

POETICS, POLITICS AND PEDAGOGY OF GRIMMS' FAIRY TALES

by

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## ABSTRACT

Placing the Grimms' fairy tales within an educational context means determining whether they contribute to current notions of the "educated person", and, if so, how. Because I am looking at the tales within the context of English and language arts classes, my thesis question is whether the Grimms' fairy tales are compatible with what I perceive to be literature's educational function, as it is both currently and ideally constituted. Do the tales provide students with insightful metaphors which facilitate better understanding of the human predicament? Can studying the specific forms and contents of the tales contribute to a literary literacy, one "language" among others available to the educated person?

The problems of current literature programs include misconceptions about literature's forms and intentions, and the distorting prioritizing of social issues over the aesthetic elements of literature. The assumptions about literature underlying the documents studied here suggest a conceptual lack or disregard for the expressive, aesthetic aspects of literature. The failure to articulate clearly what is unique or distinctive about poetic or metaphoric language, with reference to such things as aesthetic intention and qualities in terms of style, diction, and the fittingness of form and content, exposes the documents to misinterpretation. Curricula and their documents need to be balanced with the need for standards (our attitudes toward children revealed in the literature we deem appropriate for them), the need for critical

evaluative skills of literary comparison and analysis, the need for observing literary continuity through mythic themes and images, and the need for understanding literature as a distinct mode of discourse which engages our imaginations and emotions, and by which we are motivated and guided in our response. The discussion proceeds on at least three levels: first, the forms and functions of literary language, second, what constitutes a literacy program in the schools, and third, the role fairy tales can play within this conception.

## DEDICATION "EN BEDANKEN"

My parents emigrated from the Netherlands to Canada in 1951, a year before I was born. They learned English quickly, as my father insisted it be spoken at home. But it has only been through years of reading books and through discussion that my father has truly made the English language his own.

I dedicate this work to my dad, Peter Grootendorst, who shares with me his love of learning. And whom I love.

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Josephine Evetts-Secker, scholar and poet, is equally at home with literature in the classroom at the University of Calgary and in her Water Valley kitchen. Josephine first showed me the rewards of attention to language. Her love of fairy tales inspired me to read them again (and again), and provided the initial motivation for this thesis.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Responses to this thesis topic—the Grimms' fairy tales and their role in education—include “Fairy tales! I know them! As a child I loved them!” and “Do they still let children read those tales?” These reactions roughly illustrate the extremities of the question addressed in this thesis: Why literature? Why teach, study and create new literature? What is its value to human beings, and within education?

English is a relatively new discipline whose place in the curriculum has not been resolved. It is most often aligned with social sciences, at a far remove from its function as art. This position intensifies the need to determine literature's role in the curriculum. What is literature's form and what can it achieve? Currently, literature and language are collapsed as “one way of knowing” (Harste, 1988, p. 182). Literature's mode of discourse is not distinguished from other language modes such as descriptive or philosophical language. Literature is often used as a “vehicle for thought.” Liberal humanists say that literature “makes you a better person.” The 60s claimed “art for art's sake.” Literature apparently did not need “raison d'être” or external verification. Within education, however, content and method must be substantiated and justified. The educational task is to present the chosen route to achieve the desired goals.

I chose the Grimms' fairy tales as a “main character” of this exploration, because like good characters, they embody conflict. They are at once good and bad stories, “necessary for literacy” but also “unacceptable within education.” Their

fantasy elements are a “distortion of reality” while at the same time are “the means to a realistic vision of the world.” Not only do the tales create conflict, so do the brothers Grimm.

At the untimely death of their lawyer-father at the age of 44 in 1796, the eldest brothers Jacob and Wilhelm were thrust headlong into the injustice of the class systems prevalent in Germany at the turn of the century. The family’s eviction from their comfortable childhood home in Kassel was just one on a long line of injustices suffered by the brothers.

Although each one was graduated from the Lyzeum at the head of his class, Jacob in 1802 and Wilhelm in 1803, they both had to obtain special dispensations to study law at the University of Marburg because their social standing was not high enough to qualify them for automatic admission. Once at the university. . . students from wealthier families received stipends, while the Grimms had to pay for their own education and live on a small budget (Zipes, 1988, p. 3).

The brothers’ scholarly pursuits in the areas of law, philology and literature—and the writing and publication of many books—-included significant studies such as Geschichte der deutschen Sprache (The History of the German Language, 1848), and Deutsches Wörterbuch (German Dictionary, uncompleted). Their best known work, Kinder- und Haus-Märchen was edited seven times during the years 1812 to 1857. This editing process has been a topic of controversy.

Before the 60s scholars mostly ignored the authorship of the Grimms, and concentrated on the “truths” contained in the tales. These truths, it was believed, were of a simpler, more natural people. The Grimms’ role was that of neutral recorder of the “volk” wisdom. Since the 60s, scholarship has revealed the full extent of the Grimms’ editing. This awareness has created general outrage at the Grimms’ seemingly underhanded editorial manipulation. The brothers’ role changed

from neutral recorders to contriving editors. It was shown that the brothers did not insist on “literal fidelity to oral traditions but openly admitted that they had taken pains to delete ‘every phrase unsuitable for children’” (quoted in Tatar, 1987, p. 19).

The Grimms had relied on sources at least once removed from peasant culture.

Contrary to popular belief, the Grimms did not collect their tales by visiting peasants in the countryside and writing down the tales that they heard. Their primary method was to invite storytellers to their home and then have them tell the tales aloud, which the Grimms either noted down on first hearing or after a couple of hearings. Memory played an important role in the Grimms’ transcriptions. Most of the storytellers during this period were educated young women from the middle class or aristocracy. For instance, in Kassel a group of young women from the Wild family. . . and from the Hassenpflug family. . . used to meet regularly to relate tales they had heard and remembered from their nursemaids, governesses, and servants, or tales they may have read (Zipes, 1988, p. 10).

Furthermore, Frau Hassenpflug’s version of the tales could not help but be influenced by the context of her visit to the bachelor brothers in the parlour of their poor but proper home.

This cursory sketch does not address the complexity of the shift in perception of the Grimms from recorders to editors. It allows reflection, however, on the sense of the Grimms’ betrayal which (still) pervades the scholarship (Bottigheimer, 1987; Zipes, 1988b; and Ellis, 1983). This thesis aims to move beyond this problematic knot which has occupied scholars.

What understanding about the collection of Grimm stories do our present critical perceptions permit? By acknowledging the complicit nature of all language, indeed, all human endeavour, can we achieve a more mature vantage point regarding the tales? Can we accept the Grimms as philologists, recorders, editors, and family members who needed to earn a living? Can we accept them as people living in a time

and a place seeped in values, ideas, and moral positions? Can we push on to consider the Grimms as artists, and their tales as art? Given the complicity and constructedness of human experience, can we see the Grimms' tales are yet one more story, rather than the essential story? Can we view the tales as works of art distinguished by their time and circumstances, and by their transition from oral to literary stories? This is some of the groundwork which must precede decision-making about a place and role for the Grimms' tales in education.

This thesis examines current approaches to the tales seen both in critical and theoretical writing, and in literary adaptations of the tales. My examination of feminist literary and deconstruction theories is most often limited to particular applications of the theories made by educators. This may be unfortunate, but my intention is more akin to map-making. I am locating the territory of the scholarship which interests me. I acknowledge the complexity of many aspects of the "question of the Grimms" addressed here, complexities of which I am becoming increasingly aware. Each theoretical influence upon education, and upon the study of the tales could comprise many theses. I limit my analysis to specific documents and tales, showing their influence upon the use of fairy tales in the classroom.

Recommendations from some feminist theorists include rewriting the tales, and I examine a feminist retelling of Little Red Riding Hood. I also examine how deconstruction and process theory have affected the way literature is used and taught in the classroom. Because the classroom context is important to this study, I examine the effects of the devaluation of the aesthetic, and the levelling of literature to "just one more language use" by its incorporation into "language" studies, the instrumentalization of the writing process and the effects of commercial and mass

culture (parodies and ridicule of the tales which parallel literary deconstruction of fairy tale plots and themes). These aspects affect the way the Grimms' tales are used in the classroom.

