work on the fairy tale." - **Professor Stephen Benson, University of East Anglia, Editor of Contemporary Fiction and the Fairy Tale**

"...the volume includes essays that present exploratory discussions of modern-day reinventions of the fairy tale and fantasy from a variety of perspectives that draw on emergent critical discourses... Because fairy tales have always been 'stories to think with', the collection self-consciously addresses the constant interaction between theory and practice, creative and critical discourses that characterizes the genre." - **Professor Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère, University of Lausanne, Author of Origin and Originality in Rushdie's Fiction**