

return to it and reformulate it to conceive new worlds, or to reinforce our belief in the present one, indicates that we attribute great moral and ideological power to it in the process of socialising and educating our children.

In documenting the rise of the contemporary feminist fairy tale and the feminist critique, my aim has been to bring together material which will enable us to understand the vitality of the fairy tale and the significance of the transformations which have taken place in the last 15 years. The make-believe of the feminist fairy tales will perhaps make believers out of many children, and as adults, these children will undoubtedly conceive other tales which speak to the tensions and struggles of their lives. For the time being, however, the feminist fairy tales are here to stay, and, if the tales and criticism in the present collection are any indication, then they will continue to provide us with intriguing choices to chart our lives for years to come.

Notes

- 1 *The Child's Concept of Story* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 3–4.
- 2 See my book, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization* (London: Heinemann and New York: Wildman, 1983).
- 3 *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 174.

Introduction

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For centuries now theologians, educators, literary critics, psychologists, and librarians have debated the pros and cons of reading fairy tales to children. The basic question they continually ask is whether children should be exposed to the cruelty, violence, and superstition of make-believe worlds. This debate began practically the very moment the tales were written down and established a genre with children in mind—children as targets. From the late seventeenth century to the present, serious talk has centred on the moral aspect and related psychological effect of the *literary* tales. Yet, the pedantic posture of moralism has always been suspect, for its rigidity has prevented us from focusing on the real problem, if there is such a thing as the 'real problem' *with* fairy tales. Instead of examining social relations and psychological behaviour first—the very stuff which constitutes the subject matter of the tales—*both* the proponents and opponents of fairy tales have based and continue to base their criticism on the harsh scenes and sexual connotations of the tales, supposedly suitable or unsuitable for children. Take your pick: 'Away with smut and violence!' vs. 'Let our children open their eyes to sex and resolve their oedipal problems'. The code words of the debate change, but there is, in fact, a 'real problem' which remains: the moral attack against fairy tales (censorship) and the rational defence of the tales (liberal civil rights) emanate from a *mutual repression* of what is actually happening in society.

Recent feminist criticism and feminist fairy tales in America and England have sought to confront the 'real problem' which lies *beyond* and *around* fairy tales. At the very least, feminists endeavour to alter our gaze and challenge our perspective with regard to literature and society. And they accomplish this change by forcing us to look at and take our everyday occurrences more seriously than we do. As we know, the everyday for a woman often consists of menial tasks at home or at work where her rights and needs are denied in various ways and her

rewards are unequal. The lack of good, inexpensive daycare centres, the meagre salaries in comparison to men's wages, the danger simply in walking out alone on a street, the male protocol in social, political, and business affairs, the emphasis on sport as national pastimes that celebrate male power and make women into fringe adornments—these are just some of the factors which contribute to the exhaustion, reification, and exploitation of women. Moreover, the increase in wife battering and child abuse by men is also a sign of how hazardous the normal home routine, invisible to the public eye, has become. It would be foolish to exaggerate the 'desperate' situation of women in American and British societies today or to maintain that men are not suffering from many of the same social and political conditions such as technological rationalisation, unemployment, and discrimination that create great frustration and anger. In fact, one could even argue that some of the difficulties experienced by women today are due to the great gains they have made toward their liberation, and that they have qualitatively easier lives than ever before. Still, the liberation and ease have brought with them more subtle forms of oppression, and the daily life of a woman is fraught with harassment and obstacles that men rarely experience. Or, to put it another way, a woman's life is far from that of a fairy tale, and feminist fairy tales depict the struggles women undergo to define their lives in opposition to the daily lives they experience.

To talk about fairy tales today, especially feminist fairy tales, one must, in my opinion, talk about power, violence, alienation, social conditions, child-rearing and sex roles. It is no longer possible to ignore the connection between the aesthetic components of the fairy tales, whether they be old or new, and their historical function within a socialisation process which forms taste, mores, values, and habits. And it is too simple or simplistic to maintain that children need fairy tales more than any other form of literature to work through psychic disturbances as many pseudo-Freudians like Bruno Bettelheim¹ have done without challenging the premise of the oedipal paradigm. It is also too ethereal and idealistic to argue that the fairy tales contain archetypal patterns which point the way to happiness as many Jungians² have done without questioning the historical validity of the archetypes.³ What is needed is a socio-psychological theory based on the recent findings of feminist investigations and critical reinterpretations of Freud that will help us grasp how fairy tales function historically in a mediatory role within the American and British socialisation processes.

Since the late 1960s feminist criticism has been moving in this

direction. Such writers as Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millet, Shulamith Firestone, Elizabeth Janeway, Adrienne Rich, Robin Morgan, Sheila Rowbotham, Betty Friedan, and Juliet Mitchell among others have provided the basis for a radical analysis of patriarchal practices in western industrial societies.⁴ As Hester Eisenstein has demonstrated,⁵ the development of feminist thought can be divided into three phases: (1) During the early 1970s socially constructed differences between the sexes were judged to be the chief source of female oppression, and it was argued that social control of women could be reduced by diminishing gender polarisation and moving toward some form of androgyny. (2) From the mid-1970s to the beginning of the 1980s androgyny was largely rejected in favour of a woman-centred perspective. The polarisation between masculine and feminine was to be maintained, and women were urged to 'isolate and to define those aspects of female experience that were potential sources of strength and power for women, and, more broadly, of a new blueprint for social change'.⁶ (3) Since 1980 the woman-centred perspective has led some writers such as Mary Daly and Susan Griffin to argue for the intrinsic superiority of women due to physiological causes, the renunciation of rationality as masculine, and an undifferentiated view of women as powerless victims of male violence. Eisenstein believes that feminism has reached an impasse because there has been a 'divorce from Marxism and the political left; a consistent emphasis on psychology at the expense of economic factors; and a false universalism that addresses itself to all women, with insufficient regard for differences of race, class, and culture'.⁷

Bearing Eisenstein's analysis of feminist thought in mind, I want to suggest that one of the major contributions of the feminist critique still pertains to the power relations of domination in capitalist societies and their reinforcement by a specific arrangement within child-rearing and the family and the sexual division of labour.⁸ Children are conditioned to assume and accept arbitrary sex roles. These socially conditioned roles prepare females to become passive, self-denying, obedient, and self-sacrificial (to name some of the negative qualities) as well as nurturing, caring, and responsible in personal situations (the more positive qualities). They prepare males to become competitive, authoritarian, and power-hungry as well as rational, abstract, and principled. The result of the symbiotic child-rearing process in which underprivileged women assume the major responsibility for the children and the household is a type of reinforcement of the capitalist socio-economic system in which it has become second nature for men to compete against one another for material rewards in the name of

progress, to dominate their own nature and the natural surroundings without regard for the consequences. Thus, social relations have become so reified and instrumentalised that we are *almost* unaware of how alienated we are from one another and how close we are to self-destruction. At least this is the warning sounded by Dorothy Dinnerstein in her book *The Mermaid and the Minotaur*:

It is senseless, I shall argue, to describe our prevailing male-female arrangements as 'natural.' They are of course a part of nature, but if they should contribute to the extinction of our species, that fact would be part of nature too. Our impulse to change these arrangements is as natural as they are, and more compatible with our survival on earth. To change them, however, we need to understand not only the societal mechanisms by which they are supported, but also the central psychological 'adjustment' of which they are an expression. What makes it essential for us to understand this 'adjustment' is that its existence rests on our failure to understand it: it is a massive communal self-deception, designed to allay the immediate discomfort and in the long run—a run whose end we are now approaching—suicidal.⁹

Though it is difficult to summarise feminist literary criticism as a whole, it is possible to argue that it generally adheres to the impulse behind Dinnerstein's work. In particular, the criticism which deals with fairy tales has stressed the positive notion of change. That is, the criticism underscores our deep desire to change the present male-female arrangements and endeavours to demonstrate that we can raise our awareness of how fairy tales function to maintain the present arrangements, how they might be rearranged or reutilised to counter the destructive tendencies of male-dominant values. To understand the vast undertaking of both feminist literary criticism and feminist fairy tales, I want to present a brief survey of the criticism, then discuss major features of the tales themselves, and finally draw some socio-psychological conclusions about the Utopian function of the fairy tales.

I

The feminist discussion about the social and cultural effect of fairy tales began in the early 1970s. In her article '“Some Day My Prince Will Come”: Female Acculturation Through the Fairy Tale' (1972), Marcia Lieberman took issue with two essays printed in the *New York Review of Books* by Alison Lurie, who had recommended certain tales in Andrew Lang's nineteenth-century collections as feminist.¹⁰ Lieberman did a close textual study of the tales and found that they

were indeed very much sexist: most of the heroines were passive, helpless, and submissive, and in the course of each narrative they functioned largely as a prize for a daring prince. Lieberman questioned whether the acculturation of such normative values conveyed by the tales could foster female emancipation. Since it has never been proven that there is such a thing as a biologically determined role for women, she argued that fairy tales which disseminate notions of rigid roles for male and female characters are detrimental to the autonomous development of young people.

