Chapter 4: Fair[y] is Foul, Foul Fair[y]: The Poetics and Politics of Fairy Tales

Children's fairy tales, which emphasize such things as women's passivity and beauty, are indeed gendered scripts and serve to legitimize and support the dominant gender system... A further paradox of the feminine beauty ideal is that in a patriarchal system, those women who seek to gain power through their attractiveness are often those who are most dependent on men's resources.


The single most pervasive image evoked in the popular mind by the term fairy tale is probably that of a maiden in distress leaning from a tower window and searching the horizon for a rescuer.


Rapunzel and the tower are the same. These heroines have internalized the values of their culture to such an extent that they have become their own prisons.


On the side of fairy tales this implies two things. First, Briar-Rose—or, rather, the thorny rose she impersonates—expresses the ambivalence of feminine blood. The bloom metaphor of womb blood affirms this medium is fruitful, whereas the use of pricking thorns to designate a blood condition implies marital unavailability. Second, the envy of a woman called Rose for her Flower-of-the-Rose daughter entails that the latter casts the former on the sterile side of spines, not blooms. Now we are ready to grasp the constant meaning of three blood drops. Recall that Briar-Rose pricks one finger at fifteen years old, then becomes impenetrably surrounded by thorns until the right time comes for the elected husband to pass through her barrier—now displaying “large and beautiful flowers”—so as to deflower her, [...] Of course, both the pricked finger and the subsequent defloration entail bleeding. And it is as Snow White's mother pricks her finger that she conceives (both literally and figuratively) of a girl.

~ Francisco vaz da Silva, “Red as Blood, White as Snow, Black as Crow: Chromatic Symbolism of Womanhood in Fairy Tales”, p.245.

Fairy tales are dedicated to the pleasure principle, although there is no such thing as pure pleasure, there is always more going on than meets the eye.

~ Angela Carter, “Introduction” to The Virago Book of Fairy Tales, p. xii-xiii.
In his 1979 preface to *Breaking the Magic Spell*, Zipes stated his purpose as investigating the relationship between the historical developments of Western fairy tales, on the one hand, and, on the other, the social-psychological dynamics and the instrumentalization of fantasy, particularly the "magic spell" of commodity production, which has threatened to "void the liberating magic of all serious tales". In his 2002 Preface of the revised and the enlarged edition, he has, in particular, emphasized anew on the impact of the culture industry and the political nature of economics on fairy-tale production. In *The Brothers Grimm*, Zipes interrogated Grimms' revision of their tales, their unbeaten efforts toward the institutionalization of the fairy-tale genre, the Germanic "nature" of the tradition in which they worked, and the forms their tales have taken in modern times in various Western countries.

The fairy tale is probably the most re-worked and re-written/re-read genre amongst all the literary types in the world, be it for the children or for the adults. The nature and scope of the translations, transcreations, transmissions and transformations of the fairy tales into radically newer genres are not, however, not uniform; nor do the critics and historians of children's literature reach at any unanimity regarding the mutations-versus-accretion debate of the trans-generic expansion of the fairy tales. John Stephens and Robyn McCallum argue, retellings "serve to initiate children into aspects of a social heritage, transmitting many of a culture's central values and assumptions", thus promoting the retold fairy tales as a handmaiden of the dominant ideologies and their function as purely centripetal and inductive. Stephens and McCallum also suggest that retellings usually orient the child toward a conservative and sometimes even regressive institutionalized, stratified value-system because the density and gravity of the "tradition" constrains the ways in which new énoncés might be extracted from old stories. However, retellings also "have the potential to disclose how old stories suppress the invisible, the untold, and

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5 Ibid., p.21.
the unspoken"⁶; parody, for example, plays with the conventions of a pre-text—by highlighting the structuration of conventions and assumptions more visible, they disclose a hitherto unnoticed space whereby the naturalization of cultural values and assumptions can be challenged, even outside the limits of children's literature where they were first uttered. In 1979 Angela Carter published *The Bloody Chamber*, her groundbreaking collection of fairy tale re-tellings. Barbara Walker published a collection of feminist retellings in 1996 simply called *Feminist Fairy Tales*, and Peter Cashorali published a similar collection of retellings for adult gay men a year earlier. In this chapter, I am interested in the works as much as the re-workings of one of the most ancient positivities of the literary pursuit that formulaically explodes the diachronic axes into more-than-temporality [Fairy tales frequently begin "Once upon a time" and end with the satisfying, "And they lived happily ever after", thereby taking the generic bookends before and beyond any anthropological scaling of time]. Given its poetics of timelessness, the fairy tales do name the literature of infinity that the manipulations by the different epistemes harness methodically into contingencies, ideologies and conventions, by supplementing the poetics within a politics that is time-bound, archival and belimited by historical cross-sections. Therefore, an analysis of the poetics and the politics would reveal, at the same time, change and tradition—how they work through children's texts, how they interpellate the identity of the target reader, how they cache the energetic of the flow into an accretive yet static catenation. At the same time, it is important to note how the "tradition" of fairy tales, including their continuous re-workings, deconstructs its own closures by the frequent mutations and deterritorializations that the texts of this genre undergo. Fairy tales written by the Grimm brothers, for instance, were originally used as primers for relatively well-to-do European children and were aimed at imparting moral lessons to them.⁷ Today these fairy tales, in their reprinted, modified, translated, re-written, inter-textual and/or parodied versions, are read by children, teenagers and adults across different nationalities, classes, races, genders, and continue to contain symbolic, narratological or ideological representations that trace, legitimate and prolepsize the residual, dominant and emergent value-systems respectively.⁸

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⁶ Ibid., p. 22.
Fairy tales with centrality to the facts of emption/consumption of comestibles provide fictive opportunities for the character's and the epoch's treatment of the gestures and attitudes that we can associate with hunger, edibility, earning capacity and the sociology of food. The quantity, quality, need, desire, accumulation, presence, absence and circulation of food signify patterns of assertiveness or disempowerment in these tales and their political contingencies. In pre-industrial texts related to the excess or shrinkage of food-consumption, such as Hansel and Gretel, food was an "index" to hierarchal processes, chiefly class and consumption. But the food-imageries' meanings and the food's actual conniving powers become subtler in industrial and postmodern fairy tales where child characters are even less answerable for their consumption, and less agentic for their negotiations with food. Whereas pre-modern stories situate that culpability or the moral heroism with the child-characters' enticement in or resistance to temptation, consumerist revisions of such mythologies involve relocating agency in the "lure" itself. Susan Honeyman observes:

Consumers are increasingly depicted as willing victims of a manipulation wherein deeper structure is concealed, agency being re-imagined as externally located (impossibly) in ephemeral confections.9

Food as an ideological apparatus as well as a site of active contestation is not a rare phenomena in fairy tale texts. Sendak's Where the Wild Things Are (1963), in which Max is ultimately subdued, not by the wild and monstrous things he has tamed, but by the sapid smell of his dinner waiting.10 For Max, food is a contrivance through which he is mastered, and ideologized thickly enough to feel wholly satisfied by the interpellation. Henrik Drescher's The Boy Who Ate Around (1994) shows the eating-as-restructuring by the central character Mo, as he refuses to eat his string beans and soufflé, eating around them instead to the point that nothing else is left (not even his parents or the earth). His pantophagous manducations radically remake his umwelt, although finally he changes the world only slightly. Mo learns to "master food's signifying regimes rather than be mastered by them."11