The texts and curriculum documents examined suggest that their "outdated and harmful ideological content" render the Grimms' tales problematic. Adaptations of the tales more "in line" with "current values and formats" are preferred. These include parodies of the traditional tales—a use which television confirms daily. While many of these approaches are not in themselves bad, and while they can be meaningfully incorporated into the curriculum, they need to be set within a context of the study of literature. We need to ask the educational questions about purposes and intentions, and ways of achieving educational goals. If the aesthetic is not valued in education, for instance, there is little room for the Grimms' tales. If historical and mythic continuity—our literary traditions—are not seen as important in the creation of new stories, then there is little room for the Grimms' tales. A central premise of this thesis is that the aesthetic and mythic value of literature ought to form part of the basis of English studies.

I examine theories of art and aesthetics from primary sources, including those articulated by Abbs, Frye, Langer, Murdoch, and O'Hear. Exploring the aesthetic aspect of literature led me to see that not just the tales' content pose problems, but also their imaginative, fantastical element. This led to examining feminist recommendations more closely. To what do the authors of Changing Stories (1984) object? Could it be fantasy?

For civilized society and for education, fantasy has been a problematic aspect of our human existence. Literature, with its Daedalistic (read: fatal) flights of



fantasy has been suspect since Plato threatened to evict poets from the Republic.

While fantasy has always existed wherever children and adults gather at night around a kitchen or rec-room fire, perhaps the first thinker to make a direct link between fantasy and education was Bruno Bettelheim. His work, The Uses of Enchantment (1976) is a Freudian analysis of the tales.

The tales' problematic sociological content and their problematic fantasy content are addressed in this thesis. While society continues to be wary of fantasy, education needs, perhaps more than ever, to understand fantasy and imagination as educational tools (Egan, 1988 and Paley, 1990). Paley, a University of Chicago educator, demonstrates in her primary classrooms that the emotion of fear, elicited through the fairy tales, can be used in an educational context to make cognitive gains.

To return to my opening questions about literature, I assert its importance as a mode of discourse that addresses human experience from the "inside." It gives voice to the emotional and imaginative aspects of our experience. Our subjective lives—how we think and feel—is as important as what we do in the world. Maturing students benefit from assurance regarding the legitimacy of their feelings and thoughts. Literature is not vicarious experience, it is experience. Alongside scientific (descriptive) and philosophic (linear) discourse, literary (metaphoric) discourse provides a more complete, inclusive version of the educated person.

### Outline of Thesis

I chose the Grimms tales because they are fine examples of the literary use of language, particularly fantasy, which, along with their "unacceptable" content, makes them problematic on different levels. Hence they provide an apt and potent "case"

for the more general argument that underlies this thesis: literature's role and value within the English curriculum. More specifically, do current approaches to the study of English include the view of literature as a cultural means to better understand the human predicament, not from the culturally dominant "language" of science, but through literature's specific forms and intentions?

Chapter One provides the context for my study. I survey traditional, contemporary and aesthetic uses of the tales, and how current classroom strategies are presented, and what some of the distinguishing features of Grimms' fairy tales are. I outline society's unease with fantasy as characterized in feminist and deconstructionist theory, as well as the utilitarian influences of commercial and technological society, and how these factors impede the transmission of literary or imaginative aspects in the classroom. Chapter Two deals with the age-old debate (articulated by Plato, Rousseau and Bettelheim) about fantasy's (in)ability to provide children with a realistic view of the world. Plato and Rousseau bring to the discussion a concern about forms of discourse which lead to truth. The discussion serves as an adumbration of the rest of this thesis. Chapter Three poses the question about what is "good"—how can we achieve it? Can fairy tales contribute to our ideal of achieving a true sense of reality? The thesis argues for the legitimacy of metaphoric language as one of the "languages" necessary to achieve the educated person, and as an important use of literature within English programs.

I am concerned with what constitutes, and with what ought to constitute, literacy programs in the schools, and with the role of fairy tales within those programs. Chapter Four examines literacy programs and their approaches to literature, and discusses the emergence over the last thirty years of a shift in the study

of English from a literature orientation to a language one. Consistent with the shift are “schools of thought” ranging from traditional to deconstructionist and reader-response theory. Through their representative curricula, I analyze these “schools” in Chapter Five. In this chapter I distinguish between approaches whose priority is to uncover the ideologies literature perpetuates, and approaches whose priority is an aesthetic response to literature.

In the second part of the thesis I demonstrate and compare the implications of aesthetic and ideological readings of the fairy tales. In Chapter Six I examine two contemporary adaptations of the Grimms’ tale, Little Red Riding Hood. I show how engagement with its aesthetic aspects makes possible a rich retelling. Students’ articulation of their own stories is a mutually significant goal for feminism and education. The traditional fairy tales, which, through the use of wonder and magic, indirectly depicting human motivation, and symbolically representing emotions, are the imaginative means by which children, including young girls, are helped to express their hopes, fears and desires.

In Chapter Seven, I analyze The Golden Bird. I illustrate the capacity of such tales to subvert the ideology of the culture and the author. I argue that the tale gives expression to bourgeois values without simply being propaganda for them. I also stress the experiential nature of reading possible in well-crafted stories. In Chapter Eight, I examine Paley’s use of the aesthetic features of fairy tales (Goldilocks and the Three Bears) to demonstrate fantasy’s validity as an educational means for children to make emotional and cognitive sense of their experience. In Chapter Nine, the concluding chapter, I show in more general terms how feminist and deconstruction theory, when incorporated into an educational matrix, contribute to educational goals.

To illustrate this claim, a post-modern telling of Goldilocks and the Three Bears titled Ten in a Bed (Ahlberg & Amstutz, 1990) is compared with the traditional version discussed in the previous chapter. Further support is offered by an exploration of Ahlberg's playful writing. Although the author deconstructs (fractures) the traditional tale, his writing is informed by his aesthetic appreciation. Aesthetic value is privileged over deconstruction theory, to the edification of both. Also, his portrayal of an imaginative heroine allows us to achieve both a feminist and an educational goal.

The last chapter is a microcosm of my broader intention to place theoretical approaches to literature within an educational context. This context allows educators to decide how and when such approaches be part of classroom activities. I show that an English curriculum comprised of activities which reflect an understanding of the nature and form of (aesthetic) literary language, as one among different modes of discourse, contributes to the notion of educated people who are increasingly conscious of themselves as human beings in the world. In fairy tale language this is characterized as people learning to be at home in the world.

## CHAPTER TWO

### FROM ROMANCE TO SESAME STREET: A PROGRESS OF THE TALES

Part of children's schooling since the end of the nineteenth century (when the fairy tale was introduced into the school curriculum and published in primers) involved training children to become adept at recognizing, appreciating, and learning from fairy tales.

Together with the fairy tale, mythology, legend and folklore provided a continuity of theme, motif and image. The Grimms' fairy tales were valued because they provided literary continuity, because they were popular examples of the fairy tale genre, and because their origins lay in the "volk" and they contained timeless "volk" truths which demonstrate humanity's past kinship with nature. Besides, children seemed to enjoy listening to them and reading them.

Prior to the twentieth century the Grimms were considered to be neutral recorders of "volk" stories related to them by (mostly) peasant women. The informants were seen as the authors of tales. It was not the actual conditions of the everyday lives of the folk which were interesting, rather it was the romantic notion of a somehow better, more natural people, who lived closer to nature.

#### The Beginnings of an Educational Context

Traditional tales, such as the Grimms' fairy tales, have been told over and over again. The term "fairy tale" is misleading because fairies do not usually appear in the tales. But the term has come to designate stories which operate in a world

where supernatural beings and magical acts (such as spells) occur alongside realistic settings and family constellations. This ease of transfer between this and other-worldly planes is a significant feature of fairy tales, and often distinguishes them from folk tales. "Märchen", story or tale in German, has taken on this specialized meaning of magical tale. The closest kin of the fairy tale are myth and legend. Legends usually grow from a seed of historical fact, and myth attempts to explain human beings in the context of unruly nature and relentless time.