Most feminist critics tend to agree with Lieberman that the traditional fairy tales spread false notions about sex roles. For example, Andrea Dworkin speaks about the nefarious effect of these tales in the first two chapters of her book *Woman Hating*:

The point is that we have not formed that ancient world—it has formed us. We ingested it as children whole, had its values and consciousness imprinted on our minds as cultural absolutes long before we were in fact men and women. We have taken the fairy tales of childhood with us into maturity, chewed but still lying in the stomach, as real identity. Between Snow White and her heroic prince, our two great fictions, we never did have much of a chance. At some point the Great Divide took place: they (the boys) dreamed of mounting the Great Steed and buying Snow White from the dwarfs: we (the girls) aspired to become that object of every necrophiliac's lust—the innocent, *victimised* Sleeping Beauty, beauteous lump of ultimate, sleeping good. Despite ourselves, sometimes knowing, unwilling, unable to do otherwise, we act out the roles we were taught.¹¹

Dworkin examines such traditional role models as the evil step-mother, the passive virgin, the active prince, and the powerful king to show how fairy tales manipulate our notions about sex roles. Unfortunately her arguments are too reductionist, and she fails to make careful distinctions about the possible positive effects of the tales. Implicit in her analysis is the assumption that the tales are automatically received in fixed ways and that all fairy tales contain the same messages. Certainly it is difficult to see how women-hating stems from her analysis of fairy tales, and, if women-hating was the motive behind the writing and production of fairy tales, she does not document this. Her contribution to feminist criticism about the complex reception of fairy tales remains limited because she stereotypes the tales in much the same manner as she perceives the fairy tales to be conveyors of stereotypes for children.

This limitation is also a glaring defect in Robert Moore's political essay, 'From Rags to Witches: Stereotypes, Distortion and Anti-

humanism in Fairy Tales' (1975),¹² which, to his credit, incorporates an anti-racist critique with feminism. Moore maintains that the classical fairy tales represent the cultural values and prejudices of white people from Europe and that they uphold male privileges. Consequently, they must be carefully scrutinised and criticised for the manner in which they spread anti-humanist stereotypes. Like Dworkin he emphasises primarily the negative features of the tales: (1) Females are poor girls or beautiful princesses who will only be rewarded if they demonstrate passivity, obedience, and submissiveness. (2) Stepmothers are always evil. (3) The best woman is the housewife. (4) Beauty is the highest value for women. (5) Males should be aggressive and shrewd. (6) Money and property are the most desirable goals in life. (7) Magic and miracles are the means by which social problems are resolved. (8) Fairy tales are implicitly racist because they often equate beauty and virtue with the colour white and ugliness with the colour black. In sum, there is very little in the classical fairy tales which Moore would consider positive and worthwhile in the interest of a humanist education. Fortunately, he does not argue that these tales should be eliminated. Rather, he stresses that educators and parents should pay more attention to the dark side of the tales.

Undoubtedly there is a dark side to the tales, and both Moore and Dworkin are empirically correct in demonstrating the sexist and racist aspects of many traditional fairy tales. However, they deal only with a small selection of the tales and with surface features. If one were to take the complete Grimms' fairy tales, for instance, one could point to tales which focus on the solidarity of old people (*The Bremen Town Musicians*), the compassion and heroism of a sister who saves her brothers (*The Seven Swans, Brother and Sister*), the common soldier who uses his wits to revenge himself on a king (*How Six Travelled through the World*), the shrewd behaviour of a cook who outwits her master (*Clever Gretchen*). Even in such a 'sexist' tale as *Cinderella*, there are matriarchal remnants of a folk tale which still play an important role in the outcome of the tale, for it is the dead mother who enables her daughter to attain her goal.¹³ Though Dworkin and Moore raise important questions about classical fairy tales, they also neglect to deal with their Utopian allure and historical evolution. One of the important tasks of feminist criticism is to discover how and why certain changes were made in the tales during the course of centuries so that women can regain a sense of their own history and possibly alter contemporary socio-political arrangements. This is obviously the point of Kay Stone's essay 'Things Walt Disney Never Told Us' (1975).¹⁴ She compares the original Grimms' fairy tales with the British and

American translations of the past two centuries as well as with the Disney versions of the twentieth century, and the results of her study reveal that the products of the modern culture industry specify that a woman can only be considered a heroine if she is patient, industrious, calm, beautiful and passive. Or, in other words, mass-marketed fairy tales of the twentieth century have undergone a sanitisation process according to the sexual preferences of males and the conservative norms of the dominant classes in America and England. In contrast, Stone points to another folk tradition in America and England which portrays women in folklore as aggressive, active, clever, and adventurous. Unfortunately, these tales have been suppressed in literature and the mass media. Stone interviewed 40 women between the ages of seven and sixty-one in North America to discover whether they were aware of this 'other tradition'. The majority of the women were mainly familiar with the Disney and sanitised versions and were surprised to learn that there were tales about independent women to which they could relate in a more satisfying manner.

The historical re-examination and rediscovery of matriarchal features in folk and fairy tales constitute some of the most important work being conducted in the field.¹⁵ For instance, Heather Lyons investigates a variety of tales with feminist implications in her interesting essay 'Some Second Thoughts on Sexism in Fairy Tales' (1978),¹⁶ and she also discusses ways in which traditional tales can be altered. Similarly, Jane Yolen, a gifted fairy-tale writer in her own right, has presented a convincing demonstration of how an active and strong heroine was transformed into a docile and submissive girl in 'America's Cinderella' (1977).¹⁷ She studied different European folk versions of *Cinderella* and established that the original heroine had never been 'catatonic', but rather she had always fought actively for justice and truth. It was only toward the end of the seventeenth century that Perrault began to transform the Cinderella protagonist into a passive and obedient young woman. His adaptation paved the way for the Grimms and numerous American authors who produced dainty and prudish Cinderellas *en masse* in the nineteenth century. The final result of this mass-market development was the Walt Disney film of 1949, which presented Cinderella in her most 'perverted' form—the patient, submissive, defenceless young woman, whose happiness depends on a man who actually defines her life. It is evident that Yolen wrote her critical essay to rectify history and suggest alternatives to our common picture of Cinderella so that women could use cultural material to realise their own essence through art and literature. This purpose also underlies her own remarkable version of the tale entitled

daily. There is, after all, no female model for her in this tale except this 'good' (dead) mother and her living avatar the 'bad' mother. And if Snow White escaped the first glass coffin by her goodness, her passivity and docility, her only escape from her second glass coffin, the imprisoning mirror, must evidently be through 'badness,' through plots and stories, duplicitous schemes, wild dreams, fierce fictions, mad impersonations. The cycle of her fate seems inexorable. Renouncing 'contemplative purity' she must now embark on that life of 'significant action' which, for a woman, is defined as a witch's life because it is so monstrous, so unnatural.²²

Gilbert and Gubar analyse how this basic cultural pattern in *Snow White* is linked to other images of women and the portrayal of conflicts between women in the English literature of the nineteenth century, and they draw parallels with other fairy tales, which ostensibly had an effect on women writers, for it is not by chance that particular fairy-tale motifs continually appeared in their writings. For instance, Karen Rowe has demonstrated that Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*

begins with an echo of *Cinderella* and then transforms into a variant of *Beauty and the Beast*, one modified however by Gothic shadows and psychological depths permitted to nineteenth-century novelists. From its opening *Jane Eyre* plays upon a collective, folkloric unconscious, engaging readers to transfer youthful romantic expectations from their own psyches into the fiction and to judge its success by the fidelity to fantasy paradigms.²³

Rowe's subtle analysis makes it clear how Brontë felt compelled to confront stereotypical fairy tale roles to try to define her own needs. And, indeed, Brontë was not alone in her endeavours.²⁴ Numerous women writers up to the present have felt compelled to confront the stereotypical fairy tale roles in some form or another to establish a sense of their own identities and voices.