The contrast between Max and Mo in the two children's texts above

would show the difference of food in the contestation between being indoctrinated and acquiring autonomy through food. However, Max’s diachronic taming of the wild things before he comes back to the synchrony of his dining table and Mo’s oral devouring of the peoples and spaces all around the platter of food do pose colonial narratives—the fantasy of “white man’s burden” in the former and the act of masticating as territorial cannibalization in the latter, linking the food-imagery with the symbolism of colonial agency. Honeyman comments:

Whereas Max brings the wild things to submission with his imperatives and charm, Mo literally dominates the world by engulfing it: “For a midnight snack he rolled South America up in Africa, swallowing them whole like an enchilada.” Empowering, yes, but ... it doesn’t particularly draw on the most politically sensitive rhetorical tropes to create the effect.12

In Rachel Cohn’s *Gingerbread*, teenaged narrator Cyd names her permanent companion-doll “Gingerbread” after a memorable sample of the confection that her father (“real-dad”) shared with her once in an airport. The doll represents Cyd’s need for love and acceptance from her biological father, a need that she must realize is already met reliably by her more available stepfather. She, like Hansel and Gretel, journeys away from home, meets the master gingerbread baker, only to return for a reformed and empowered reintegration with an estranged parent (in this case the mother). The nomenclature of the doll traces her desire for the paternal affection, which is metonymized as well as mnemonized as “gingerbread” or the food-object, which was exchanged/shared between the daughter and the father only once but has become a resourceful object—in-memory for her to defend against her senses of lack and loss. The witch figure is represented through the benevolent Loretta, who owns a “Shop for Great Eat”. Food is a formative element of identity throughout *Gingerbread*: most of Cyd’s close acquaintances are interpellated within a victual, confectionary economy of pleasure—Shrimp, Sugar Pie (whose best friend was “Honey Pie”), and the sibling with whom she identifies most during her journey to meet “real-dad’s” family is Danny, “a baker and cake decorator”.13 Cyd Charisse’s mother tries to starve Cyd’s younger sister with policing her diets, but Cyd’s doll and imaginary nurturer, Gingerbread, functions like comfort food—offering dependability and companionship on her journey.

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Revisions and re-workings of “Hansel and Gretel”, Honeyman observes, reflects on the changing political economies of child-rearing, family and the ethics of food over its semantic diachronics. In its earlier versions, it is not a consumerist cautionary tale about curbing one's fanciful appetites but a pre-modern story about repressing basic hunger. The mother (a “step” in later versions) who plans to dump her children is interpellated by the familial economy of the times of famine: to preserve food for working adults by unburdening themselves of helpless dependents. This we can view in another of Grimm’s tale, “The Children Living in a Time of Famine,” in which a mother:

...fell into such deep poverty with her two daughters that they didn’t even have a crust of bread left to put in their mouths. Finally they were so famished that the mother was beside herself with despair and said to the older child: ‘I will have to kill you so that I’ll have something to eat’.

This tale seems to beg sympathy from children for their helpless parents, and to ask for selfless sacrifice in thankful return. The children’s solution to the (mother’s) dilemma and starvation is to “lie down and go to sleep, and we won’t rise again until the Day of Judgment.” This is a remarkable utterance of the familial economy, whereby the children are prioritizing the parental unease over their biological need for food. The submission to sleep is virtually a self-nihilating being-for-others, rather than the being-in-itself that the protestant ethics would take children to be.

Unlike these children who come what may withdraw into eternal slumber to save their flesh which is uttered, however pathetically, as a food for the adult in hunger, as well as to save the definition of the parent as the protector, Hansel and Gretel run off. Their hamartia that is crucial for the poetics of the tale is to use bread crumbs for a trail on the second outing rather than pebbles—a waste of food. That Hansel wastes bread-crumbs and they find a bread-house is no coincidence—it presents a retreat of the food, the disappearing appearing of the cannibal [the witch] through the coming back of the lost food, an antithetical reinscription of the geography of survival in terms of the reclamation of bread and devouring the savory jouissance of the dreadful other [the witch whose food Hansel could have been, but whose food-house Hansel takes over]. In a context where “bread” is a polyvalent object capable of attributing hunger, greed, patience, pragmatism, utility, wastage, need, affluence—a contingency of ontological and oneiric extremes—it easily becomes a dense cultural object, dramatizing the interface between impoverishment and upward mobility, for example. Hence

the narrative of *Hansel* and Gretel do not just stand for a morphological formality or a sentimental morality—it demonstrates the conflicts that can operate through the stratificatory potential of “bread” as a matter which is always cut by the discourses of life, death and dreams.

When Hansel and Gretel find the witch’s bread house, they continue to eat even after the owner inquires from within. Bruno Bettelheim interprets this as a cautionary tale on oral greed. A satirically proposed legendary source for the tale of “Hansel and Gretel” would suggest the cultural vulnerability of the innocent “witch” in the case of Katharina Schrader, an innovative honey-cake maker acquitted of witchcraft charges, who lives in self-exile in the forest but is murdered by the spurned and professionally envious Hans Metzler and his sister, Gretel. From another perspective, the narrative also hooks the disciplines and punishments in the parse economy of food with the children’s status as the ambiguous inside-outside of the bread-culture—they are parroced within a tutelage devoted to the controlling of their desires on one hand, and, at the same time, encouraged to participate in the bildungs in order to earn the means of satiating nutrimental or alimentary desires. And adults can use their economic power to regulate the penalty/naturality dichotomy of child’s hunger into desirable behaviors, through condign or compensatory powers catalyzing the child’s actions. For Jack Zipes, this control constitutes exploitation:

Hansel and Gretel’ has always minimized and will continue to minimize that degree [of abuse] in all societies . . . [It] rationalizes the manner in which men use the bonds of love to reinforce their control over children.16

This kind of barter is far more complex than simple adult-biological appetancy and earned satiation. One of the reasons for this complexity is that on the other side of the barter, the issue of the child’s self-assertion and expression of identity is involved: Carole M. Counihan writes:

> Because eating involves the first experiences of love and autonomy, the first awareness of pleasure, the first expressions of aggression, and the first dimensions of frustration and rage, it is a rich domain for children’s self-expression.17

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Food is a central aspect of identity and the adult’s/parental/societal control over the availability, regulation, rationing or abundance of bread can represent the marginalizing prohibitions, obligations, and disempowerment inherent in saccharine concepts of childhood. A more extreme example of this disempowerment is the esculent architecture of the Other’s place—the house of the Witch. The Witch’s abode in “Hansel and Gretel” is a decoy for tender young things with a sweet tooth. It is definitely not a space that feeds children, but a space that cannibalizes children. In this space, the place of the death-as-the-food-of-the-other, Hansel and Gretel get initiated to the earning of their food and riches, through the actions of bravery and strategy, and the space is converted into the place of the food-as-the-death-of-the-other. The intriguing allotropy of the bread-house, then, becomes the limit between disempowerment [even potential annihilation] and self-discovery. A house that is liminal between regalement/thanatos, a dialectic threshold for humanist selfhood-formation through the expulsion of the abject, the fantastic object that would fill the void in the gastronomical subject of bildungsroman—the Witch’s house is all of these at the same time.