Before the tales were collected and transcribed by the brothers Grimm in the early 1800s, they existed as oral tales not intended for children. Since fairy tales' earliest manifestation in literary form, however, the educational contexts for enjoying and studying fairy tales have been shaped by existing cultural and social conditions. At the time of the publication of Kinder-und Haus-Märchen (1812) both society and technology saw literature as a formal means of instructing and educating children. Bourgeois cultural norms, like obedience and hard work, were assimilated into the tales. As they became aware of their readership, the brothers Grimm became even more diligent about their newly acquired moral and educational responsibilities. Angela Carter (1992, p. xvii) suggests such "editing" was widespread, and not just malicious actions on the part of anthologers:

Removing 'coarse' expressions was a common nineteenth century pastime, part of the project of turning the universal entertainment of the poor into the refined pastime of the middle classes, and especially of the middle-class nursery. The excision of references to sexual and excremental functions, the toning down of sexual situations and the reluctance to include 'indelicate' material—that is, dirty jokes—helped to denaturize the fairy tale and, indeed, helped to denaturize its vision of everyday life.

As Carter suggests, before they became literary, the tales were entertainment for the

whole community during long hours of manual labour on the threshing floor and in the spinning room. Carter (1992, p. ix) says that

for most of human history, 'literature', both fiction and poetry, has been narrated, not written—heard, not read. So fairy tales, folk tales, stories from the oral tradition, are all of them the most vital connection we have with the imaginations of the ordinary men and women whose labour created the world.

Twentieth-century technological, political and critical-literary “advances” challenged these assumptions and created a shift in the cultural and educational function of fairy tales. In the late 60s and in the 70s the underlying authoritarian and sexist attitudes of fairy tales were revealed through literary, Marxist and feminist criticism. Major shifts in communication systems, guided by new value systems, facilitated these changes. Parodies of Mother Goose nursery rhymes and fairy tales have since become staple entertainment for young and old in political cartoons, comic strips, as well as on Sesame Street and other children's television programs. Caught in the flood of cheap books and entertainment, the fairy tale has slowly lost the largely romantic aura with which it had been endowed.

The shifts in the study and teaching of Grimms' fairy tales parallel the study and teaching of English literature. The linguistic and sociological literary approaches of the 60s and 70s led to the demystification of the fairy tales, perhaps most remarkably by pointing out their cultural embeddedness. Two scholarly approaches which also contributed to the removal of the fairy tale from their airy heights are the Russian formalist approach represented by Vladimir Propp, who dissected and examined the structure of the fairy tale, and the socio-historic approach inspired by Marxism, which examined its contextuality.

The studies of the tales range from their treatment as sociological,

psychological or historical documents, to folklore, myth and essentialist stories.

Aberrations of fairy tales motifs and themes exist within Western culture in advertising, and as witty aphorisms in our daily speech. People speak about life as a “fairy tale” or refer to somebody as having lived a real Cinderella story. We absorb them as if they were part of the air we breathe. As Edmund said of Shakespeare in Jane Austen’s Mansfield Park, “we all talk Shakespeare, use his similes, and describe with his descriptions”; we could say the same about fairy tales.

Their mythic themes have also been incorporated into serious literature.

Charles Dickens once said that if only he had married Little Red Riding Hood he “should have known perfect bliss.” He bitterly deplored “the cruelty and treachery of that dissembling Wolf who ate her grandmother without making any impression on his appetite, and then ate her, after making that ferocious joke about his teeth” (quoted in Opie, 1974, p. 119). Margaret Atwood said recently (August 24, 1991, The Globe and Mail, C5) that Grimms’ tales were her greatest literary influence and that her literary activity has “profound roots in fairy tales.” As one of Canada’s leading writers, Atwood recognizes the Grimms’ tales as foundational to her writing. This should alert educators to consider including the tales in English and language arts programs. They also deserve consideration as educational material on the basis of their historical value and as a cultural means of making sense of experience. Despite their demystified and altered forms, the tales have survived and are thriving in the cultural imagination, as the title of Atwood’s novel, The Robber Bride, testifies. The tales infiltrate the language of everyday life, providing common images and themes of what might still be called our “volk” imagination.



## The Fairy Tales in Today's Classroom

Writers of contemporary children's literature are experimenting with traditional forms of literature in order to create contemporary versions which reflect today's values and conditions. These books entering the classroom, the Disney versions of the tales, and teachers' growing interest in thematic and social concerns, have changed the teaching and appreciation of the fairy tale in the classroom. The following observations are based primarily on the review of curricula used in pre-service programs in education faculties in British Columbia, but also on conversations with instructors and teachers, and classroom observation in Ontario. Students might read many versions of the tales and study them from the various critical approaches. If traditional fairy tales are used, they will most likely be used for comparison/contrast, as many of the complicated refinements of current "fractured" fairy tales are lost on those who do not know the traditional tales. For example, the intertextual joke in Munsch's The Paper Bag Princess (1980) is unintelligible without prior knowledge of the traditional tale. Curriculum activities include using the "Lazy Letters" contained in Johnson and Louis (1990, p. 31) where students imagine Snow White "writing to her father to tell him about the adventures she has had since she was abducted on the orders of the Wicked Queen." Based on "lazy letters, sold at some tourist resorts" this "modelling" project uses "a multiple choice format with ridiculous options" in which the children select the answer which most appeals to them. For example, the letter begins: Dear Father, I have a) been eaten by a frog, b) become a truck driver, or c) married a prince, and ends: Fortunately a a)frog, b) prince, c) trucker kissed me and I a) woke, b) threw, or c) slipped, up. The students' choices comprise their letter.

Other classrooms study gender patterns. Using the British curriculum document, Changing Stories (Mellor & Hemming, p. 46) students compare various adaptations of a particular fairy tale, examining it for its notions of girls, who, in some stories “are silly and weak” and boys “who are brave and adventurous.” Or a class might read Roald Dahl’s Revolting Rhymes, poems based on the fairy tales. Or tales might be mentioned in conjunction with films, including The Little Mermaid, Beauty and the Beast, or Aladdin.

Recently I visited a grade five class which put Hansel and Gretel on trial for trespassing on the witch’s property and damaging her property. The children dramatized the courtroom roles, learning about law but also about (the teacher said) “deconstructing the text and uncovering the real story.” But is transgression of property, or even murder, the “real story?” While it is understandable that instruction about the fairy tales include concerns about “gender-skewing” and racism, should they be to the exclusion of the tale’s imaginative and mythic content? Frye says that children need a mythic foundation in order for later literature to be comprehensible, and to enable them to become imaginatively aware. Do the teaching strategies mentioned above permit such education?

This brief survey of uses of the tales illustrates three dominant influences upon the tales and literature in general: feminist theory, deconstruction theory, and the products of mass culture, namely commercially-produced versions of the tales. While using the tales as imaginative stories which speak meaningfully to children still exists, the meanings we derive from the tales are not limited to their literary value. In fact, many teachers, aware of the criticisms of fairy tales as violent and sexist stories, no longer feel adequate assisting children in emotional and imaginative responses. The

“problem” of the fairy tales is best captured in the voices of teachers who ask, how, given their current level of social awareness, can they continue reading, loving and teaching the old stories, knowing they revolve around an old, patriarchal plot? As well, feminist criticism’s current emphasis on gender constellations in all the arts mandates a certain kind of reading. Theory, both political and literary, then, is one of two major influences upon the tales. Feminist theory has both political and literary manifestations, and it is often difficult to tell where political concerns end and literary concerns begin—or whether such separation is possible. The other influential theory is deconstruction. In Scieszka’s (1992) The Stinky Cheese Man and other fairly Stupid Tales the author not only collapses the meaning of the traditional tales, but has the table of contents topple on Chicken Little’s head. Mass culture and commercialism are most obviously seen in the Disney movies of the tales.

Other trends reinforce the strategies and afore-mentioned uses of literature. In the United States a technicism known as the Writing Process instrumentalizes writing, treating it as stages (writing, editing, rewriting, conferencing, and publishing) which can be learned by teachers and taught in their classrooms. Although it applies directly to writing, the movement has influenced the way literature is used and taught in the schools. Literary language, under the Writing Process (and other movements such as Writing across the Curriculum) has become just one more “language” use along with descriptive and expository writing. The implication is that writing and reading can be learned just as well from the newspaper as from books, and literature is not distinguished as being a unique, artistic use of language. This trend or movement from Literature-based study to Language-based study which began in the sixties, has reached fruition in current educational systems.