In a lecture on 'The Beast, the Mermaid and the Happy Ending' delivered at the 1980 MLA Meeting in San Francisco, the novelist Carolyn See expanded the discussion begun by Gilbert, Gubar, and Rowe.²⁵ She examined the function of the 'Beauty and Beast' motif in contemporary literature. For instance, Alix Kate Shulman's *Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen*, Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, and Alison Lurie's *The War Between the Tates* depict 'beautiful' women who fall in love with 'beast-like' men only to learn that the men do not turn into princes when they, the women, sacrifice their lives for them. The women break their relations with these men either to take destiny in their hands or to succumb to a bitter fate. In this way, according to See, the novels reveal

the patriarchal lie of the happy end in the classical fairy tale. Underlying See's interpretation of the fairy tale patterns in certain contemporary novels is Karen Rowe's thesis from her essay 'Feminism and Fairy Tales' (1979) that

romantic tales exert an awesome imaginative power over the female psyche—a power intensified by formal structures which we perhaps take too much for granted. The pattern of enchantment and disenchantment, the formulaic closing with nuptial rites, and the plot's comic structure seem so conventional that we do not question the implications. Yet, traditional patterns, no less than fantasy characterizations and actions, contribute to the fairy tale's potency as a purveyor of romantic archetypes and, thereby, of cultural precepts for young women.²⁶

If most feminist critics argue like Rowe and See that the traditional fairy tales are unacceptable today because of their atavistic notions of sex roles and their ideology of male domination, we must now ask what the alternatives are. Or, how have feminist-oriented writers tried to reformulate sexual arrangements and aesthetics to suggest that we have choices as individuals with regard to the development of gender qualities and characteristics, social values, and norms?

II

In her essay 'The Tale Retold: Feminist Fairy Tales' (1982) Ruth MacDonald suggests that there are three solutions to the dearth of folk tales acceptable to modern feminists:

One may present the tales, unaltered, with their traditional endings, and the devil take the consequences of the possible damage to a young girl's career expectations; one may rewrite the tales, deemphasizing physical beauty and marriage, but thereby violating the objectivity of the folklore collector by imposing one's own language and bias on the narrative; or one may write new tales, using folklore motifs with less conventional endings.²⁷

As examples of the new tales, MacDonald discusses *The Practical Princess and other Liberating Tales* by Jay Williams and *The Five Wives of Silverbeard* by Adela Turin, Francesca Cantarelli and Nella Bosnia, and she finds them lacking because the male characters are presented as one-dimensional and inadequate in comparison to the females. With regard to the rewritten folk tales, she examines the two collections by Ethel Johnstone Phelps, *Tatterhood and Other Tales* (1978) and *The Maid of the North: Feminist Folk Tales Around the*

World (1981), and here she questions the right of an editor, 'who is not a teller but rather a feminist and scholar',²⁸ to make changes which comply with her bias. Finally, she praises the unaltered folk tales in Rosemary Minard's *Women Folk and Fairy Tales* (1975) because the editor refrains from tampering with them (as if they had not already been changed!). She concludes her essay by asserting that 'to subvert the ending [of a tale] by altering the reward structure or to de-emphasize the essential values of goodness in a fairy tale — beauty, wealth, potency against evil, or even marriage — is inherently unsatisfying. To reconstruct the fairy tale world in the image of modernity may be possible, but success at this point in history seems illusive'.²⁹

Perhaps it may be illusive for MacDonald, but the fact of the matter is that she is barely in a position to make such judgements when she considers such a minute selection of new and retold fairy tales. Moreover, she appears to believe that there are eternal and essential values in fairy tales which are 'inherent', as if the literature were organic and as if values were natural and universal. As most feminists argue, it is this notion of biologically determined traits and values with regard to sexuality and society which needs questioning, and their experimental literature of the last 20 years reveals a fascinating transformational tendency within the fairy tale genre that is linked to key social changes in the civilisation process itself.

As I have already suggested, MacDonald has failed to indicate the great breadth and quality of experimental feminist fairy tales which seek to provoke the reader to re-examine his or her notion of sexual arrangements and the power politics of those arrangements. For instance, she should have at least mentioned if not discussed in more detail the following works published before her article appeared: *The Donkey Prince* (1970) by Angela Carter, *Princess Hynchatti and Some Other Surprises* (1973) by Tanith Lee, *The Forest Princess* (1974) and *The Return of the Forest Princess* (1975) by Harriet Herman, *The Girl Who Cried Flowers* (1974), *The Hundredth Dove* (1977), *Dream Weaver* (1979), and *Sleeping Ugly* (1981) by Jane Yolen, *The Clever Princess* (1977) by Ann Tompert, *All the King's Horses* (1976) by Michael Foreman, *Little Red Riding Hood* (1978) and *Snow White* (1978) by the Merseyside Fairy Tale Collective, *Kittatinny* (1978) by Joanna Russ, *Clever Gretchen and Other Forgotten Folktales* (1980) edited by Alison Lurie, *The Skull in the Snow and other Folk Tales* by Toni McCarty, *Stories for Free Children* (1982) edited by Letty Cottin Pogrebin, all designed largely for young readers, and *Transformations* (1971) by Anne Sexton, *The Green Woman* (1973) by Meghan Collins,

In the Suicide Mountains (1977) by John Gardner, *Beginning with O* (1977) by Olga Broumas, *Beauty* (1978) and *The Door in the Hedge* (1981) by Robin McKinley, and *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) by Angela Carter for adult readers. What is interesting about the experimental 'tampering' with traditional fairy tales is that the authors cut across ages, social classes, race and gender and write their tales as socially symbolic acts to pursue alternatives to the destructive and also self-destructive processes in American and British child rearing and socialisation.

As I have already noted, there are numerous experiments with the traditional fairy-tale repertoire that could be called feminist. Such experiments did not appear out of thin air. Aside from a long tradition of matriarchal tales that were printed and continue to be printed in folklore collections of various lands, there were feminist precedents set in the literary fairy-tale tradition by the end of the nineteenth century. Such Victorian writers as Mary De Morgan, Mrs Molesworth, and Evelyn Sharp (who incidentally played a major role in the British suffragette movement) conceived tales with strong heroines who rebel against convention-ridden societies. At the beginning of the twentieth century E. Nesbit wrote, among other significant tales, *The Last of the Dragons* and *The Nine Whirlpools*, which are remarkable for their critique of tyrannical patriarchs and their depiction of resourceful women, who work with men to form humane societies. It was exactly during this time, too, that L. Frank Baum wrote his Oz books, which portray a Utopian society governed by nurturing women. Later in the century, Catherine Storr wrote *Clever Polly and the Stupid Wolf* (1955), which reverses the motif of the traditional Red Riding Hood tale by having a smart and intrepid girl continually outwitting a bumbling wolf. Thus, the contemporary feminist fairy tales have drawn upon a rich tradition of feminist tales or tales with strong women which may not be widely known but have nevertheless provided models and the impetus (along with the feminist movement itself) to challenge the dominant male discourse. In reviewing the contemporary feminist experiments, I want to focus on those tales that reveal the manifold ways in which present-day writers have rearranged familiar motifs and characters and reversed plot lines to provoke readers to rethink conservative views of gender and power. The aesthetics of these tales are ideological, for the structural reformation depends upon a non-sexist (and non-racist, I might add) world view that calls for a dramatic change in social practice. This point has been made convincingly in Ellen Cronan Rose's essay 'Through the Looking Glass: When Women Tell Fairy Tales' (1983), in which she discusses

the works of Sexton, Broumas, and Carter.³⁰ My discussion of feminist fairy tales will be broader and cover narratives written for young and old. Obviously, the aesthetic complexity of those tales written for older readers does prevent younger readers from grasping or even following the plot. However, *all* the tales emanate from a basic impulse for change within society, and though the writers have reacted to this impulse on different levels, they share the same purpose of questioning socialisation, have influenced one another to some degree, and have been stimulated by feminist criticism to rethink both fairy tales as aesthetic compositions and the role they play in conditioning themselves and children. As a cultural phenomenon, the new feminist fairy tales seek to break boundaries and speak in the name of future generations which may not need a feminist literature of this kind in the future. This is the basic irony of feminist fairy tales: they aim ultimately at discarding the adjective feminist and at conceiving worlds in which the contradictions are not concerned with sexism and domination.

In the fairy tales for younger readers the most noticeable change in the narratives concerns the heroine who actively seeks to define herself, and her self-definition determines the plot. As she moves to complete this task, traditional fairy-tale topoi and motifs are transformed to indicate the necessity for gender rearrangement and the use of power for achieving equality. For instance, in *The Forest Princess*³¹ Harriet Herman reverses the Rapunzel tale by having a princess, who has grown up alone in a forest tower, rescue a prince. After she returns with him to his father's kingdom and is treated in a patronising way by the king, she demonstrates that she is equal to all the males at the court and rejects the sexist society by departing for her home in the forest. Herman's tale is illustrated with pictures that emphasise the key scenes of self-discovery, joy, and disappointment. The initiation ritual of this tale is totally different from that in *Rapunzel*. Absent is the female witch who imprisons Rapunzel and punishes her lover. Here the princess grows up 'sexless' so to speak, and she gradually discovers that there are arbitrary sexual distinctions made in society, largely by men. She is unwilling to be socialised by such a court and rebels as an example to the other children, both in the narrative as characters and as implied readers of the narrative. Herman does not belabour her point. Neither the king nor the prince is villainous. Rather they are stuck in a tradition which they have never questioned, and the princess as outsider can more readily challenge the authoritarian structure of the court, which incidentally begins to break down and become more egalitarian in the sequel *The Return of the Forest Princess*.