The breadcrumbs left behind by Hansel en route, then, are the “traces” of what is already always to be left behind, discarded, abandoned—for example, the peripheral or disempowered belonging in a refectory economy. Affluence minimizes the need to chastise wastefulness or encourage thrifty eating habits; and wastefulness in a narrative of acquisition [of resourceful abundance of victuals and valuables] needs not be coded or underlined, or even emphatically represented. In other words, in a narrative of gaining permanent emancipation from alimentary depression and repressive parentage, the profligate/parsimonious binary is not at all important for the author or the society because the focus is elsewhere. This absented or hypo-visibilized, almost hidden trope of improvidence with food is further glossed over by linking it to the cartographic functions like tracking, navigating and direction-finding. As Hansel scatters the breadcrumbs, the viaticum is made into quasi-cartographic signs de-linked from the eutrophic contingency, but linked to the path of the re-integrative fugitive, the road of the reverse journey, the impossibility of return to the same after the two witches, the step-mother and the crone of the refectionary cottage, are expunged from the narrative [both dead] as “bad mothers”. The gesture might appear to be an excretionary act [the retreat of the lost fantasy at its amnesiac instance becomes a leitmotif for the tale] or even reification of the viands themselves; but the relevant point is what the
child traces with the breadcrumbs. Maria Tatar has suggested, perhaps more than any other Grimm fairy tale, "Hansel and Gretel" seems to "perpetuate strangely inappropriate notions about what it means to live ever happily after". Honeyman comments:

Villainizing the parents helps the story's audience build empathy for a potentially scared child's perspective, but not for a child's triumph in overcoming painful challenges (earning or stealing his or her keep, escaping or killing his or her captor)

U. C. Knoepflmacher writes:

If the survivorship of Hansels and Gretels is to be refigured in narratives that promote the transformation of thinking children into thinking adults, such a narrativizing must presumably comfort, however indirectly, the childhood trauma induced by parental desertion and the threat of annihilation.

But by focusing on the trauma, and not the children's overcoming of it or the nutrimental poverty initializing their problems, Knoepflmacher follows the nurturance tradition of perceiving children as a homogene to be acted upon by the adults' victual economy, in which the readers focus more on the passivity of children than their protagonism—more on the irresistibility of the temptation or the inevitability of marginalization than the success of active resistance or pleasure of choosing extravagance exercised by the children.

Interestingly, the shift in "Hansel and Gretel" through the different ages have basically worked through the differential treatment of the item and instance of the two children's temptation, heightening the ideology of food. Rachel Freudenburg explains in her history of the visual semiotics of the tale that during the nineteenth century, the most popular images to accompany the text are the confrontation between children and witch in front of the candy house and the siblings alone in the forest. The emphasis on the aperitif bait (in the older pictures a house of bread, then a structure of gingerbread, and eventually a riotous architecture of all sweets imaginable) rather than the children's moment of abandonment or triumph shifts the didactic effect of the tale as well. Freudenburg ties this shift to changing views of childhood and child rearing in the nineteenth century:

18 Maria Tatar [ed], The Classic Fairy Tales. (New York: Norton, 1999), p.182
Even a tale such as 'Hansel and Gretel,' in which juvenile incarceration, abandonment, and child labor figure prominently, has spawned many an illustration of carefree, innocent children. In fact, nineteenth-century illustrations for this tale deflect attention away from child abuse and instead concentrate on issues which were more attractive to a contemporaneous readership, among them, the image of the Romantic child.\(^22\)

In nineteenth century, the encomiums of refectionary parenting and panary tutelage of children were regulated by an archive dominated by repressive and rationalistic orthodoxies; Victorians were "sadistic" in child feeding, following the spiritual pedagogy of John Wesley and nutritional advice of Pye Henry Chavasse to develop a "pleasure-free cuisine that some claim helped create the stoic Victorian personality".\(^23\) Probably this also explains, as Allen observes, the popularity of American children's texts in which there were scenes of kids munching and chomping on a profusion of buckwheat pancakes with maple syrup, eggs, and sausages. Certainly this kind of indulgent gorging continued to be depicted in the twentieth century and still is today, exemplified by James Marshall's version of *Hansel and Gretel* (1990), shown in Figure 4.1. The illustration of Hansel and Gretel gulping down the broken crusts of confections at the doorstep of the Witch's esculent cottage is really a picture of happy and sudden discovery of opulence. But there is a sub-text of ailment underneath the statements of ailments. It seems from the facial expressions that there is no happiness or no optimism in their cognitions—amidst piles of food, the faces of the children look extremely vulnerable. In fact, the ambiguity of Hansel's hand holding the bread can denote a holding of stomach due to stomach-ache, a comic cautionary.

The lack of moderation in consumption or deglutition is to be followed by the unease or some kind of upset—this is a rare illustration in American children's books.\(^24\) However, this criticism is partially redundant for the said instance in *Hansel and Gretel*, because the two children are virtually orphans, and free from the burthen of any sense of community in context of which the ethics of moderation can be required or fruitful.

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\(^22\) Ibid. 264.


Figure 4.1: The instance of epulation in *Hansel and Gretel* by James Marshall, published in 1990 by Dial Books for Young Readers, A Division of Penguin Young Readers Group, A Member of Penguin Group (USA) Inc.
The poetics and politics of space is different in a fairy tale from the management of the colonial space, for example, in Phantom Comics, or the hauntological excesses of spectral spaces in the ghost stories, or the space of the novum in the science fictions. The European fairy tales deploys two non-homeomorphic worlds—a magical irreal space of paranormal beings from the beyond, and a non-magical normal human world—spaces that are divided from one another through occasionally runny but sometimes also inflexible frontiers. There are limiting structures or spaces such as a bridge, river, pond, seashore, well or spring, stone, forest, thorns, and so on, that denote either the mutual permeability or exclusion. The forest is a particularly intriguing passage-way. Right from Blake’s nursery rhymes to the more contemporary Oz books, it is regarded, in both the real and metaphorical sense, as a place of fatal hazards and illicit cravings. In the binary opposition of the civil urbane space and the rustic, natural, uncivilized space, the forest or the jungle inhabits the place of the inferior other, as we have seen in the case of Phantom comics; the ancient, primitive jungle is an antithesis of the urbs eterna.