There are good and bad stories, good and bad movies. The Disney movies are not unequivocally bad, nor are Grimms' tales unanimously good. Commercial products are common in our schools, and current social awareness influences our educational decisions. However, the material we bring into the classroom, and which we consider to be educationally worthwhile, have met certain criteria, and have had certain questions asked of them. For example, it may well be that teachers need to make students aware of negative gender constellations within personal and public relationships. Such awareness may be our educational goal. If so, it seems appropriate to ask not only which subject areas can best address our concerns, but also how and when we should teach a particular tale. Gender studies may, for instance, be best examined in social studies, political science or media. And if we decide that the English class is the place to study gender, more questions arise. Should we, for example, engage the gender question before students read a fairy tale, or immediately after? Should we provide a historical context for the tales, or first allow for children's unmitigated responses to an oral telling of the tale? What considerations about the role of politics in art must inform our decision? How can deconstruction theory be best put to use in our classroom? Are we wise, as we saw in the example of the "Lazy Letter", to draw our educational materials from tourism?

The world is alive and well in the classroom, as Dewey insisted. And so it should be. Feminism, deconstructionism and commercial products should be considered for their educational usefulness. Technology is relevant to educating students, and its systems worth considering. My concern is to be conscious of educational choices, indeed, to make educational choices about what we use and how it meets our educational goals. In English and language arts, this consciousness

means awareness of the purposes and nature of the subject matter as a cultural means of making sense of reality. What is literature and what is the importance of literary language? How can it best be taught? What is the difference between utilitarian and artistic use of language? Is one more conducive to achieving/setting our goals than another? Consciousness means being aware of how the theories, products and processes we use achieve our educational goals.

### Life-like or Literature-like: Conventions of Life and Literature

What are the connections between the tales and how they are taught? What do the various strategies suggest about attitudes toward the fairy tales, toward teaching, and toward children? How does understanding the nature of literature and what it can achieve shape goals for literary education?

In the classroom the children's smart-aleck responses to the tales include: "This is just a fairy tale", and "Hansel and Gretel should go on trial for trespassing onto the witch's property, and for killing her." In conjunction with Little Red Riding Hood and other wolf tales, children questioned the wolf's victimization. "Why blame the poor wolf?" A parallel attitude towards the tales can be found in many current books, such as Jon Scieszka's, The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs. This story, written from the wolf's point of view, is about the wolf's "innocence." Where do these new responses come from? Increased ecological awareness? Studying wolves? The tens of t.v. sit-coms with their one-line, shot-from-the-hip witticisms? Post-modern theory?

The tales' conflicts and motifs are echoed in countless artistic and literary elaborations. They have not petrified, nor are they preserved as relics from the past.

They shift, like beach logs in a storm, while their core of motifs, images, characters and plots remains constant. The tales adapt to reflect and reinforce the forms and contents of each society. While each age and each art form must reinterpret the themes and forms handed down to it, fairy tales, and particularly the Grimms' tales, are a striking example of the cultural embeddedness of artistic expression. They tumble in and out of fashions, theories, genres, media, and come out with their basic story line and urgent themes intact. The longevity of the tales, their adaptability, and our enduring fascination with their themes, form a main theme of this thesis.

Although I argue for the inclusion of the Grimms' fairy tales in the school curriculum, my intention is not just their preservation. Rather, I want to use them as historical records and for their mythic content. Limiting curriculum materials to what is currently fashionable is not a good way of gaining perspective. Unfortunately, most fairy tale instruction is limited to whatever version portrays currently popular thought, so students remain ignorant of the traditional versions (even though deconstructed tales infer knowledge of the traditional tales for their jokes and sophisticated refinements). But it is not just a matter of the unavailability of the Grimms' well-told tales. Choosing classroom literature on the basis of what is currently popular, such as feminist- or sociologically-correct narrative, shows a poor understanding of the criteria which best determines the literature students need.

The tales must be examined in terms of their cohered form and content. As literature they are not neutral, infinitely malleable containers which accommodate all things. Literature has intentions and forms. It shapes what it says in purposeful ways. This interrelationship is a theme of this thesis. As teachers/writers, we must make our judgments based on the effect created by the combination of words and

form of the fairy tale, rather than basing our decisions on acceptable versus unacceptable contents. The content of The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs, namely, story-telling from the point of view of the traditionally maligned victim is currently politically “correct”, and is considered by some educationally sound on that basis. The Grimms’ tales, with their house-bound heroines, are excluded. While a story’s content is important for our educational decisions, it is even more important to understand that literature is never just content. It does not exist in a direct relationship to the real world. Frye (1989, pp. 36-37) says that

it would be the wildest kind of pedantry to use it (literature) directly as a guide to life. . . Life and literature, then, are both conventionalized, and of the conventions of literature about all we can say is that they don’t much resemble the conditions of life. . . To bring anything really to life in literature we can’t be life-like: we have to be literature-like.

Not only are life and literature conventionalized in different ways, but so is language. Its main function, however, is to communicate, to convey information. Language used as art, or language used with artistic intent, also conveys information, but not merely as facts. Language can be used to communicate in expedient or artistic ways. Witness the office memo with its terse reminder of a meeting agenda, and contrast this with a child’s picture book. The artistic medium of literature is words, however, so it is possible to read literary words in their more ordinary sense as conveyers of information. This is not literature’s best use. Reading literature as you would the newspaper, for instance, will give you some facts, but will not account for the complexity of its expression of those facts. Literature is made up of words—true—but words which are chosen and shaped to create what Langer calls a “virtual event.” What poets say through the shape of their words is as important as the content. The

most obvious example is the idiosyncratic form of poetry itself. In writing about a mother, for instance, or about a fabulous storm, why not write in full sentences? What is it about the mother or the storm which calls for line breaks? What is it about the subject matter that insists upon a particular rhythm? Why repeat a word? We write in different ways, for different purposes, and we read in different ways. If students are to increase their understanding and enjoyment of literature, then we facilitate attending to literary language.

In her essay, "Poesis", Susanne Langer (1953, p. 211)<sup>1</sup> explains that language-as-art happens when "the poet uses discourse to create an illusion, a pure appearance, which is a non-discursive symbolic form. The feeling expressed by this form is neither his, nor his hero's, nor ours. It is the meaning of the symbol". Peter Abbs (1982), whose theory is discussed in chapter three, addresses this topic from the point of view of literary art as a movement from bodily impulse to cultural symbol. The author sees the expressive quality of the story or poem as a process of "translating" the artist's inarticulate feelings and impulses into the consensually intelligible symbols of the community. It is the artist's responsibility to shape the energy of the original impulse so that the artifact expresses its meanings in imaginative and emotional ways which are recognizable to others. As "virtual events" literature is akin to other expressive arts such as dance and film. The play of powers set up in a dancer's first gestures is similar to the play of powers the first words of a poem set up. The reader is taken up into the illusion created

by means of words—words having sound and sense, pronunciations and

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<sup>1</sup> The use of the masculine pronoun implies a certain bias which I do not share. Throughout this thesis I maintain individual author's use of the pronoun with hesitation.



spellings, dialect forms, related words (“cognates”); words having derivations and derivatives, i.e. histories and influences; words with archaic and modern meanings, slang meanings, metaphorical meanings. But what he creates is not an arrangement of words, for words are only his materials, **out of which** he makes his poetic elements (Langer, 1953, p. 211).

The genre of poetry is one of the most concentrated uses of language, but its devices—such as metaphor—are evident to greater or lesser degree in most language usage. Language itself is metaphor. Poetic use of language occurs on billboards, in office memos, in the newspaper, in movies, but occurs in a more intentional and concentrated way in the literary arts.

Although we see evidence of playfulness and literary conventions in much writing, teaching students the form and nature of literary language is best done by examining it in its most concentrated and heightened form: literature. Langer (1953, p. 213) says all works of artistic value “may be understood by the specialization and extension of poetic devices. All writing illustrates the same creative principles.” Although literature is a very concentrated use of language, it is not just a series of good effects. When a writer creates a poem, a story or a fairy tale, the intention is not to communicate a discrete bit of information, but to create the experience of the poem or story. Poetic devices within a work of art are committed to a context, to the whole work. Billboards and other advertisements often use incredibly sophisticated language and images, but they are not sustained works. Their effect is quick and passing. The metaphor which the novelist employs, however, must create a lasting impression; it does not just speak “in passing.” It must also be coherent in terms of the whole story or vision. When educators instruct students in the use of poetic devices, it seems logical that they use the best examples. Literature offers a full

range of language use, and a commitment to the patterns and the larger context of literary studies.