Herman's tale obviously seeks to overcome the atavistic nature of numerous classical fairy and folk tales which are sexist. This is also the case in Jeanne Desy's *The Princess Who Stood on Her Own Two Feet*.³² Here Desy takes issue with such tales as *King Thrushbeard* and Shakespeare's misogynist rendition of the tale in *The Taming of the Shrew*, which poke fun at and humiliate women likened to witches and shrews. Clearly the definition of 'shrew' has depended on masculine images of women, and Desy is most concerned with what lies underneath the definition and images. Her tale is about a tall, young princess, bright as a sunflower, who has mastered everything she has undertaken. However, she is unhappy because she cannot find somebody to love and to love her. The court wizard, a sensitive and droll figure, provides her with a miraculous talking Afghan hound as companion, but a dog is nothing but a dog, so the princess thinks, despite his sage counselling and compassion for her. Therefore, she falls in love with a prince who cannot tolerate the fact that she is taller and more talented than he is. After he humiliates her numerous times and finally causes her talking hound to die out of love for her, she rejects the prince and finds someone who accepts her for what she is. By portraying the prince as a pompous, insensitive person, Desy shows how absurd and unfair his sexist actions are. Moreover, she employs humorous figures such as the good-hearted wizard and his clever cat and comic reversals to parody the patriarchal notion of achievement and the male quest for power.

There are a number of unusually funny feminist fairy tales whose main purpose is to show the farcical side of sexist expectations in classical fairy tales. For example, *Cinderella* is treated to various satirical interpretations in the hands of Tanith Lee, John Gardner, Richard Gardner, Roald Dahl, and Judith Viorst. In Lee's *Princess Dahli*,³³ the underprivileged princess rebels against her rich relatives and finds a poor prince of her own choosing. In John Gardner's *Gudgekin the Thistle Girl*,³⁴ the poor girl refuses to be humiliated by a prince, who must learn to respect her integrity. In Richard Gardner's *Cinderelma*,³⁵ a young woman succeeds in attending the royal ball through her own initiative and reaches a mutual decision with the prince that they are not suited for each other. In Roald Dahl's verse rendition of *Cinderella*,³⁶ the prince turns out to be a sadistic head-chopper, who is ultimately rejected by Cinderella, and the ironic rejection of an ugly prince is also the theme in Judith Viorst's short poem.³⁷ Each one of these writers relies largely on humour to poke fun at outworn sexist notions in tales which are still cherished today as delightful reading for children. Going against the grain of sexist

classical fairy tales, the above writers have also written other parodies mocking *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Snow White*, *The Three Pigs*, *Rapunzel*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *The Little Mermaid*, and *The Frog Prince*.

In addition to the comic reversals of classical tales, there have been some remarkable adaptations of folk tales and motifs from a feminist point of view. For instance, Dorothy Van Woerkom has adapted a German folk tale in *The Queen Who Couldn't Bake Gingerbread* (1975).³⁸ Here King Mulligatawny learns to bake his own gingerbread and to respect his wife's other talents. In Marcia Sewall's newly illustrated book containing P.C. Asbjornsen's literary version of a Norwegian folk tale, *The Squire's Bride*,³⁹ a farmer's daughter outwits a rich old squire, who wants to marry her, by dressing up an old mare to be his bride. In Anita Lobel's *The Straw Maid*,⁴⁰ which has elements of central European folk tales, a peasant girl tricks the robbers who capture her and makes off with some of their treasure to help her poor parents.

In all three of these tales, the women rely on their wits which enable them to overcome oppressive conditions. In many other feminist fairy tales it is magic, symbolising the latent potential of women, which helps them grasp and subdue inimical forces which might keep them in a submissive position. Whereas the heroes of traditional folk and fairy tales often pursue power to dominate and rule others, the heroines of the new feminist tales use power to rearrange society according to a more nurturing moral concept and to attain independence for women and mutual respect. For instance, there are several remarkable fairy tales which revolve around the question of sexual domination and relations of power in society, and they reveal how changes must be made in the private and public sphere if a young woman is to come into her own. Michael Foreman's *All The King's Horses*⁴¹ suggests that a strong woman will not settle in a sexist society so long as the rules are set by domineering men. In Ann Tompert's *The Clever Princess*⁴² Lorna solves three riddles with the help of magic that she has learned from a sage woman named Old Krone, and thus she becomes a wise and independent queen who rules by allowing the people to rule themselves. In Betty Miles's *Atalanta*⁴³ another young princess decides her fate by standing up to her father and winning a race. In the process she finds a young man who respects her courage and individualism, and together they symbolise the possibility for a new type of relationship between the sexes. In none of these tales is marriage a necessity or a goal for young women, rather it is a possibility which may or may not enter their plans. The important narrative shift which takes place during the course of the story is one from a male-centred to a woman-centred

world. In addition, the lives and the careers of the young women are not telologically shaped by marriage.

When marriage does become a question, as in Jay Williams's *Petronella*,⁴⁴ it assumes a different function. In this tale it is part of the recognition and fulfilment which the princess achieves at the end of her own personal quest. In the process the male figures play a peripheral role in the action of the story. Though it may be argued, as MacDonald has done in her essay, that the females in Williams's collection of liberating tales are much more interesting than the males, Williams does not degrade the male characters. Some are talented and adept like the magician, whom Petronella chooses to become her husband, while others are bungling power-seekers. As a male writing to question present gender arrangements, Williams, like Foreman, Richard Gardner, and others, is more concerned about generating respect for women, learning from them, and exposing male foibles. Like the feminists, his goal, too, is the rearrangement of gender and social roles so that power is not used to gain advantage but to resolve contradictions.

Another tale which ends in marriage but suggests that gender roles are not biologically determined and that power can be used for the liberation of both sexes is Angela Carter's *The Donkey Prince*.⁴⁵ Daisy, a young working girl, who knows a trick or two, enables Bruno, the enchanted donkey prince, to recover a magic apple in the Savage Mountains. Due to her courage, cleverness, and skills, she helps Hlajki the wild man and Bruno to survive a dangerous mission, and in the end she marries Bruno, who is transformed into a human due to her compassion and deeds. The entire quest in Carter's tale is a humanising one: the beast becomes human and humane in more ways than one, and the hard work of a working girl is recognised and duly rewarded in a way that she appreciates. Ironically, what happened long ago in another country becomes a Utopian model which Carter projects in her fairy-tale construct as a goal for which we should strive.

In most feminist fairy tales the use of power raises moral questions which have political ramifications in society. For instance, Charlotte Pomerantz's *The Princess and the Admiral*⁴⁶ is based on an incident from the thirteenth century involving Vietnam and the Imperial Navy of the Kubla Khan, and a clear parallel is drawn to the American invasion of Vietnam during the 1960s and 1970s. In addition, the general question of colonisation and imperialism is posed. Here the ruler of Tiny Kingdom is a lean, dark-eyed princess named Mat Mat, who uses wisdom to defeat a vain admiral and his fleet in a non-violent way when they seek to attack and conquer her country. A similar

perspective, which makes the personal into the political, underlies Claus Stamm's translation of the Japanese folk tale *Three Strong Women*.⁴⁷ The huge wrestler Forever-Mountain, who is on his way to the imperial wrestling matches, learns humility from a young woman named Maru-me, who easily subdues him when he tries to tease her in a patronising way. To his surprise, Forever-Mountain comes to enjoy the company of Maru-me, her mother, and grandmother on their farm rather than to participate in the imperial wrestling matches.

In the fairy tales by Pomerantz and Stamm, power is used to bring about peace and understanding, not domination. Both Mat Mat and Maru-me want *re-cognition*, or, in other words, the two powerful male figures, the Admiral and Forever-Mountain, are obliged to undergo a different cognitive process based on their new experiences with women which will hopefully alter their behaviour in general. Neither Mat Mat nor Maru-me seek revenge when attacked. They are self-confident and want to develop the talents which they possess without imposing their will on anyone. All this is in contrast to numerous traditional folk and fairy tales which depict males rising to power by killing, destroying, or outwitting competitors. Often the protagonist fights for a woman as property or defines the woman's destiny through his heroic act which feminist writers now declare is more degrading than uplifting for women.

Perhaps one of the most radical reactions to the manner in which women are 'heroically' treated in fairy tales can be found in Joanna Russ's fantasy novel *Kittatinny*.⁴⁸ At one point her heroine Kit, who is lost in a forest while undergoing an initiation ritual, discovers a story entitled *Russalka or The Seacoast of Bohemia*, which is a critical adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid*. Whereas Andersen affirmed the tortuous self-sacrifice desired by a mermaid, who is eventually rewarded for such denigration by God, Russ deplores the actions of Russalka, a mer-woman, who begins to read land books and catch the human disease, which involves self-deception and self-betrayal. Russ demonstrates in a poignant manner how a man's love can kill a woman, especially when there is no basis for understanding. Of course, it is Russalka, who is at fault for denying her true essence in this tale — as is the mermaid in Andersen's. But there is a difference: Andersen was petrified of women and wanted to keep them under control, and he rewarded the submissive, pliant women in his tales with God's love. Russ is angry at women who sell themselves for a 'romantic' vision of love. Her tale of self-betrayal and self-denial ends on a tragic note because it is intended to serve as a warning to her fictitious heroine Kit in her novel and to her readers as well. In a man's

world love can be poison, and the walls of life can feel like a prison.