It is not always possible to demarcate, in the Euclidean sense, the space of the material reality from the space of the irreal. On the contrary, we are confronted with a fabled shifting of spheres. For example, Alfred Messerli observes:

...when the hardworking daughter in the fairy tale “Frau Holle” is down in the underworld making the bed and energetically shaking out the bolster so “that the feathers fly, then it is snowing in the world.” And the vertical movement of the daughter’s jump into the well is at variance with the horizontal movement of her homecoming, which happens not by arduous climbing up out of the depths, but simply by stepping out of the otherworld... 25

Messerli comments that there are three broadly identifiable aspects of spatial representation in European Fairy Tales: economy in the organization of space, the discontinuous order of spatial perception, and the reconfigural significance of the narrative perspective for the narrated space. First, the European fairy tale proceeds with extreme reserve in constructing space in the course of the narrative. Artistic economy is displayed not only in the thrifty, pertinent handling of the elements once chose but also in the scanty designation of figures and objects. Only those indicators of space are given that are absolutely necessary for comprehending the narrated geography. The fragmentary, incomplete, and indeterminate constitutes the sense of the space, which the reader must augment toward a complete spatial

ensemble. In the earliest version of the "Frog King" tales, for example, there is no architectural concretizations like "castle", only the word "home" along with the mention of a dining table [not even a hall] and a marble staircase and the onomatopoeia of a door opening jar are given, which the reader must co-ordinate into a sense of castle/palace.26

Second, fairy tale space is often discontinuous, erratic, and radically heterogeneous. The hero's movement through these discontinuous spaces require special means of transportation, which are either magical gifts or transmogrified naturals [like an elongated beanstalk, or a tamed piece of cloud, or one's own body morphing into a bird or fish]. Besides, the cross-over zones through which the hero switches between the real and the irreal are not usually elaborated in fairy tales—the journey is not the central metaphor but the destination is. Wide intermediate spaces are unexpectedly surmounted in this way, and only the individual stops are named.27 Space in the fairy tale is simultaneously contractive and expansive. Distances are "translated" into time data, usually by fixing the time required to traverse space or by the stylistic means of repetition [of verbs, usually]. For example: "X rode and rode and rode on...he rode for the whole day, then for two days continuously, finally he rode for three days and nights and reached Y" is a common pattern of denoting the spatial impression of being too far afield.

Third, it receives its spatial profile from the action and from the perspective out of which the action is related. Spatial changes in fairy tales result finally from a narrative situation or narrative perspective that is not consistent. The change from an authorial to a figural narrative situation alters the proximity to events and the organization of space in an attempt to influence the intensity and emotional quality of the reception.

Like space, body becomes an important agendum in the poetics and politics of fairy tales and their re-workings—as the locus of lack and desire, as the matrix of resistance, as the site of desire. Cristina Bacchilega, in Postmodern Fairy Tales, calls fairy tales "ideologically variable desire machines".28 Fairy tales thematize desire on several planes, including but not limited to desire for material goods, power, and sexual union. It is sexual desire, often intertwined with the desire for power over another human being, which is foregrounded in eroticized fairy tales. Catherine Orenstein's assertion is significant here:

26 Ibid. 277.
27 Ibid. 278..
Fairy Tales are at their core about sexuality—about the codes and manners and qualities and behaviors that society deems desirable, and thus which make us desirable to each other.29

Partly in reaction against the Western history of cultural infantilization and institutional reluctance, critics reading fairy tales that do not unequivocally deal with sex have often construed their imagery, conflicts, and resolutions sexually.30 Since fairy tales have been incorporated into children’s literature over the past two centuries, there is also an “element of gleeful perversion in eroticized fairy tales”.31 However, we must remember that the intertextual re-workings of eroticized or adult fairy tales are not per se children’s literature; they use strategies such as Freudian symbolism that works through the demography, the gestures and the objects that populate the children’s texts into a titillating and/or subversive remake. The retellings of the fairy tales can be, either still child’s text, or de-contextualized and de-genred into strictly adult readings. Rewriting traditional fairy tales for contemporary audiences has become something of a growth industry in literature for both children and adults in recent decades. At one extreme, Angela Carter and Tannith Lee write for the adult readers feminist retellings of classic children’s tales with a foregrounding of and stress on the sexual politics implicit in the patriarchal roots of such stories, while at the other authors such as Robert Munsch construct new tales with a twist on old models to entertain younger readers. Such rewriting, however, is hardly a new phenomenon: writers have been amending the folk tale’s roots in oral culture for centuries into innovative literary rhizomes in the European traditions. In seventeenth-century France the literary fairy tale prospered, affixing to the affects of surprise of the folk-tale traditions a more stylish and refined emotive susceptibility, a more rationalized gender-politics and an ethical stress. And in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Germany, Romantic writers imbued with the Gothic reaction to realism and Enlightenment reinforcement of canny middle-class values in fiction worked on the folk-fairy-exotic hymen to inseminate their own hymenographic archives [utterances of the “between” of natural and supernatural realms, for example, or the sublimation of the perverse into ethical claims].


One of the sites, probably the primary, of demarcation between children's and adult fairy tales, and of the operation of "desire" in both, is the body—its contours, its praxis, its institutional or discursive cuts, its abstractions and concretions. Amongst the markers and scripts of the body, in a fairy tale, the most significant is the "beauty" of the corporeal presence. There is frequent mention of characters' physical appearances (their looks, physiques, clothing, etc.) in these fairy tales, and this is true regardless of their gender or age; 94 percent of the tales make some mention of physical appearance, and the average number of times per story is 13.6. Overall, there are approximately five times more references to women's beauty per tale than to men's handsomeness. While the number of actual references to the woman's body is not very high, what is remarkable is the way in which feminine beauty is referred to, mostly abstract, and cosmological instead of physiological: in The Pink Flower a maiden is hyperbolized as a superior original to any art, "so beautiful that no painter could ever have made her look more beautiful", and in The Goose Girl at the Spring a young woman's natural beauty is sublated into the magical excesses, "so beautiful that the entire world considered her a miracle". The metaphysicalization of physical beauty and the moral aufhebung of the body and the beauty are quite regular—31 percent of all stories associate beauty with virtue and 17 percent associate physical repulsiveness with malice or vice.

In spite of the prominence of beauty as a moral, metaphysical and sociological category in the fairy tales, and the over-abundance of physical charm as a marker of a character's acceptability both toward other characters inside the plot and toward the readers, in itself, a fairy tale heroine cannot be a concrete icon of erotics. Characters in the Western fairy-tale canon, argues Lüthi, ordinarily "lack physical and psychological depth". In the Grimms' rendition of "Snow White," for example, the eponymous protagonist is, at the age of seven, described as "beautiful as the day is clear and more beautiful than the queen herself," while

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33 Ibid., p. 717.