Children need the traditional tales because they are imaginative stories which delight and to instruct. Fairy tales deal with human experience. They offer us a point of view about who we are and what we are in the world. They are not just words. They are forms and conventions which express the vision of the words. The choice of the literature we use in schools must not be limited by theme or content, but must be based on more comprehensive grounds such as the success of their poetic devices or conventions. The task of the English and language arts curricula is to help students deepen and increase their understanding and enjoyment of the artful use of language.

Traditionally, the grounds for inclusion in the literature curriculum has been the work's literary features. Although the features are elaborated throughout this thesis, I want to create a context for the ensuing arguments. I want to present my ideas on the literary qualities of the tales.

### Distinguishing Features of Fairy Tales

Except for my discussion of Goldilocks and the Three Bears, my thesis focuses on the Grimms' fairy tales, a collection of 211 cautionary, fairy, folk, religious and other tales which Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm collected as examples of traditional tales, and edited seven times between 1812 and 1857. It is the final 1857 version which has achieved a sort of immortality. Even the tales' most severe critic, Jack Zipes, uses it

as the basis for his own edition of the complete works of the brothers Grimm<sup>2</sup>.

There are a number of features of fairy tales which they share with other literature, but some are unique to the genre. Fairy tales have their own internal logic or coherence (blending this and other-worldly realms, for instance), and they do not express the resources we ordinarily bring to problems. We do not normally heed a fox's advice, though we may be kind to the animals we encounter (maybe this is the same thing). Fairy tale plots have no apparent strategy or tactical skill—characters can act kindly or just be lucky. There is no easily describable character development, as most fairy tale characters are stereotyped and flat. The oral elements of the tales are discernible in their ritual character, which includes repetition of dialogue, verse, and action (the predictability of the structure, for example).

### The Cinematography of the Tales

Joseph Campbell says that fairy tales are the picture primer of the soul. In the same way that a still life painting is a primer for the visual artist, the fairy tales are a glossary of images and themes of fiction, drama and poetry. Mary Meigs (*In The Company of Strangers*, 1991) helps me think about the fairy tales in cinematic terms. She writes about film characters become the subjects of the films, and the inter-relationship between subject and object. I have adapted some of her ideas to the fairy tales.

The tales are not life, but life translated into fairy tale language—largely

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<sup>2</sup> Zipes is an outspoken critic of those "bourgeois sanitation men", the Grimms, so it interests me that their last, most "sanitized" edition is the one he chose for his translation. Is it possible that he chose it because it is also the best, most artistically rich version? (Zipes, 1979-80, p. 8)

pictorial, suggestive. In a sense they are the fusion of the art forms of literature and a kind of film language—both in composition and methodology. The tales' spare, cinematic style is compressed and rendered in graphic strokes. It is as if the fairy tales takes hundreds of hours of film and extracts the essential tableaux. Meigs (p. 63) talks about the cutting process in film making, in which personally significant themes become part of the larger vision of the film. They become small "facets of the whole", each with an importance, contexted by their place in the whole. This is demonstrated in the fairy tale, Goldilocks and the Three Bears, for instance, in the tripartite structure of the heroine's tasting, sitting and sleeping. While the individual elements may be significant, they are subservient to the cumulative meaning. In shedding descriptive language and the language of the non-visual senses, the tales turn the artistic responsibilities over to the camera, as it were. Reading the tales makes one appreciate the film editor's responsibility "to eliminate negative or dead space." If a scene is even seconds too long a spectator will become bored and impatient (Meigs, 1991, p. 63). In film, as in fairy tales, natural images such as animals and landscape "bear a burden of explanation that is as light as air"—there is space for the reader's imagination and interpretation, space for many, rather than one "right", reading of the tales (Meigs, 1991, p. 63). When Goldilocks tastes the "just right" porridge, we can grasp the significance (either consciously or subconsciously) in personally meaningful ways. We also know that the tree on her mother's grave which Cinderella waters with her tears symbolizes promise and hopes—hers and ours—even though we may not be able to explain our understanding in words.

## Characterization

Fairy tale characters contain the subject of their own tales. The tales are a dynamic source of connections, powered by the energy of a wish. Cinderella, for example, is the story of the heroine's wish to be recognized. Everybody in her tale lives in the wake of her desire to be restored to her rightful position—the one she had before the events of the story. When her mother was alive and she was loved. Secondary characters have no separate existence—the entire story is the playing out of the heroine's "subject", often a problem to be solved, or conflicting feelings. These feelings are equilibria, or binary opposites such as significance/insignificance, alienation/reconciliation. These disparate wishes and feelings manifest as characters and action.

Fairy tale characters embody readers' best ideas of themselves. Our fantasies include visions of ourselves as the heroine, prince, or the mischievous girl. The fairy tales see us not exactly as we are, but the way we "feel" we are, or might be: kind, generous, thoughtful, smart, quick-witted. Within the fairy tale, we are our best selves, our "best beloved" selves—the myth of our ideal selves.

## Point of View

It may be that fairy tales are told from children's points of view, rather than the adults', but we cannot be sure of this. We can recognize that some features of the tales correlate with some children's experience of the world. Fairy tale characters are bound to life through the images of nature with which they interact—for example, the hero in The Golden Bird rides the fox's tail and the fisherman in The Fisherman and His Wife talks to the fish. I remember being a child and experiencing the natural

world in similar, animated ways. The tales' seamless connections between this and other worlds are similar to children's enjoyment in weaving fairy tale, television characters, and other fantasy constructions into their play.

### Realistic versus Fantastic Worlds

The stories typically begin at home, and with an equilibrium which is promptly shaken, sometimes by a change in the family structure, sometimes by magical intervention. Carter (1992, p. ix) says that

although the content of the fairy tale may record the real lives of the anonymous poor with sometimes uncomfortable fidelity—the poverty, the hunger, the shaky family relationships, the all-pervasive cruelty and also, sometimes, the good humour, the vigour, the straightforward consolations of a warm fire and a full belly—the form of the fairy tale is not usually constructed so as to invite the audience to share a sense of lived experience. The 'old wives' tale' positively parades its lack of verisimilitude.

Carter confirms Frye's comments about the differences between social and literary conventions. The treatment of magic in the stories is indicative of the narrator's acceptance of the coexistence of what we normally distinguish as rational and irrational thought, or realistic and fantasy worlds.

### The Mythic Continuity of Stories

The oral aspects of fairy tales have persisted in literary form. As well as the oral stylistic features discernible in written form (such as riddles, verses, and rhetorical questions), the mythic content of the tales (which, I believe, is what enables us to remember then retell them generation to generation) has survived the transition from oral to literary forms. Versions and adaptations of the traditional tales, especially of the Grimms' tales, are endemic in mass media (film, advertising,

television) and inundate formal literary publications. This does not make the Grimms' the "true" stories. Traditional tales are revisions of the myths, themes, questions which continue to interest human beings. The Grimms' original intentions were philological—they collected and codified the tales for scholarly study and for the purpose of preservation. Their tales mark the shift from oral to literary tales, but the orality or myth of the tales has not been frozen into the printed versions. The tales persist, as Betsy Hearne (1989, pp. 5-6) explains

No telling is above modification. Wilhelm Grimm's tidying up tales to suit society had an impact as pervasive as Disney's. And the Grimms, needless to say, did not "fix" them, either in the sense of freezing them or in the sense of achieving a terminal ideal. It was the Grimms' versions that touched off rebellious new forms such as Anne Sexton's poetry and Tanith Lee's fictional reworkings. The strong story is greater than any of its tellings. The core elements remain because they are magnetic to each other, structurally, and to people, variably but almost universally.