Though less pessimistic, Jane Yolen also explores the mermaid theme in an original and provocative manner in her book *The Hundredth Dove*.⁴⁹ Two tales, *The White Sea Maid* and *The Lady and the Mermaid*, have women return to the sea rather than live in male-governed worlds. Crucial in all of Yolen's many fairy tales is a reaffirmation of female cultural life. This can be seen clearly in her revision of *Cinderella* entitled *The Moon Ribbon*.⁵⁰ When the continuity and development of female culture is disrupted, Yolen points to the tragic aspects in such tales as *The Girl Who Cried Flowers*⁵¹ and *Brother Hart*.⁵² For the most part, Yolen emphasises the caring and nurturing of women as constitutive of moral integrity. Though she rarely assumes an outright, radical feminist position in her tales, her sensitive rearrangement of traditional stories does lead to a contradiction of the patriarchal view of the world. Certainly this notion is at the centre of the tales written by the Merseyside Fairy Story Collective.⁵³ For instance, in the Merseyside version of *Red Riding Hood*, a timid girl and her great-grandmother confront and overcome a wolf without the help of a male hunter. In *Snow White* the young princess becomes the leader of a group of insurgents who defeat a power-hungry queen. In each tale the parallels to actual social conflicts in British society are apparent, and the endings point to new beginnings in which underprivileged groups take destiny in their own hands with a new *political* consciousness.

In most feminist fairy tales for older readers the patterns and themes are also designed to stress liberation and transformation. But there is a more guarded position or sober attitude with regard to the possibilities for gender rearrangement. In some cases the writers are outright pessimistic, or pessimistic in a provocative manner that makes the reader desire change. For instance, Anne Sexton, one of the first writers to use fairy tales as a vehicle to comment on the plight of women in a male-dominated society, portrays her 'heroines' as prisoners or commodities. In her book *Transformations* (1971) she adapted 17 of the Grimms' fairy tales in verse form to demonstrate the multifarious ways in which women are circumscribed by language and custom in daily life so that the possibility for them to attain self-expression and free movement is curtailed. In general, Sexton begins each one of her poems with a first-person exposition that elaborates her 'transformed' position regarding the original Grimm tale. In *The Frog Prince* she comments that:

about the need to transform the socialised human condition before it is too late.

One poetess who has heard Sexton's voice and definitely heeded her warning is Olga Broumas. Perhaps because she is younger and has benefited from the women's movement, Broumas is more optimistic and is convinced that there are ways for women to determine their own lives. She, too, has transformed fairy tales into verse in her book *Beginning with O*,⁵⁹ and in two poems which use quotes from Sexton as points of departure she suggests another style of life. For instance, in her *Cinderella*, she begins with Sexton's statement

... the joy that isn't shared
I heard, dies young.⁶⁰

Here Broumas depicts the successful career woman who has broken the male royal code, and, after being accepted at the male court, so to speak, she realises how she has betrayed her sisters and resolves to change:

... A woman co-opted by promises: the lure
of a job, the ruse of a choice, a woman forced
to bear witness, falsely
against my kind, as each
other sister was judged inadequate, bitchy, incompetent,
jealous, too thin, too fat. I know what I know.
What sweet bread I make
for myself in this prosperous house
is dirty, what good soup I boil turns
in my mouth to mud. Give
me my ashes. A cold stove, a cinder-block pillow, wet
canvas shoes in my sisters', my sisters' hut.⁶¹

The answer to Sexton is sisterhood. That is, Sexton talks about this in her poetry, but she never envisages it as a real possibility. She glimpses the possibility in such statements as 'a woman / who loves a woman / is forever young'.⁶² However, it is Broumas who then develops this notion fully in *Rapunzel*. Here the antagonism between the old witch and the young woman is transformed into a love relationship which is celebrated. Since numerous fairy tales, as Gilbert and Gubar have suggested in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, often pit old women against the young, Broumas goes against the grain and prefers to depict the tender concern and passion of two women as in *Little Red Riding Hood*. Time again she reflects upon the need for sisterhood in her fairy-tale poems, the need to find adequate means for self-expression. In *Rumpelstiltskin* she poses the question:

How to describe
what we didn't know
exists: a mutant organ, its function to feel
intensely, to heal by immersion, a fluid
element, crucial
as amnion, sweet milk
in the suckling months.
Approximations,
The words we need are extinct.
Or if not extinct
badly damaged: the proud Columbia
stubbing
her bound up feet on her damned
up bed. Helpless with excrement. Daily
by accident, against
what has become our will through years
of deprivation, we spawn the fluid
that cradles us, grown
as we are, and at a loss
for words. Against all currents, upstream
we spawn
in each others's blood.⁶³

Poetry appears to be especially suitable for women who want to speak their mind and in their own voice about fairy tales. Aside from Sexton and Broumas, Sara Henderson Hay, Helen Chasin, Judith Rechter, and Kathleen Spivack have experimented with fairy-tale motifs in unusual poems which ask questions about oppressive gender expectations in the socialisation process.⁶⁴ Most of the poems are filled with laments, bitterness, and disappointment, and heterosexuality is viewed askance. If there is hope for women, the poems project it in a woman-centred society, in which men can no longer interfere with the lives of women.

In contrast to the poets, Robin McKinley takes a more optimistic view of men and heterosexuality. She portrays self-confident, courageous young women who take the initiative in a world which they help to define with men. In her adaptation of *Beauty and the Beast* (1978)⁶⁵ and in her transformed fairy tales in the collection *The Door in the Hedge* (1981),⁶⁶ it is the woman who dares to oppose tyranny, to seek alternatives to oppression. For instance, in *The Princess and the Frog*, a princess takes the initiative in overcoming a powerful prince named Aliyander, who had turned his own brother into a frog and threatened the father of the princess. Though McKinley is often naïve and too facile in the manner in which she depicts women assuming

active roles, it is this very unquestioning attitude which is significant. That is, for McKinley there is no reason why women cannot live the lives they choose for themselves if they are willing to struggle and surmount obstacles which apparently hinder men, too, from realising their identities. This is also the major theme of Michael de Larrabeiti's *Malagan and the Lady of Rascas* (1984), in which a noble woman demonstrates that the beauty of her soul and her humanitarian character can conquer black magic and despotism. It is her magnanimity that liberates her husband and sets a standard for his future actions.

One of the more unique fairy-tale depictions of the quest for identity and transformed heterosexual arrangements is John Gardner's *In the Suicide Mountains*.⁶⁷ He sends three characters, Chudu, a dwarf, Armida, a blacksmith's daughter, and Christopher Sullen, a Crown Prince, into the mountains because they cannot live up to the sexist and racist 'norms' of their society. For instance, though he has never harmed anyone, Chudu has been blamed for using his magic to cause evil. Armida cannot gain acceptance on her own terms because she is so strong and intelligent. Christopher is shunned at court because he dislikes tournaments, fights, and politics and professes a love for books and music. Ironically, the three of them are diverted from their suicide plots in the mountains by a sinister, six-fingered abbot, whom they eventually defeat by combining their talents. In the process they gain mutual respect for each other and begin their lives anew. Such regeneration is only possible because they find that their 'otherness' is accepted in each other's eyes and that they do not have to lead socially defined roles. Gardner weaves fairy-tale motifs and tales throughout his novel around the theme that 'things are not as they seem'. Indeed, the genuine qualities of the characters do not surface until the appropriate conditions give rise to them, and it is at this point that the protagonists become what they are and want to be. Ultimately it is Gardner's aesthetic construct composed of fairy-tale reformulations which provide such conditions and allow us as readers to glean Utopian possibilities in the rearrangement of genders.

The form which Gardner's Utopian model assumes is most comforting, but 'Utopian reformulations' of classical fairy tales can also be discomfiting. For instance, Angela Carter in *Bloody Chamber*⁶⁸ and Tanith Lee in *Red as Blood*⁶⁹ have rewritten tales by Charles Perrault, the Grimm Brothers, and other classicists to indicate that the path to Utopia is filled with thorns. It is not by chance that both authors project the image of blood in the title of their collections. If women are to control their destinies, if there is to be a rearrangement

of gender in child rearing, then blood will indeed be shed and it will not be simply the blood of one sex. As Ellen Cronan Rose demonstrated,⁷⁰ most of Carter's stories disclose the machinations of male domination and depict how women discover their own sexuality and human dignity through intense struggles. Each one of Carter's revisions of traditional patriarchal schemes in *Bluebeard*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Little Red Riding Hood* prepares the way for an unusually original narrative entitled *Wolf Alice*. Here a woman as outsider learns about her uncanny powers and is able to aid another outsider, the duke as werewolf, both of whom stand in opposition to the violent hunters of so-called civilisation.