35 Ibid., p. 566.


her rival, the Queen, is “beautiful but proud and haughty”. Both statements are strongly suggestive, but only in the vaguest, non-anatomized terms. And even the Grimms’ famous delineation of Snow White as “white as snow, as red as blood, and her hair as black as ebony”—a sentiment rich in simile—yields only the most general physical description. From these accounts, we know something of Snow White’s complexion, and that she is comely, but little else. The fairy tale refuses to map the corporeal in discreetness or distinction. Charles Perrault, whose collection is much more explicit about the literary quality of the retellings than is that of the Grimms, provides physical and psychological descriptions that are no more specific. Perrault, in his version of “Cinderella,” writes at his most descriptive that when the “godmother then touched [Cinderella] with her wand . . . her clothes turned into cloth of gold and silver, all beset with jewels,” and that when she entered the ball, “there was immediately a profound silence. Everyone stopped dancing, and the violins ceased to play, so entranced was everyone with the singular beauties of the unknown newcomer”. It is a statement of the beauty of the character in the narrative. It is not, however, a specific description. So difficult is the opsis of a costume of gold and silver, and so vague are Cinderella’s singular beauties, that the reader would have to fill the void with his or her fantasies, intuitions and desires. What is being evoked here, as it is with the Grimms’ “Snow White,” is a set of rhetorical conventions specific to fairy tales in print, mostly an epithet replacing the contingency of a description. On one hand that would imply an erasure of the corporeal, and therefore a preclusion of the eroto-genital, from the limits of the fairy tale’s circuit of desire. On the other hand, this would also imply the whoring of the fairy tale heroine—the withdrawal of singular and concrete depths would make the body of the fairy tale heroine a passive recycle bin of everyone’s differential desires, a tabula rasa for the libidinal economies. As Francisco Vaz da Silva contends in his article “Bengt Holbek and the Study of Meanings in Fairy Tales,” fairy-tale characters, being literary and depthless, have no id of their own and thus no psychoanalytic energy in themselves. Similarly, the corporeality of the fairy tale body is only possible as a retrait, since their corporeality is inscribed by an evasion of the bodily singularity. Writers, readers, raconteurs, and listeners all have the capacity to project psychological depthand physical praxes onto them, but the characters themselves are incapable of projection. Thus, about “Snow White,” we may say that the relationship between the protagonist and her stepmother is pivoted around an Elektral triad. For example, a Portuguese oral version of

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“Snow White” presents a mother named Rose and her daughter, called Flower of the Rose, of whom the former is envious to the point of trying to kill her. But the analytic projection in this case is from the interpreter, and onto the textuated passive, withdrawn mind or unfleshed body of the heroine. This is not true to the same degree to the realistic, magic realistic, “stream of consciousness”, naturalist or historical fictions, for example, because in these cases the characters are foregrounded as cogitational and corporeal representations located in the contingencies, scales and momenta of material realities around them and/or around us, not just contours to be fleshed and cogitated with readers’ transitive acts.

Sandra L. Beckett’s Recycling Red Riding Hood, for example, studies the intertextuality and re-contextuations of the fairy tale over the decades in two hundred variations in twelve countries. Beckett describes in detail an impressive international array of books that textually or pictorially evoke, reinterpret, re-install, and re-tell “Little Red Riding Hood” since 1970, some of them “unknown in the English-speaking world”. 39 Most children in Europe or European-derived cultures know some version of “Little Red Riding Hood,” though, as Beckett notes, it is “often a sanitized version that frequently combines elements from both [Perrault’s and the Grimms’] tales”. 40 Thus, as “part of the literary heritage of almost every child in the Western world,” “Little Red Riding Hood” allows authors and illustrators of children’s books to pursue forms of postmodern aesthetic experimentation that are more often reserved for adult literature. 41 “Contemporary retellings of Little Red Riding Hood,” as Beckett initially explains and then illustrates throughout her study, “often use complex narrative structures and techniques, such as polyfocalization, genre blending, metafiction, parody, irony, mise en abyme, fragmentation, gaps, anticlosure, and the carnivalesque”. 42 Many of these re-workings invert gender roles (for example, Little Red Riding Hood may be amoral, and the wolf may be a vigilant instructor). Some authors begin text with one of the traditional closures in the earlier tales and try to narrate what happened after that, in the process not only providing the earlier text with new lines of flight, but also deterritorializing the majoritarian narrative closures. Others explore reflexivity by writing tales in which “the characters are familiar with their own stories and quite conscious of the roles they are

40 Ibid. xvii
41 Ibid. p.xix
42 Ibid. p.xx
playing".\textsuperscript{43} In the process, the Red Riding Hood is teased out of its complacent frozenness and provided with not only allotropes and catenations but with a whole range of becoming what she was not.

In the process of contemporary re-tellings of the "Little Red Riding Hood", Beckett argues, authors and address issues ranging from technology, ecology, animal rights, physical fitness and well-being, ragging and resilience amidst the seniors, physical deformities, gender roles, sexuality and violence, and often these parameters themselves are deconstructed by utilizing the already subversive potential of the original tale. The diverse ways in which illustrators and author-illustrators of "Little Red Riding Hood" (for example, John Goodall, Kelek, Warja Lavater, James Marshall, Beni Montresor, Sarah Moon, O'KIF, Tony Ross, and William Wegman) have reworked the visual semiotics of the story using a wide range of media [oil, water-colour, pencil, ink, charcoal, pastel, crayon, photography, collage, textile, cut silhouettes, and varying combinations of these] is just one dimension of the disclosing the fairy tale from its primary semantic content. Particularly interesting are the contemporary illustrators’ playful recycling and recall of the earlier illustration-texts by previous artists (those of Gustave Doré and Walter Crane): the extent to which a quite different story may be told in the illustrations than is told in the verbal text becomes apparent through the breaks and pastiche-like mutations in the latter pictures. Beckett discusses a number of books in which authors substitute alternative colours (little blue, green, yellow, or black riding hood) for the colour "red" that is normally associated with the story and, thus, deliberately mistell the story as a means of opening the child’s imagination to further subversive, textual play.\textsuperscript{44}

However, the re-cycling of the fairy tale is rarely transparent in the sense that the allusions and reminiscences are seldom acknowledged, cited or unmasked. A thick range of European intertextual reworkings of "Little Red Riding Hood" as pre-text only playfully evokes the positivity and/or the mimicry: Philippe Coretin’s \textit{L'ogre, le loup, la petite fille et le gâteau} (1995), Christian Bruel and Didier Jouault’s \textit{Rouge, bien rouge} (1986), Tord Nygen’s \textit{Den röda tråden} (1978), Mitsumasa Anno’s \textit{Tabi no ehon} (1977), Elsa Devernois’s \textit{Grosse peur pour Bébé-Loup} (1997), Sharon Jennings’s \textit{Jeremiah and Mrs. Ming} (1990), Fam Ekman’s \textit{Lommetørlklet} (1999), Anthony Browne’s \textit{The Tunnel} (1980), Rascan Nicolas de Crécy’s \textit{La

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.. p. 216.

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.. p. 69.
nuit du grand méchant loup (1998), Hervé Debry’s Rock ’n loup (1999), Monique Bermond’s Pouchi, Poucha et le gros loup du bois (1976), and Jostein Gaarder’s Sofies verden (1991). Some novel-length treatments of the tale, which, among other things, deal with the themes of terrorism and freedom, such as Gillian Cross’s Wolf (1990) and Carmen Martín Gaite’s Caperucita en Manhattan (1990).