Hearne touches on an important point: something greater than the Grimms marks their stories. This irrepressible element—its mythic power, its orality—forms the connection between "volk" imagination (Carter, 1992) and the Grimms' Märchen, between oral and written form. But the mythic element which those "moral sanitation" men (Zipes, 1979/80, p. 8), the Grimms', were unable to suppress is also the connection between their tales and Anne Sexton's Transformations, for instance.

Centuries of worldwide peregrination of the tales testify to their adaptability and interpretability. For the Cinderella story alone, analogues exist not only in English, Scottish, Irish and French, but also in the Baltic and Scandinavian languages, Icelandic, Faroese, Dutch, Basque, Spanish, Catalan, Italian, Romanian, Hungarian, Czech, Polish, Serbo-Croatian, Albanian, Greek, Turkish and Armenian (Grimm & Grimm, 1982, p. 11). The Grimms "carefully recorded points of similarity with

foreign traditions which are often far separated in time and place, for we feel we are right to attach importance to such resemblances, precisely because they are not easily explicable" (quoted in Grimm & Grimm, 1982, p. 10).

Some account for this phenomenon as the tales reflecting the major themes of the human Collective Unconscious. Or it may be that all versions, from Perrault and Grimm and later ones, are just that—versions—differing (and differently slanted) interpretations of an underlying story which is essentially meaningless, and which only exists theoretically. Every time somebody tries to tell the authentic story, it gets slanted again. Most versions allow for multiple responses, assuming that we have the interpretive strategies to look for them. The tales are, in theme and form if not in image, universal and ancient.

And if that is true of versions, is it not also true of interpretations of versions? While critics battle over issues such as sexual stereotyping inherent in fairy tales, Margaret Atwood, Liz Lochhead, Lisel Mueller, among many others, are composing their poems and stories rich in fairy tale lore. Composers continue to use these particularly rich and human stories to inform their operas, and artists in all disciplines continue to be inspired by the highly problematic but stimulating fairy tale. And perhaps most easily overlooked, but most importantly, children enjoy the tales.

At a seminar presentation for a racially and ethnically diverse audience, I asked an audience of approximately sixty people to join in a collective telling of Little Red Riding Hood<sup>3</sup>. Each contributed a sentence until the story was told. The rules were that anybody could interrupt the story, adding or subtracting details, or offering

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<sup>3</sup> This idea appears in Nodelman, 1982. Although our audiences differed, my conclusions were similar to his. He first mentions the flexibility and longevity of the tales.



an alternate version. We created a wonderfully enthusiastic rendition of the tale, and were amazed that we all knew the story. The Chinese and African members of the audience offered different details, but in all the versions the plot was basically the same. The basket of goodies, meeting the wolf on the path to Grandmother's house, and again in Grandmother's house, were consistent elements of the story. How many other stories or plots could we have collectively remembered? Our many different versions, as well as the insistence upon the validity and truth of our particular version, show the enormous flexibility of the tale. These two features—interpretability, as well as the significance of the tale's motifs and themes based on the aesthetic (the imaginative and emotional responses) they engender in us—are reasons certain tales are remembered, and why they are so meaningful to us. These aesthetic aspects, however, generally valued in literature, are not so readily valued when it comes to the Grimms' tales.

### Good Characters in a Good Story

Finally, I believe that the fairy tales answer the Aristotelian question of how we should live in the world, and what is the relationship between choice and circumstance. How should we deal with those situations in life which are beyond our control? How should we deal with them resourcefully, expectantly, allowing life to unfold rather than needing rigid control? The only thing we can truly account for in life is our reaction to life's circumstances, circumstances that are to a large extent outside our control. While our reactions are culturally, economically and politically determined, there is often greater opportunity to gain control of our responses to the particular circumstances than to manipulate the circumstances themselves. (Obviously

I am addressing the western world where such contemplation is possible.)

The reconciliatory thrust of the fairy tale, and of literature generally, helps to create community. The reader/listener brings the story to life and the story brings readers together, reconciling humans with the natural world and with each other. It reconciles as life cannot. The whole thrust of the fairy tale is that of metaphor—the binding of known and unknown, signifier and signified. It binds our best image of ourselves with the lived self; it binds others' perceptions of us to ourselves. We need to see our lives objectified, detached from the swarm of memories and sensations. We need to be made into characters, good characters in a good story, as Martha Nussbaum (1990, pp. 3-4) says. The literary language and form of the fairy tale presents us with views which

emphasize the world's surprising variety, its complexity and mysteriousness, its flawed and imperfect beauty. . . in a language and in forms themselves more complex, more allusive, more attentive to particulars. . . in a form that itself implies that life contains significant surprises, that our task, as agents, is to live as good characters in a good story do, caring about what happens, resourcefully confronting each new thing.

Nussbaum claims that literature's purposes are located in its cohered language and forms or, as Langer says, its experiential nature. I believe English curricula should be based on such an appreciation of literature's complexity.

If fairy tales speak to the complexity of experience in ways comprehensible to children, it follows that they be part of the curriculum. Surely their multiplicity of views, and subverting potential to undermine the ideological assertions of a work, override the criticisms about them? Unfortunately, many tales do not get past the censoring bodies. Part of the problem is poor scholarship. A common fault is the Procrustean urgency of interpretive "beds" to read narrowly and therefore miss a

work's vision and intention. When critics extract meaning from a story without regard for either the work as a whole or for the subverting potential of different aspects of the story, their criticisms are incomplete so their assessments should be discounted. Unfortunately, ill-founded, out-of-context criticisms abound.

### Censorship

The translations of the traditional Grimms' tales may never get past the censoring bodies and into the classroom. One example of the grounds for censorship is articulated by Robert Moore (1975, pp. 1-3) who says that "fairy tales. . . contain many values and assumptions which reinforce unhealthy and destructive images for the reader." He recommends that "concerned parents and educators should work to liberate homes and schools from such potentially destructive materials and to provide children with more progressive and equally enjoyable fare." Similar recommendations were made by Ontario teachers (Batcher, Brackstone et al., 1987) who sought to ban the fairy tales from their classrooms. If such recommendations are implemented, students' acquaintance with fairy tales will be limited to their own extra-curricular reading, or to the renderings of fairy tale motifs which saturate the popular media. Moore's claims have currency in our society, as was recently demonstrated by the activists who claimed the curriculum series for the language arts program called Impressions (edited by David Booth) contained occult material in its images of the supernatural (witches, for example), and promoted belief in magic and the occult. Snow White was banned in Jacksonville, Florida, for children in

kindergarten through grade two on grounds of violence<sup>4</sup>.

Censorship in some cases may be appropriate. The tales, after all, do contain troublesome content. There are punishments of every gruesome sort: parents abandon their children, fathers make lustful gestures toward their daughters, and females stay home, pining at their windows or sweeping the hearth, while young men seek their fortune and adventure far from home. The offensive elements should be removed from the tales, or the old tales substituted with new tellings. Or the tales should be quietly ignored.

Feminist writers have also implied their criticism through rewriting parts of the tales to make them more palatable to feminist viewpoints (Phelps, 1981), as well as writing entirely new tales (Mellor & Raleigh, 1984). Contemporary critics, speaking from a predominantly feminist perspective, claim that fairy tales provide an inaccurate portrayal of the female, thus of the relationships possible between the genders. These critics, through close reading and socio-historical and linguistic approaches, and through their focus on the perception and portrayal of females within the tales, have contributed to the dismantling of the romantic notions surrounding the fairy tales. As Aitken (1987) in Masques of Morality explains, feminist interest in literature lies partly in literature's ability to delineate power structures. It permits some objectivity on our experiences which normally are tangled and complex. Literature's "distance" makes possible discussion of the systems and attitudes which help and hinder our progress toward a more humane society. Fictional females bound within the literature of patriarchal culture enable us to perceive the influences of

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<sup>4</sup> Restriction on fairy tale under fire, The Globe and Mail, April 14, 1993.

socialization, politics and aesthetics which shape our consciousness of who we are—and, more often—of who we are not. Asserting that the Grimms' fairy tales reinforce authoritarian socialization processes, especially through their emphasis on passivity, industry, and self-sacrifice for girls and activity, competition, and accumulation of wealth for boys, feminists say that the tales impart "values and norms to children which may actually hinder their growth, rather than help them to come to terms with their existential condition and mature autonomously" (Zipes, 1979/80, p. 15).