There is a haunting quality to all of Carter's tales which can also be traced in the narratives of Lee. Whereas Carter rewrote mainly French tales, Lee's focus is more on the Grimms' tales such as *Sleeping Beauty*, *Rapunzel*, *Cinderella*, and *Brother and Sister*, and the tales are intended to move chronologically toward the future where the gender arrangements become fully transformed in a science-fiction version of *Beauty and the Beast*. While each tale is poignant in its own way, the version of *Little Red Riding Hood* entitled *Wolfland* is especially significant since it picks up the thread of transformation in the figure of the wolf developed by Carter, Ursula LeGuin⁷¹ and other writers. Here the grandmother is a werewolf called Anna the Matriarch, who initiates her granddaughter Lisel into the vicious ways of the male-dominated world by recalling the past and by showing her how she can retain power over her own life. Again, it is no coincidence that writers such as Carter and Lee insist that women seek contact with the 'wolfish' side of femininity, that is, their sensuality, to be proud of their animistic ties to nature. The celebration of the 'wolf' should not be misread as a celebration of 'brute power'. Rather it is more like the celebration of the witch in Meghan Collins's *The Green Woman*⁷² and other feminist tales⁷³ which view the 'black magic' of witches as the true healing power of women and possibly of men. As we know, witches, werewolves, and wolves were once revered in archaic societies as the mediators between the wilderness and society. They provided contact with the *other* world, a sacred divine and forbidding world. And this contact was necessary if the civilised world were to rejuvenate itself. So, the witch, as in *The Green Woman*, lives on the outskirts of society like all witches and werewolves, on the edge of society and the wilderness, and represents the true healer of society, one who will be used and abused until 'civilised' peoples learn to live in harmony with nature again, which also means living in harmony with our own bodies. The rearrangement of bodies demands a political experiencing of a

different mode of child rearing and sex roles in which exploitation of nature no longer takes place.

Just how difficult it is for many women to develop the consciousness necessary to bring about the rearrangement of sex roles in a liberating manner is the theme of Margaret Atwood's *Bluebeard's Egg* (1983). Set in contemporary Canada, Atwood's story is about a doctor's wife named Sally, who builds a mirage so that she cannot see to what extent her husband, a heart specialist, is a modern Bluebeard, someone who operates coldly on the hearts of others. Sally typifies the middle-aged, middle-class woman whose comfortable, but lonely life is filled with distractions such as university courses and part-time jobs. Most of all, she constantly deceives herself by imagining how superior she is to her supposedly dumb husband and how much she is in control of him. Her awakening at the end of the story is the possible first step toward liberation, and here Atwood cautiously leaves Sally's future open to indicate that she has a long way to go before she realises what it means to be alive as an egg, red and hot inside.

Almost all the fairy tales which I have discussed explore new possibilities for gender arrangement. The reversal of the traditional fairy-tale patterns is more than a simple formal matter. All the tales are linked to power, violence, social conditions, child rearing and sex roles. How we have arranged ourselves, our bodies and psyches, in society has been recorded and passed down through fairy tales for many centuries, and the contemporary feminist tales indicate that something radical is occurring in Western society to change our social and political relations. At this point, it is fruitless to ask whether the feminist fairy tales can have the impact they obviously seek because they have not been widely distributed, nor have they been in existence very long. What is more important to ask at this stage is why have they come into being and what do they reveal about social and psychological conditions in America and England. Here I want to draw mainly on two essays by Jessica Benjamin and Ilene Philipson⁷⁴ to make my concluding remarks.

III

Benjamin's starting point is a critique of Christopher Lasch's *The Culture of Narcissism*, in which he asserts that the Oedipus complex is no longer the prime organiser of psychic life or the prevalent cause of psychic disturbances in American society thus eroding a significant sense of the past and all forms of patriarchal authority.⁷⁵ In contrast, Benjamin questions 'whether the oedipal model, with its affirmative

view of paternal authority as a *sine qua non* of autonomy, is an ideal or universal path to individuality'.⁷⁶ In fact, she perceives the oedipal paradigm as hindering the free development of gender identity.

The oedipal father represents our peculiar form of individuality; his authority represents the only alternative to remaining undifferentiated; his freedom up till now is the only freedom. He teaches us the lesson that she who nurtures us does not free us, that he who frees us does not nurture us, but rules us. As we shall see later, this constellation is the basis for gender domination in our culture.⁷⁷

For her purpose, Benjamin focuses on the dyadic experience of differentiation in the preoedipal phase of childhood and employs Heinz Kohut's work on narcissism and the restoration of the self to elaborate her critique of Lasch.

If the decisive years of developing gender identity and individuality occur in the preoedipal phase, then it is the responsiveness or non-responsiveness of the mother which influences the child's basic drives. The attachment to the mother and a mutual recognition of needs can encourage the independent development of a child. In the ideal constellation posited by object relations theory a child can learn to differentiate between self and other and appreciate the other's independent existence as an equivalent centre so long as the mother is independent and strong enough to respond to the child's needs in the preoedipal phase. It is this phase which is key to the future gender identity and autonomy of an individual. However, as Benjamin remarks, this phase is rarely completed in a successful way in American society because the father is internalised as an ideal of absolute autonomy, and the same can be said about English society.

This form of false differentiation can ... be seen as institutionalized in the Oedipus complex and perpetuated in oedipal socialization. Man/father achieves absolute autonomy because woman/mother represents dependency. Individuality, then, is constituted by what is male, by the permanent assignment of man to the role of subject, through the father's assertion and insistence on complete independence. Originally it is through this denial of subjectivity to women that men lose the mirror of their subjectivity. Recognition occurs not through the love relationship but only in the competitive struggle with other men. Man's domination of woman has found expression in the oedipal relationships in which the split between male and female is reproduced in each generation.⁷⁸

To combat false differentiation and male domination, Benjamin insists, like Dorothy Dinnerstein, Nancy Chodorow, and Meg Stacey

that the rearing of children in America and England must change, that men must share equally in the parenting of a child, and that relations between the sexes at the work place must become more democratic. Here Benjamin qualifies her argument in a significant way:

But this demand covers a far broader terrain than the rearing of children. It implies a challenge to the entire sexual division of labour as well as to the separation of domestic/personal and productive/public spheres in our society. And this separation has been absolutely intrinsic to the growth of capitalism. It is this separation that, on the societal level, embodies the split between activity and recognition — the former is depersonalized and the latter is privatized. To women as mothers is assigned the Promethean task of raising individuals who can harmoniously balance what society pulls asunder. The family must bear the entirety of the individual's needs for recognition, needs that our small, child-centered families tend to cultivate intensely.⁷⁹

Of course, it is a well-known fact that the family has not been able to bear this burden, but it is not due to narcissism or lack of paternal authority. Rather, it is the bureaucratically transformed mode of paternal control which prevents individualisation. The rise of the narcissistic personality and narcissistic disturbances can be interpreted as signs of revolt against the impersonalised forces of reason which continue false differentiation and the patriarchal quest for omnipotence. That is, if we regard the narcissistic phase in a more positive manner, as a period of bonding with the mother and differentiating from this bond, then the initial goals of the child are love and self-esteem, a fundamental need for the other which can engender self-definition if this need is required. Since this narcissistic need is rarely realised or fulfilled, it remains as a 'revolutionary spark', so to speak, which can explode and engender either liberation or destruction. Whereas Benjamin would agree with Lasch that Western society is becoming more callous, indifferent, instrumentalised, and commodified, she disagrees with his one-sided use of the term narcissism to describe the pathology. The *healthy* narcissistic longing leads in our society to a questioning of the pathology, which is the obsession with control, possession and subordination of nature maintained by a capitalist economy and ideology of competition and rational domination. In this regard the crisis of the family and authority has a healthy side to it: the challenge to the oedipal model stems from our indomitable narcissistic longings that have given birth to experiments with long-range goals of androgyny and parenting based on mutuality, equality, and true differentiation.