A crucial in-built aspect of re-working the fairy tale is the poetics of illustrating the narrative, of fleshing out and deepening in the characters into opsis, and via the oculocentrism and scopophilia, into a sensuous concretizion. The picture as a re-working is literally a figural other of what the narrative limits and bounds, as they are contained within the same book, operate as per-textual signification, and render the page-textuated body and mind a sensuous semiotic supplementation and a psychic complexity respectively. Unlike the lisible text, the pictographic texts are smartly parapractical and visually acknowledgeable as embodied, or what Zolkover calls “the corporealization and eroticization of fairy-tale characters”.45 These illustrations re-make the fairy-tale characters [which are otherwise flattened, stylized, stripped of all but the most essential references to the sensual and the psychic], into emotionally complex, sexually/corporeally explicit, and physically present/represented. In their transition to the pictographic page, they are fleshed out, physiologized. They are given form, drapery, fashion that at once mark them as contiguous with their fairy-tale lisible selves, and lend them a verisimilitude that allows them to pass unquestioned into human society, both ours and the dialogic demography of the plot. And further, as part of that same transition, they are more or less eroticized, for an utterance in the scopic regime would necessarily anchor the slippery body-signifier within or at a libidinal moment or momentum. Through dialogue, through plot transformations, and most significantly through discrete yet sequential artistic rendering, they are given psychic depth—desire—that makes manifest that which was, at best, latent in the narrative from which they primarily are extracted. The dramatis personae of fairy tale narrative are transformed in the pictures-- they are simultaneously capsized and preserved to produce a set of characters that have walked into a more evidently, eye-witnessedly realist conventions of picture books, dragging their abstract past behind them.

This transformation, at its most basic level, is a matter of the way in which these characters inhabit their skins. Through characterization, storytelling, and artistic rendering, their fairy-tale identities are reinscribed again and again, page after page, even as they are transformed into something new. In part, this is a matter of the nature of the visual medium, which leads to a situation in which characters, by necessity, are imbued with a body on the page. They are drawn out—represented in pencil and pen and paint—given a solid, if symbolic, form that is recognizable among readers and producers as a body. At the same time, however, in order to make that body recognizable—in order to allow readers to associate it with a particular character—it must be given insignia. Introduction, commentary or quotidian excerpt that provide a means by which readers can perceive its specificity. However, the pictures themselves do not usually constitute any plot or narrative: they are bodies, character-renderings that must be recognizable in a single instant extracted from a larger narrative—no cinematic and sequential series of these sorts of depictions are provided as we have seen in the case of the comic strips. Yet they preserve the positivity, and thus reinforce the unity of the lisible plot. And as a result, the reader comes to identify certain consistently rendered forms with certain characters, in effect, assigning to each a single body. In other words, Snow White is Snow White in the first page and in the fortieth, although her presence is only transitory—a snapshot—her image fleeting in and out of the lisible, leximatic narrative.

Snow White, in fact, presents an excellent example of corporealization through its repictions, its pictographic re-writings. Speaking about the trichromatic heroine’s physical and metaphysical significance, a good starting point is often N. J. Girardot’s remarks on the death symbolism of time spent by Snow White in the dark forest. In his view, the fate of the tricolour heroine enacts "the idea of a union of the red (menstrual blood) and white (semen) through the agency of the black (the ritual ‘death’ involved in the initiation and marriage union)."46 The chthonian dwarfs in the dark forest are in the business of drawing luminous entities out of darkness—illuminant ore out of earth’s darkness and In the same vein, they will not bury the maiden [Snow White] in the "dark earth" (schwarze Erde) but choose, instead, to elevate her to light by putting her in a glass coffin on top of a mountain.47 The gesture that darkness/blackness prefigures new light, for enchantment is, at bottom, a reversible death—a

standard pattern of cyclic models regarding conspicuous natural phenomena. What is interesting here is that all such phenomena—new moon coming out of dark moon, or the earth's darkness receiving corpses as well as new seeds that would sprout out into the light of a vernal renascence—do have a collapse of Eros/Thanatos, a diptych that inscribes the cultural ambivalence regarding female fertility, female sexuality and jouissance. Snow White's chromatic tri-valence and her being placed in a glass coffin under the light of the sun instead of being killed in the dark cave of the chthonian dwarfs in the dark forest recalls this cultural ambivalence between female eroticity and female fatality. The absence of Snow White's erotic body is precisely the withdrawal through which her sexuality is inscribed, retreated, as a disappearing appearing—her de-sexualized body, which has been displaced in the fairy tale from anatomy to chromatic indirectness, is sexuated through that displacement only.

In Willingham's comic strip *Fables*, for example, she is the deputy mayor of the Fabletown. When we first encounter her in the first issue of the series *Fables*, even if we were to miss the nameplate prominently displayed on her desk, she would be almost immediately recognizable. As she is illustrated, she evokes the famous description, of Grimms' fairy tale: her skin is very pale—nearly white as snow; her lips, whether through cosmetics or otherwise, are red as blood; and her hair is raven black. Further, the illustration evokes the isomorphism with Snow White from the 1937 Disney film. Her turtleneck dress is almost of the same hue as her blouse in the Disney text. Her garb, her mannerisms, and most strikingly her attitude have all been altered to fit the geography (New York), the time period (twentieth century), and her administrative subject-position in the governamental stratification. In spite of all the reterritorializations, she recalls the unique body of Snow White in the original fairy tale text, and concretizes it even more as a particular, singular, individual body: the original Snow White, evoke an idealized patriarchal past, a Victorian silence about sexuality, the abstraction of the Eros as a female passivity, while in *Fables* her body is fore-grounded as active, contemporary, and sexually present. In the Grimms' tale (as in the Disney film), in exchange of shelter and panary rations, Snow White is to perform almost all of the functions of a good middle-class house-wife; she must cook, make the beds, wash, sew, and knit, and keep everything shipshape and tidy. Conspicuously absent from her enumerated tasks is her bodily performances, especially sex. Since in the fairy tale her singular identity is inscribed by only two things—her beautiful bodily complexion and the feminine tasks she performs perfectly, it is not wrong to expect that these two inscriptions of her identity would cusp somewhere—but in the fairy tale they never do.
Conversely, in *Fables* the only trace of Snow White's exile among the dwarves centers on its corporeal aspect. In the same scene where we first meet Snow White, we find her in the heat of an argument with Beauty, of "Beauty and the Beast" fame. She tells Beauty that she cannot help with the couple's financial problems—that they ultimately need to learn to manage money themselves—and in response, Beauty scoffs at Snow White's "amorality", recalling her adventures among the seven dwarves. Central to the scene is a trace, a loud silence, of the absent fairy-tale backstory, transgressing the taboo of recalling the libidinal in the discourse of fairy tales, and making present that which has been withdrawn from inscription in the fairy tale.

The corporeal transformations found here are one significant part of a complex of inversions and subversions that constitute what Peter Stallybrass and Allon White might, in their *Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, describe as a world upside down. The abstractness innate in the fairy-tale genre may be effective in forging a discursive space, reified from the norms of social and material external world, potentially a distanced place from which the critique of the real world's and society's normatives can speak amidst resemblances. But the corporeal and psychological concreteness of *Fables* serves as a reverse critical mirror of that discursive space. Through the metamorphosis of fairy-tale characters, through the exploration of their physical and psychological depth, the creators of *Fables* generate a "carnivalesque commentary, at once lighthearted and pointed, that exposes the rigidness and prescriptive moral didacticism of fairy-tale patriarchs like Perrault and the Brothers Grimm." At the same time, through their pastiche-like reflexivity toward fairy-tale antecedents, they position the fairy-tale body of Snow White into a post-modern, middle-teen age resurfacing amidst other corporealisized, eroticized and contemporized bodies of Grims', Perrault's and even *Arabian Nights'* characters.