### Fairy Tales as a Basis for the Study of Literature

The polar extreme of the above argument is the concern voiced by critics such as Yolen, Aitken, and Frye who claim that by withholding myths, legends and fairy tales, our curriculum is failing to offer children a base of imaginative literature essential to their literary development (Yolen, 1981a, p. 14). Frye (1989, p. 46) says that mythic and poetic literature "should be taught early and so thoroughly that it sinks straight to the bottom of the mind, where everything that comes along later can settle on it." Yolen (1981a, pp. 15, 19) makes a similar claim saying that a grounding and understanding of the old lore and wisdom "is a basic developmental need." Children's need for myth and art to generalize and interpret their experience, Bettelheim and Yolen say, is compounded at particular times in their lives when the mythic elements of stories can be of greatest influence.

While our critical awareness is sharpened by the dissenting voices, and while the continuum of values associated with the tales runs from their essentialist qualities to parodies and ridicule of those claimed inherent values, the educational usefulness of the fairy tales is a complicated issue. Are fairy tales the "still lifes" of literature, and

thus essential to literary development? Or do the tales present untrue pictures? While we should not allow harmful texts into the classroom, how do we determine such harm? Sometimes this is easy to do, as with hate literature which we dismiss outright. But in many other instances, subtle (or not so subtle) censorship occurs without any conscious articulation of the censoring process, resulting in good literature being suppressed for poor reasons.

Part of the answer to determining the educational usefulness of fairy tales lies in understanding that they give expression to values without simply being propaganda for them. They incorporate social concerns, but even stories rigidly written from a particular theory or ideology can promote more than just one view, and subvert even the writer's conscious intention. A story or poem whose meaning can be paraphrased is not successful because the nature of literary or metaphoric language is such that the arrangement of the words, and the intention of the author to explore experience defies simple prosaic restatement. This is captured in the question I was taught to ask of a poem: not **what** the poem means, but **how** it means.

We need, as Frye instructs, to understand the difference between writers' ideologies and their myths. We need better ways of dealing with "unacceptable" contents, and to be aware that our "liberated" versions are not necessarily pinnacles of cultural awareness. All children's stories carry ideological baggage, make implications about the intended child-audience, about childhood, and about how children learn. We need to examine stories within their historical perspective, including our own, in order to appreciate how all stories are products of time and place. For example, what aspects of Hansel and Gretel are missed when the importance of the story is its legalities? Is there a better educational purpose for the

story of Snow White than writing a “Lazy Letter?” Conversely, can we defend the use of such an activity? Most approaches to a story can be in some measure valid, but stories which reflect currently acceptable attitudes should not be automatically embraced, to the exclusion of traditional tales.

This brings an important dimension of the problem of the fairy tales into view, introduced in the discussion of Langer’s, and to a lesser extent Abbs’, concepts of the form and function of literary language. Both writers say the study of English should be part of the school’s artistic vision. The curriculum, however, does not align literature studies with the expressive arts such as music and dance. Rather, literature is placed within the Humanities where together with social studies it is associated with the social sciences. Reading literature as an assertion of facts and opinions explains why literature is aligned with the core subjects of mathematics and science rather than the expressive arts. Langer (1953, p. 208) says that the “reason why literature is a standard academic pursuit lies in the very fact that one can treat it as something else than art.” These are subtle distinctions about literature which are easily and steadfastly overlooked. You may remember your own school experiences of poetry, in which analysis consisted of figuring out what the poet was trying to say. Poor befuddled poets who cannot speak clearly! I believe that using literature as mainly something other “than art”, and stressing the utilitarian uses of language, characterizes education’s, as well as society’s, long-standing uneasiness with the aesthetic elements of literature, namely, its imaginative and emotional components.

#### A Brief Account of the Fear of Fantasy

Fantasy, and its association with metaphor, poetry, and imagination, has not

been a valued player in mainstream educational traditions. In ancient times oral cultures produced such epics as Beowulf, Gilgamesh, and The Odyssey, which are distinguished by the ability to associate freely, in terms of depth as well as range of association. This ability to leap from the conscious to the unconscious is the element which (still) provides the psychic energy in literature. Fantasy declined as a genre when rational discourse (Socrates' de-mythologized intelligence) gained favour over "irrational" feelings. It was relegated to an underground status (literally) in the servants' quarters or within literature. Nor has Christianity, with its spiritual patriarchy, been a friend of the subconscious. St. Paul (like Plato) admonishes us to veer from the darkness (rather than enter it) toward the light of reason. Implied in St. Paul's warnings against the dangers of the flesh is a mistrust of human impulse and desire. Fantasy was reintroduced into the public sphere in Freud's work. Or perhaps more accurately, Freud prepared the groundwork for fantasy's re-emergence in the public sphere. His theory of the importance of the earliest human relationships, together with Piaget's developmental psychology, distinguishes the early and mid-part of this century as one of increasing attention to the individual—most notable in the growth of child study. Fantasy came a step closer to being an educational concern with the work of Bruno Bettelheim (1989), who discusses its psychological and therapeutic importance in children's lives.

Rationalist intelligence has proven useful in creating a technological society, but within education, the careful channelling of literature's psychic energy into technically sophisticated (but emotionally and imaginatively innocuous activities) deprives students of rich experiences and hinders the development of their imaginative lives. It is easy to understand that fairy tales, with their incessant leaping from this to



an other-worldly realm, causes problems for an educational system.

Feelings, fantasy and imagination are risky elements of human experience, subject to mistrust and scepticism, as Plato, Rousseau and others make clear. Perhaps insecurity about our often conflicting and chaotic emotional lives has contributed to society's gravitation toward scientific verifiability. Science may not give us all the facts, but it gives us some facts, some certainty. Our current awareness of the limitations of scientific discourse in addressing the complexity of our experience has created a breathing space in which fantasy and even emotions might yet be taken seriously as important educational tools. In Chapter Eight I discuss Vivian Gussin Paley, an educator who uses fantasy, including the fantasy and mythical aspects of fairy tales, in her teaching. She provides evidence that fantasy is an important dimension of learning.

What is perhaps more surprising than the academy's resistance to fantasy, however, is feminism's resistance to it. My interest in feminism and my preoccupation with it in this thesis is because of its influence in my personal, professional and writerly life. I am indebted to the political goals of feminism, such as having women's voices heard and their contributions to society in private and public spheres acknowledged. I am also indebted to feminist literary studies for its role in opening my critical eyes to my prejudices and its role in creating a more egalitarian approach to the literary canon and methods of analysis. I believe that feminist critique has helped us to see the inadequacies and imbalance of many hitherto unchallenged features—such as literature's patriarchal plots (Aitken, 1987). This thesis is a beginning framework for the reconciliation of feminist and literary aims, which at present are at cross purposes. A common goal might be that children's

reading and writing activities increasingly encourage them to discover and articulate their own story/voice<sup>5</sup>. Reduced to an overly-simplified example, the educational question of how to achieve this goal would be answered by the feminist teacher providing her class with a feminist retelling of the Grimms' tale Little Red Riding Hood. The traditional tale, however, would be banned in her classroom for reasons of inaccurate portrayal of the female character as a passive and compliant little girl. I welcome the tale in my classroom, and use its powerful stylistic and thematic features and form to help children gain the pleasures of the fairy tales. In this thesis, I show that the literature itself suggests the problematic nature of those aspects which the feminists find unacceptable. Do we achieve literacy by being provided with correct role models, or through engaging in fantasy and other literary aspects of the fairy tales?

I believe we need to distinguish between feminist literary theory and feminist politics. I do not think they have been clearly distinguished, and that literature, and its study, have suffered as a result. This is not so much a matter of censoring the censors as it is determining how and when theories and critical approach are to be used in the classroom. I resist censoring writers, and writing stories for reasons other than artistic consideration. As well, I believe neither the feminist movement nor

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<sup>5</sup> My notions of "voice" or of "telling one's own story" include both writing and reading activities, sometimes interchangeably. The terms do not mean formalizing a method of teaching students to re-tell the fairy tales. My interest lies in readers' use of the emotional and imaginative elements in the tales to further their awareness about literature and about themselves. Reading, reflection, discussion and writing are all aspects of this process. Central to my notion is the pleasure of literature. Their aesthetic features create the enjoyment and the tension which makes us want to reflect upon them. Enjoyment is not arrested in the pursuit of analysis. The products of reflection— criticism, talk, new stories—are various.