Such goals are condemned by conservative forces in American and English society presently seeking to restore the authority of the oedipal family with a strong father in control of power. Ironically, by endeavouring to move backward, the social policies of conservatism are only aggravating the contradictions within the family and public sphere and are signing the family's death warrant. Benjamin's sober analysis of authority, autonomy and the New Narcissism points to the necessity of further loosening oedipal structures and paradoxically creating instability in the private and public spheres with the goal of creating a new form of 'stable' family life that depends on mutual recognition of parents and children and equal sharing in child rearing. Her critique is developed from another stimulating perspective by Ilene Philipson, who discusses the crisis in the family and the politics of mothering in a more historical manner. Like Benjamin, she deplores the fact that women have generally been obliged to assume the major role of child rearing, and she analyses the negative aspects of this division in the family primarily in the period following World War II to understand the contemporary crisis which consists of state intervention in the family, a soaring divorce rate, wife battering, violence against children, etc. She argues that

the history of the post-World War II period is a history of family life in which mothers were compelled through ideological, social and economic forces to live for and through their children. Because their own needs for recognition, meaningful work, and relationship to other adults were so frequently denied, child-rearing assumed a significance in the minds and activities of women that was historically unprecedented.⁸⁰

Like Alice Miller's⁸¹ work in Europe, Philipson is concerned with the way mothers were and are forced to play the primary role in child rearing and unconsciously engender early narcissistic disturbances by using and misusing their children in a variety of ways. It is due to the failure to develop a consistent sense of self-worth in the preoedipal phase of a child which leads to narcissistic disturbances and social behaviour that are exploitative and parasitic. In the present framework of child rearing, the mother's faulty empathy gives rise to a false gender differentiation that in turn leads to heterosexual antagonisms.

There are asymmetrical ways in which men and women come to deal with a particular situation experienced in early childhood that can result from women as mothers having sole responsibility for child-rearing in isolated, unstimulating and frequently emotionally barren nuclear families. In response to the erratic or faulty maternal empathy occasioned by such

socially constructed circumstances, sons are more likely to develop a need to be admired, a fear of dependence, and an exploitative stance toward relationships with women. Daughters, on the other hand, are more likely to have a profound need to identify with and/or live through other people, to have markedly deficient ego boundaries, and to be capable of feeling good about themselves (to have self-esteem) only when then are attached or 'fused' with some significant other. Both of these unconsciously based situations can make heterosexual relationships very difficult.⁴²

Philipson maintains that the post-World War II family in America depended on sending women, who were already in the work force, back home into isolated and frustrating circumstances. This same development also occurred in England. And, despite some changes in the work force, this policy of keeping the woman at home has been maintained to the present. Thus, it is no wonder that the family is being torn asunder from inside and outside. 'By indirectly aiding in the production of individuals who are incapable of maintaining enduring relationships with others, the ideology and social policy that attempts to keep mothers at home through 'expert' advice or assertion, the lack of child care, and restrictive employment practices, undermines that which it explicitly tries to sustain.'⁴³

Like Benjamin, Philipson argues for family ties based on emotional intimacy, reciprocity, and equality, and this demand is not to be understood as some kind of idealistic declaration of rights in behalf of children and women. The feminist critique of the family and child-rearing practices emanates from a careful examination of the mediations between psychic and social structures. The conclusions to be drawn from the critique lead to political struggles in both the private and public sphere which are still in the process of being waged as has been clearly documented in the significant books *Women's Oppression Today*⁴⁴ and *Powers of Desire*⁴⁵ concerning America and Europe. Power is at stake, and the control exercised by fathers as authority figures and mothers as their surrogate legislators will not be abandoned easily, especially when social policies do not encourage and increase the self-esteem of an individual.

The revisions, reforms, and rearrangements in family and social life proposed by feminists such as Benjamin and Philipson are rooted in the very experience of women and men who have already explored alternative life styles and family living. In some cases lesbians and homosexuals have created new forms of communal life just as single women and men with children and without children have conceived ways of going beyond the bourgeois nuclear family in opposition to

traditional gender expectations. In both America and England, though it is perhaps wise not to exaggerate the profundity of the change, there has been a shift away from the male-centred society which has improved the experience of women qualitatively in their struggle to live by their own definitions — and the side effects for men have not been without their benefits, particularly those opposed to the dominant manner in which gender is socially arranged. Such experience has been at the root of the feminist literary criticism and the feminist fairy tales which originated during the social upheavals of the late 1960s and 1970s.

If we compare the feminist literary criticism of fairy tales to the work of Benjamin, Philipson, and other psychologically oriented critics, particularly those who have been influenced by object relations theory, it becomes apparent that the literary criticism has *not* drawn sufficiently enough upon the studies of mothering and narcissism. With the exception of the work by Gilbert and Gubar, the literary critics have not explored the subtle connections between traditional tales which reveal *contradictions* of patriarchal societies and the oedipal model upon which numerous tales were based. Nor have the critics made much headway in examining the new feminist fairy tales as reflecting mass social changes since 1945 that have affected the psychic structure of individuals and the general socio-genetic development of American and English culture.

For instance, it would seem to me important to take into consideration such developments as the 'Cinderella Syndrome', in writing about the traditional tale and contemporary literary experiments. This syndrome⁴⁶ was first discussed in the *American Journal of Psychiatry* and concerns girls between the ages of nine and ten, who are living in foster homes and have been apparently neglected and maltreated by their foster parents. At least, they dress in tattered clothes and are dishevelled when the authorities find them. However, upon investigation, the authorities often discover that the girls do this purposely to attract attention to the fact that they are in danger of being mistreated and abused by their mothers, who often have the same case histories as their foster daughters. There are numerous questions which one could pose here. For example: Are the girls rejecting the Cinderella role by using it? Is the Cinderella role the only one they can use to draw attention to their miserable plight? What is at the base of conflict between the foster mother and the foster child that brings about a repetition? Why have psychologists called this syndrome the Cinderella syndrome? Are there contemporary fairy tales which have explored this syndrome to some degree?

In fact, there have been endeavours, particularly by Sexton and Broumas, to explore an aspect of the Cinderella syndrome, but the point that I want to stress here is that feminist literary criticism, though more oriented toward social conflicts than the general literary criticism of fairy tales, has failed to keep pace with the contemporary feminist fairy tales. In this regard, the significance of the feminist fairy tales lies in their Utopian function to criticise current shifts in psychic and social structures and to point the way toward new possibilities for individual development and social interaction.

If we take the feminist tales for children and adults as a whole and generalise about their aesthetic and ideological features, we can see how closely they are related to feminist demands for gender rearrangement and equality in the family and at the work place — demands central to the work of Dinnerstein, Chodorow, Benjamin, Philipson, Stacey, Barrett, and others. First of all, the structure of most of the feminist tales is based on the self-definition of a young woman. The female protagonist becomes aware of a task which she must complete in social interaction with others to define herself. Instead of pursuing power for the purpose of self-aggrandisement or omnipotence, the heroine rejects violence and seeks to establish her needs in harmony with the needs of others. Power will only be used in self-defence or to prevent violence. Though the heroine may be wronged, she will rarely seek revenge. Rather, the form of the fairy tale resembles the nurturance provided by a parent who does not project her/his wishes on a child but respects the need for the child to define her or his self. That is, the aesthetic form is derived from a sense of nurturing rather than competition. Thus, there is a reversal of the morphological structure of the traditional fairy tale based on power plays and the male protagonist's quest for power.

Though it is clear that the male characters in the feminist fairy tales have other interests than the heroines, they are not portrayed in a one-dimensional way. Generally, they are associated with false differentiation or with the oedipal phase which undermines healthy narcissistic longings. However, the male characters are also capable of learning and changing just as the traditional fairy-tale form itself reveals a capacity for transformation. The aesthetics of each individual tale depends on how each writer intends to explore the contradictions of gender antagonisms which are often linked to social problems. As we have seen, the writers who address adults as primary audience tend to focus more on the conflicts between men and women and stress solidarity among women as the necessary first step to overcome the instrumental rationality of a male word. Ultimately, self-trust and trust

of other women are the prerequisites for the creation of a new society. From a heterosexual viewpoint, such a society can have its limitations because it tends to exclude or even eliminate men. On the other hand, the critique of male domination in the fairy tales is tempered by compassion and also reflects a certain degree of frustration with male intransigence. Thus, until the regulatory male norms are transformed, the sceptical attitude of feminist writers toward marriage, the family, and heterosexuality is certainly justified.

The writers who address young readers as primary audience are more optimistic about forming a new world with men just as long as mutual respect is achieved. It is only in a dialectical relationship with men that the heroine, often the symbol of a healthy narcissistic drive, defines herself and has an impact on society. Though some of the feminist fairy tales end in marriage, this is rarely the goal of these narratives. Feminist fairy tales experiment with the language, topoi, motifs, and characters of the traditional tales in pursuit of expression commensurate with alternative forms of child rearing that lead to encouraging the self-worth of an individual. To change the fairy tale for feminists is not simply an act of symbolical writing for self-gratification, but it is also a political act based on their experience with male brutality and general social violence which is the result of the legitimising interests of male control. Ultimately, to write a feminist fairy tale is to write with the hope that future generations will not adapt the atavistic forms and ideas found in traditional tales, but that they will arrange their lives in response to non-sexist social conditions and the different options presented in the feminist fairy tales which are still seeking to prove their humanitarian value.