The case of "Little Red Riding Hood" is probably one of the most fetishized and fantasized fairy tale in the world, with the parapractic vulnerabilities of the text giving it a readiness for addressing/being projected with debates regarding woman's sexuality, onirous desires, seduction and the child's libidinal psychology. The red hood of the little girl has been variously interpreted as hymen, menstruation and initiation into sexuality, as well as her proletarian status and the ambivalence of female blood. However, the original versions deemed fit for the consumption of the little tots have been always treated as a cautionary tale, with its majoritarian telos of warning the child within suitable and safe behavioural roles and activities, and also about a protectionist

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discourse about the marginal child like the female child or the parentless child. The Wolf's cannibalistic hunger and his desire for tender flesh can be read variously as thanatological excess, monstrosity, human/animal divide in which the latter term is othered as a dangerous, menacing permanent threat to the bildung of the human, the primitive or the savage as well as the pedophilic phallic figure. The fact that the old grandmother's cautions and her own intelligence outwit the Wolf's gastronomic/sexual hunger is a double entendre: the moral rectitude and virtue of the little girl supplying practical wisdom [partially also collected from the benevolent and experienced adults, maternal figures etcetera as a "good girl" or "good child" is supposed to acquire, as opposed to Pinoccio's or Alice's truant, fugitive rebellions] and the sexing of a child into a girl who must be a hyphenated body to keep the hymeneal reputations intact, a body without gender being transformed into the feminine coyness and self-discipline. The misogynist umwelt of the little girl is overlooked and the entire responsibility of survival is vested in the moral and practical wisdom of the woman.

The de-sexuating surface of the cautionary tale, however, is the most recurrently re-worked and re-configured source of adult fantasies and desires in Western civilization. Kate Bernheimer writes as a "the personal is political" mode of confessional criticism of the fairy tale's reception:

All of these images filled me with rapture. I don't think the rapture I felt reading fairy tales had to do exclusively with their themes of sex and danger. It had to do with the beauty of an art form that shines through even the most bowdlerized versions, and it had something to do with being transformed. But sex did figure. Once, in about 1975, my older sister and I happened upon a copy of Playboy with a cartoon of a young woman in a red cape being tied to a tree, which we immediately recognized as a fairy tale we were not supposed to read. We did, nothing would have kept us from it, and not only because it was dirty—it was Red Riding Hood, after all, the girl Charles Dickens so famously called his first love. "I should have known perfect bliss," he claimed, if he had been able to marry her.

Tex Avery's 1943 short film Red Hot Riding Hood or his 1949 short Little Rural Riding Hood that are explicit about their transformation of fairy-tale femmes into fairy-tale femmes fatales tease the Lolita-figure of the Red Riding Hood out of its passivist body to an active agent of corporeal processes including subverting the structure of heterosexuality—the female protagonists in these animation films are neither inert nor disciplined into docile bodies. However, the issue of "femaleness" in the sense Showalter would have used it is not restricted to the external or subsequent re-workings only; even some of the in-built repictions of the narrative in the form of frontispiece illustrations generated the same potential.

within "children's books". A look at Gustave Doré's illustration of the "Little Red Riding Hood" [Figure 4.3 below] would make it evident that the "encounter" between the little girl and the supposedly adult wolf is an event on the bed; the ambivalence of Red Riding Hood's bedspread partially covering her body but also signifying semi-nudity beneath the pulled bedsheets couches the encounter in more than animal/human-child interface. The Wolf is a phallic intruder, and the Red Riding Hood shields herself with the bedspread but stares, not as passive, but as an active participant in the scopophilic gaze, at the phallic face of the Wolf. The Wolf's hoodedness may signify, in this illustration, a concealment of his real intentions; but is not Red Riding Hood already aware of it, the way the child behaves to her own body, trying to robe it first, than to run away?

![Figure 4.2: Gustave Doré, "Little Red Riding Hood."]

The poetics and politics of body, desire and sexuality, with or sans fantasy, fetish and violence is not the only dimension whereby the re-working of fairy tales operates. Racialized body and the proletarian body circulates in even the children's fairy tales and their reworking for children as important reminders of the fact that the fairy tales are, truly, cut by history and polity. Davenport's Ashpet: An American Cinderella (1989) gives his tale a distinctively Appalachian setting (characteristic of all his fairy tale films) and a World War II period feel. The film is introduced by the voice of Louise Anderson, an African American Appalachian storyteller who
also plays Ashpet's "fairy godmother" in the film. This conflation of roles of storyteller and fairy godmother literalizes the bridging of the role of the lost mother with the fairy godmother of the original tale. Anderson, as "Aunt Sally," tells stories to Lily/Ashpet within the film; by serving as the frame narrator as well, the voice that both introduces and concludes the story for us, she co-extends the audience with Cinderella. We, like Ashpet, are worthy of listening to her tales. The stepsisters, who fear "Dark Sally's" magical concoctions, her occult powers, and implicitly her black skin, never hear the stories she tells, nor do they understand her riddles. The epidermalization of racial difference is re-appropriated into a discourse of the epistemological superiority of the black female, who is at once an oracular agent of ambivalent discourses [riddles, prophecies, chantings] and a matrix of the place of the Imaginary. Ashpet cracks Sally's riddles effortlessly because she has not lost the semiotic chora—her mother had already always told these riddles to her, or at least that is what she feels to be secret of her ready communion to Sally's babel. Sally, the black fairy-godmother character, becomes a figure through which the little Cinderella can trace and recall her absent mother. The step-sisters are symbolized within a phallogocentric symbolic, and hence unable to participate in or be energized with the semiotic chora embodied in the magic-talk of Aunt Sally. By situating the maternal and the negritudinal magic in the same figure, Davenport presents the fairy tale's fairy godmother as a rhizome.

Early in the film Sally tells Ashpet the familiar folktale of “the possum and the snake”, in which the snake persuades the possum to carry him, then eats him when he no longer has need of him. The story-within-the-story generates a figural fable for the violence between the self and the other, and the impossibility of ethical friendship in utilitarian contracts. Here Anderson takes over the film, reciting the old tale animatedly as though under an occult energy. Sally's face explodes in laughter at the punchline. As the possum sadly and fearfully asks the snake why he plans to eat him, when the possum has done nothing but help him out, the snake screeches sinisterly, "But you knewed[sic] I was a snake!" Ashpet, somewhat puzzled, brushes Sally's hair as she listens. Later, though, she returns home to her stepsisters, who have promised her a chance to go to the dance if she will run one errand for them. The errand completed, they leave her to clean house, gleefully reneging on their promise. The story-within-a-story-reworking-the-original-story takes the literary, moral and ideological structures of “Cinderella” into a new direction.50 Sally wants Ashpet to stop being a possum,

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to stop taking the abuse and waiting for the rewards, like the fairy godmother did in the original tale, but the Afro-American context of her tutelage of Ashpet and her use of fables instead of didactic and utilitarian advices change the poetics and the politics of the Fairy godmother figure itself. She reminds Ashpet, too, to claim her name (her given name is Lily) and her inheritance and not only her mother's dress and shoes but the house itself, which Sally claims belonged to Lily's mother, not her father (whose remarriage and death have so failed her). The issue of the woman's property is here addressed with a double maneuver.