Notes

- 1 Cf. Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment. The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Knopf, 1976).
- 2 Cf. Marie Luise von Franz, *Problems of the Feminine in Fairytales* (New York: Spring, 1972).
- 3 I have endeavoured to deal with the failings of both the Freudian and Jungian approaches in my book *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales* (London: Heinemann and New York: Methuen, 1979). In particular, see 'On the Use and Abuse of Fairy Tales with Children: Bruno Bettelheim's Moralistic Magic Wand', pp. 160–82 which is unfortunately often misconstrued as an attack on Freudianism. My point is simply that neither Freud nor Jung can be used in an uncritical manner when interpreting fairy tales.
- 4 I have mainly mentioned the key figures here. Since 1970 there has been a plethora of remarkable feminist studies. For a thorough account of these works, see Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, 'Placing Women's History in History', *New Left Review*, 133 (May–June, 1982), pp. 5–29. See also Nannerl O. Keohane,

- Michelle Z. Rosaldo, and Barbara C. Gelpi, eds., *Feminist Theory. A Critique of Ideology*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) and Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson, *Powers of Desire. The Politics of Sexuality* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983).
- 5 *Contemporary Feminist Thought* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1983).
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. xii.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. xii. See also pp. 136–45.
- 8 See Michele Barrett, *Women's Oppression Today* (London: Verso, 1980) as well as the constructive and elaborate critique of the book by Johanna Brenner and Maria Ramas, 'Rethinking Women's Oppression,' *New Left Review*, 144 (1984), 33–71.
- 9 *Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977) p. 9. See also Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).
- 10 *College English*, 34 (1972), 383–95.
- 11 New York: Dutton, pp. 32–3.
- 12 *Interracial Books for Children*, 6 (1975), 1–3.
- 13 See Alan Dundes, ed., *Cinderella. A Casebook*, New York: Wildman Press, 1983.
- 14 In *Woman and Folklore*, ed. Claire R. Farrer (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1975), pp. 42–5.
- 15 Most of this work is being conducted outside America. See Heide Göttner-Abendroth, *Die Göttin und ihr Heros* (Munich: Frauenoffensive, 1980), Yvonne Verdier, *Façons de dire, façons de faire. La laveuse, la couturière, la cuisinière* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), and Bernadette Bricout, 'L'aiguille et l'épingle. Oralité et écriture au XVIIIème siècle', *Bibliothèque bleue nel seicento o Della letteratura per il popolo*, 4 (1981), 45–58. Cf. my book *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood* (London: Heinemann and South Hadley: Bergin & Garvey, 1983).
- 16 In *Literature and Learning*, eds. Elizabeth Gugeon and Peter Walden (London: Open University Press, 1978), pp. 42–58.
- 17 *Children's Literature in Education*, 8 (1977), 21–9. This essay has also been reprinted in Alan Dundes, ed., *Cinderella: A Casebook* (New York: Wildman, 1983), pp. 294–306.
- 18 Garden City: Doubleday, 1979.
- 19 New York: Pocket Books, 1981.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- 21 *The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 42.
- 23 "'Fairy-born and human-bred': Jane Eyre's Education in Romance", in *The Voyage In*, eds. Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1983), p. 89.
- 24 By the end of the nineteenth century there were numerous writers such as Isabelle Anne Ritchie (Miss Thackeray), Maria Craik, Mrs Molesworth, Mary De Morgan, and Evelyn Sharp, who incorporated fairy tales in their works or wrote their own from an unusual perspective.
- 25 Unpublished manuscript which was held as a talk on 27 December, 1980 at the Modern Language Association Meeting in San Francisco.
- 26 *Women's Studies*, 6 (1979), 248.
- 27 *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 7 (Summer, 1982), 18.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 19.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 20.
- 30 In *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, eds. Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1983), pp. 209–27.

- 31 Berkeley, California: Rainbow Press, 1974. The sequel was published the following year.
- 32 In *Stories for Free Children*, ed. Letty Cottin Pogrebin (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982), pp. 43–6.
- 33 In *Princess Hinchatti and Some Other Surprises* (New York; Farrar, Straus & Girous, 1973).
- 34 In *Gudgekin the Thistle Girl and Other Tales* (New York: Knopf, 1976).
- 35 In *Dr. Gardner's Fairy Tales for Today's Children* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1974).
- 36 In *Revolting Rhymes* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982).
- 37 In *If I Were in Charge of the World* (New York: Atheneum, 1982).
- 38 New York: Knopf, 1975.
- 39 New York: Atheneum, 1975.
- 40 New York: Greenwillow Books, 1983.
- 41 Scarsdale, New York: Banbury, 1976.
- 42 Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Lollipop Power, 1977.
- 43 In *Free To Be . . . You and Me.*, eds. Carole Hart, Letty Cottin Pogrebin, Mary Rodgers, and Marlo Thomas (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), pp. 128–35.
- 44 See *The Practical Princess and other Liberating Tales* (New York: Parents Magazine Press, 1978), pp. 63–80.
- 45 New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970.
- 46 In *Stories for Free Children*, ed. Letty Cottin Pogrebin (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982), pp. 17–20.
- 47 *Ibid.*, pp. 49–52.
- 48 *Kittatiny: A Tale of Magic* (New York: Daughters Press, 1978), pp. 43–51.
- 49 New York: Crowell, 1977.
- 50 *The Moon Ribbon and Other Tales* (New York: Crowell, 1976).
- 51 In *The Girl Who Cried Flowers and Other Tales* (New York: Crowell, 1974).
- 52 In *Dream Weaver* (New York: Collins, 1979).
- 53 See *The Prince and the Swineherd and Red Riding Hood* (Liverpool: Fairy Story Collective, 1972) and 'Snow White' in *Spare Rib* (October 1976), 44–6.
- 54 *Transformations* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), pp. 93–4.
- 55 *Ibid.*, p. 94.
- 56 *Ibid.*, p. 95.
- 57 *Ibid.*, p. 98.
- 58 *Ibid.*, p. 112.
- 59 New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977.
- 60 *Ibid.*, p. 57.
- 61 *Ibid.*, pp. 57–8.
- 62 *Ibid.*, p. 59.
- 63 *Ibid.*, pp. 65–6.
- 64 See Sara Henderson Hay, *Story Hour* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1982); Helen Chasin, *Coming Close and Other Poems* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968); Judith Rechter, 'Fay Wray to the King', in *No More Masks! An Anthology of Poems by Women*, eds. Florence House and Ellen Bass (Garden City: Doubleday, 1973), pp. 257–8; Kathleen Spivack, *Flying Inland* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1974).
- 65 New York: 1978.
- 66 New York: 1981.
- 67 New York: Knopf, 1977.
- 68 London: Gollancz, 1979.
- 69 *Or Tales from the Sisters Grimm* (New York: Daw Books, 1983).
- 70 'Through the Looking Glass', pp. 222–7.

- 71 See LeGuin's 'The Wife's Story' in *Changes*, eds. Ian Watson and Michael Bishop (New York: Ace, 1983), pp. 29–34.
- 72 In *Fine Lines. The Best of Ms. Fiction*, ed. Ruth Sullivan (New York: Scribner, 1982), 121–39.
- 73 See Susan M. Schwartz, ed., *Hecate's Cauldron* (New York: Ace, 1982).
- 74 Benjamin, 'The Oedipal Riddle: Authority, Autonomy, and New Narcissism,' in *The Problem of Authority in America*, eds. John P. Diggins and Mark E. Kann (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), pp. 195–224; Philipson, 'Heterosexual Antagonisms and the Politics of Mothering', *Socialist Review*, 12 (November–December, 1982), 55–77.
- 75 See Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (New York: Norton, 1979), especially the first two chapters and the last entitled 'Paternalism without Father'.
- 76 Benjamin, 'The Oedipal Riddle', pp. 198–9.
- 77 *Ibid.*, p. 202.
- 78 *Ibid.*, p. 208.
- 79 *Ibid.*, pp. 211–12.
- 80 Philipson, 'Heterosexual Antagonisms and the Problem of Mothering', p. 61.
- 81 See *The Drama of the Gifted Child* (New York: Basic Books, 1981) and *Am Anfang war Erziehung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983).
- 82 Philipson, 'Heterosexual Antagonisms and the Problem of Mothering', p. 71.
- 83 *Ibid.*, p. 74.
- 84 See Michele Barrett, *Women's Oppression Today* (London: Verso, 1980).
- 85 See Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson, eds., *Powers of Desire. The Politics of Sexuality* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983).
- 86 See Jean Godwin, Catherine G. Cauthorne and Richard T. Rada, 'Cinderella Syndrome: Children Who Simulate Neglect', *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 137 (October, 1980), 1223–5.

I Feminist Fairy Tales for Young (and Old) Readers