However, the reworking of "Cinderella" into an American Cinderella has its own ideological and cultural closures. Shally serves as Ashpet's fairy godmother, giving her a potion (though we may suspect it is just soap) with which to wash before the big dance, helping her find her mother's clothes hidden in a secret attic, and perfom1ing her chores so that she can escape to the dance unseen. The three helps done by Shally therefore, are: offering a cosmetic commodity that would enhance Cinderell's feminine beauty as blonde [though sally is a black herself], reworking with the wardrobe of fashion like re-introducing a style-statement out of the archive, and invisibilization of labour to create a zone of leisure. Sally's promotion of dominant American values, especially the consumer culture of beauty-products and the concealment of the labour-metaphysics curbs her African American and maternal subversiveness.

Lily/Ashpet arrives late at the dance and entrances all onlookers, including the handsomest boy in town, a soldier boy named William whom the elder stepsister Thelma has had her eye on. Blinded by their own jealousy, the sisters do not recognize Lily, who leaves the dance when William's back is turned. She drops a shoe on the way, and the anthropometric tracing of Lily/Ashpet/Cinderella leads to a fairy-tale marriage.

Ashpet is in many ways an entirely conventional Cinderella story. Reasons as to why it can be called so can be tabulated as below:

1. It depicts the rivalry amongst females at its worst, both between Ashpet and her stepsisters, and more sinisterly between the stepmother and all three younger women in her house, especially her eldest daughter, Thelma.
2. **Beauty is rewarded**, as Ashpet clearly outshines her sisters (one of whom, as is conventional in Cinderella-movies, is overweight and indeed food-obsessed).

3. **Love at first sight** unites Lily and her soldier-boyfriend, who returns her shoe, jumps a fence to join his comrades, and comes back, we are told, to marry Lily and take her to Niagara Falls for their honeymoon. Figure 4.3 aptly arrests the conventional treatment of the discourse of love and marriage in the text—even the child reader's response to the text has been imbricated within the conventional meanings and configurations of love and matrimony. Figure 4.4 on the other hand shows the theatrical improvisation of the text, with the corporeal matter of the actors blending easily into material props, invoking psychoanalytic "extra"s into the text.

Yet despite these conventional trappings the film takes on a new meaning, I believe, in its emphasis on black female-narrator storytelling technique and the maximal intensification of matrilineal epistemologies. Lily's transformation in the film involves reclaiming a maternal legacy, and she finds that legacy through Sally; her connection to Sally is a connection to her own maternal past. While Sally looks and talks like a "mammy," she is clearly the moral center of the film and the agent of its eventual happy ending. The storyteller, the Black as well as maternal keeper of the stories, is central to this version of Cinderella—she builds the bridge for Cinderella to transgress the contingencies of poverty, orphanhood and alienation. As a bridge between past, present, and future, Sally restores Lily to her desirable identity and to her maternal legacy, assuring us that the two are really one and the same. In Ashpet, then, we have a trans-genre [the text is theatrical/filmic in its aesthetic telos], trans-chronic, trans-racial re-working of ideological and institutional practices, an example that the re-working of a fairy tale across genre can preserve the moral structures and naturalizations [such as the beauty myth] yet reterritorialize the political molarities in new, contemporaneous diversifications.

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[Figure 4.3: The “closure” of Ashpet as a Cinderella re-working. These drawings were made after the students saw a performance of Rex Stephenson’s story theatre adaptation of “Ashpet” by the Jack Tale Players (spring, 2000). The handling of love, heteronormative marriage and the bridal signifiers are noticeable. Source: www.ferrum.edu/aplitt/bibs/tales/ashpet.htm, 22 November, 2008.]

[Figure 4.4: Photo from a performance at the Women’s Leadership Conference, Ferrum College, April 2008. On the left, the old lady instructs the prince to look for Ashpet’s pretty face in the fireplace. The Jack Tale Players often make objects such as the fireplace with their bodies. Source: www.ferrum.edu/aplitt/bibs/tales/ashpet.htm, 22 November, 2008.]
Fairy tales provide us with different models of selfhood, and the formation of selfhood. In "Clever Brother Hare", for example, the eponymous protagonist is seen in the central colour picture to stand in front of the mirror wearing new clothes before starting for the ordered meeting with the lion [Figure 4.5]. This depiction of Clever Brother Hare's self-inspection evokes the Lacanian mirror phase, when the child fantasizes about itself to be a whole and powerful individual by identifying with its own more perfect mirror image. In this scene, clearly about Clever Brother Hare's fantasy and self-appreciation of his powerful selfhood, his wife and children in the background are so busy prematurely mourning his death. Clever Brother Hare, on the other hand, seems totally engaged in his mirror image; he watches only his own likeness, unaware of the consequence of such preparatory gestures on his family. Later, Clever Brother Hare uses the mirror; it is his instrument for fashioning himself in such a way as to manipulate Brother Lion. Clever Brother Hare's image, fabricated and confirmed in the mirror, serves him with the idea of the trick to manipulate and outwit Brother Lion, deceiving the feline adversary into thinking that his reflection in the water at the bottom of a deep hole is an other, a rival lion. Brother Lion jumps in to devour his fictitious mirror-other, and instead drowns. The Lion is here a victim of a fundamental reverse-fiction: at the mirror, the self gains its fiction of ipseity by looking into the other [the image], while the Lion's anxiety and finally death are created by the failure to identify, and seeing the other as an Other. The Clever Brother Hare, dandifying his self with the help of the mirror, has a complete identification with his own mirror image, yet he is remarkably conscious about this gesticulation of self-fashioning through self-reflexivity as he evidently converts the mirror from the fictions of the self into a technique of ontic survival; only a figure who is not ideologized by the mirror stage would stage the mirror toward the other with such innovative confidence. In other words, Clever Brother Hare can analyze the psychoanalytic subject from the political subject, on one hand bolstering his narcissistic self with the discernibility, perfection and wholeness of the other in the looking glass [figure 4.5] yet using a specular surplus of his knowledge of the self-other intrigue at the face of the conflict with the political other [figure 4.6]. The surplus is generated by his transgression, an act of cognition, of the sham of the patriarchal moment of self-recognition. Laura Mulvey defines this moment as an instance when children's corporeal ambitions outstrip their motor capacity, with the result that their recognition of themselves is joyous in that they imagine their mirror image to be more complete, more perfect than they experience in their own body. If this phallogocentric subsumption of the will to self-fashion be the generative moment of the self's fiction, [then] the

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Clever Brother Hare definitely can perform the verfremdung between the psychoanalytic sense of the self and the political contingency of the self by crossing the limits of this moment—in spite of a egotistic subscription to the ruse of the mirror directed at himself, he can at the very moment retreat the political by making the plateau of self-other colligation a chicanery, a capital.

[Fig. 4.5: Illustration by Hilde Koeppen for “Clever Brother Hare” in Fairy Tales from Many Lands, edited by H. Herda (The Hague: Thames and Hudson, 1956), p. 199. The Hare is contemplating himself, in intent and intense self-scrutiny, and this visual instance has no exact textual reference.]

[Fig. 4.6: Illustration by Hilde Koeppen for “Clever Brother Hare” in Fairy Tales from Many Lands, edited by H. Herda (The Hague: Thames and Hudson, 1956), p. 201. Originally published by Cornel Verlag, Cologne, Germany.]