Conceptualizing the child as reader/listener and as story-teller is particularly apt to younger children. The reciprocity between the child and the art form means they quickly internalize the symbolic and expressive features and recast them in their own symbolic forms. They dramatize the t.v. character even as they watch. The doll corner at school is the site of many re-enactments of family constellations. I do not aim to distinguish between the roles of reading and writing (they are obviously different) but, rather, to understand how aesthetic text facilitates the responses of audience and writers alike.

literature has been well served by feminism's resistance to fantasy. Aspects of the feminist critique seems to be yet another instance of cultural embarrassment in the company of fantasy, metaphorical energies and mythic forces. Along with deconstruction theory, feminist criticism is a representative of larger conditions which obscure the transmission of aesthetic values in the classroom.

Literacy is, in part, the ability to read television, mass culture, and many other forces operating in society. We can learn how to read, however, by reading books. We can learn how to think about gender roles by thinking about the gender roles we encounter in our literature. The reason we read a story to learn about possible gender constellations rather than a sociology text, however, is because literature's aesthetic features enable us to experience the emotions and feelings of our subject, and to think about our subject in ways that a sociology text normally does not. These emotional and imaginative aspects are central to the experience of literature.

I provide a framework for understanding and appreciating the fairy tales which does not perpetuate the problems which feminism identifies. Rather, I show that fairy tales offer liberating potentials for children, perhaps especially girls. Rather than identifying contents as good or bad, my interest is to understand how literature expresses its values without simply being promotional devices for them. I believe children need to be helped to read with pleasure and ever-increasing discernment. The pleasures of literature include: emotional involvement, the recognition of patterns of emotional involvement and detachment, patterns of plot (suspense and resolution), recognition of literary conventions which influence us in emotional, cognitive and moral ways (and which we can choose to accept or reject), the pleasure of identifying with fictional characters, thereby recognizing and understanding

ourselves and others better, the pleasure of learning to respond more deeply to literature, and importantly from a feminist perspective, the pleasure of manipulating aspects of the inherited tradition to create and tell our own stories. I believe we must provide the conditions for empowering children rather than sheltering them. The classroom is the proper place for close readings of texts, and aesthetic enjoyment. My ultimate hope for children is that they enjoy reading, that they be perceptive and discerning readers, that they become increasingly articulate in telling their own stories.

### The Aesthetics of Fairy Tales

The aesthetic use of literature is discussed throughout this thesis, and at length in Chapter Three. It is not, however, my intention to provide a comprehensive definition or theory of art. My use of aesthetic stresses the experiential nature of literature and the interconnections between the (physical) impulses and (culturally expressive) symbols, stressing the importance of our subjective (inner) experience in education, and the epistemological validity of both feelings and imagination. This creative relationship between body and the mind, feelings and intellect, subjective experience and cultural symbolism available to an individual have been largely ignored within education. Abbs (1982) articulates the need to view English as a subject which has connections with the expressive arts (e.g. dance and film). My purpose is not to echo Abbs' justification of the place of English within the curriculum, but to make connections between the process of art-making and students' experience of literature:

The art-maker elaborates, refines and deepens the spontaneous

movement of psyche towards imagery and reflection. His aim is to convert the hidden elusive art of his own being into the visible and enduring art of culture. He gives subjectivity an objective representation so that he can come to know his own experience. The art-maker, always working within his own historic culture and with the tools and traditions made available by that culture, is thus an agent in the promotion of consciousness, both his own and that of his audience who recognize in his work the hidden forms of human experience taken to fulfillment (p. 35).

While Abbs (1982) speaks of the artist's creative relationship with his culture, his vision can be extended to the artistic components of reading and writing in the classroom. Certainly reader-response pedagogy is premised on the readers' emotional and imaginative response to the literature they read, but it seems buried under a barrage of language theories currently popular within schools and their affiliated institutions at the local, provincial and national levels.

The Grimms' fairy tales are aesthetic stories in that they create emotional and imaginative responses in readers. These responses, which are in part pleasurable, do not just ameliorate the task of learning to read, but are central to it. The enjoyment we experience in reading leads us to reflect upon those feelings and the ways in which they were created. We reflect upon, and try to recapture the patterns which our bodies spontaneously provide. The educational significance lies in the conversion of impulse into meaning, into consciousness and, ultimately, into knowledge of common subjective experiences.

I believe that the ideological assertions of a work of literature cannot be isolated from its artistic context. Literature's amenability to the social sciences, and its usual curriculum placement beside social studies to comprise the Humanities does not mean literature belongs primarily in the social sciences. Literature is an expressive art. Metaphoric discourse is a particular language use with particular

intentions, with imaginatively embedded themes. Understanding this language use in its complexity includes revealing its constructedness—but using its aesthetic dimension as the route to such knowledge.

It is not a matter of critical acuity versus literary naiveté. Feminist, deconstructionist and reader-response approaches want to engender feeling, thinking readers. All acknowledge the cultural embeddedness of all human endeavour. The difference lies in the validity of aesthetic material. Deconstructionists and some feminist literary theorists mistrust aesthetic response, saying emotional involvement thwarts accurate perception and clarity. Reader-response theory advocates teaching students to trust and use aesthetic response to deepen their understanding of literary language and convention.

Using the fairy tales in a curriculum that values the aesthetic use of language means risking being emotionally and imaginatively involved with the tales. Fantasy as an educational consideration is a problematic concept, and seems to always have been so. Plato, for instance, was aware of the powerful effects of poetry. Chapter Two looks at fantasy in terms of its ability to provide realistic conceptions of the world. Plato argues for literary characters whose embodiment of the “good” make them virtuous examples for citizens, who will then become good. They will gain a realistic conception of themselves and their place in the world. Using the diction of psychotherapy, Bettelheim argues that psychic health is achieved when the reader engages in (rather than avoids) the struggle between virtuous and villainous—or good and bad—literary characters.

## CHAPTER THREE

### HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES: PLATO, ROUSSEAU AND BETTELHEIM

#### ON THE AUTHORITY OF POETIC LANGUAGE

Before examining how current theories and critical approaches embrace or avoid the fantasy elements of the fairy tales, I give a brief survey of some historical perspectives of fantasy. I do this through examining the work of three major writer-educators. Plato recommends censoring the folk-tales told to children because he claims as mere fictions they encourage a false image of reality. Bettelheim argues for the psycho-therapeutic value of precisely the elements Plato wishes to censor. Rousseau, the third writer, anticipates literary theory through the questions he raises about the nature of literature. The educational conclusions of this dispute are important to my thesis.

#### Poetic Misrepresentation of the Gods

Plato claims that fantasy misrepresents by encouraging a false sense of reality. It does this in two ways. First, the arts are at a “third remove from reality”, which make them unreliable sources of truth. My work table was made by a carpenter who knows the form of tables, and its construction is dependent upon the accuracy and implementation of that knowledge. The poet, however, can suggest “table” without that same obligation of physical verifiability, or without intimate knowledge of its physical composition. Second, the arts, or more precisely, the poets, misrepresent the gods by exploiting their polysemous nature, rather than representing only their virtuous characteristics. Citizens will justify and

excuse their own bad behaviour, says Plato, if the gods, as exemplars of truth, are shown to be corrupt. People need heroic deeds to admire, emulate or aspire to. Underlying the accusations against the poets and poetry is Plato's mistrust of fantasy. Because fairy tales are fantasy constructions, Plato's complaints obtain here.

Plato is aware of the effects of language (Republic, p. 90—all quotes are from Cornford's translation of The Republic of Plato, 1978) and poetry's appeal to the "lower faculties" of the soul, namely, the emotions. Poetic language is both powerful and dangerous. "Rhythm and harmony sink deep into the recesses of the soul and take the strongest hold there, bringing that grace of body and mind which is only to be found in one who is brought up in the right way." Plato's "right way" is a carefully conceived educational program set within a developmental scheme. Young children, centred as they are in the world of appearances and the appetites, he claims, need guidance so that their senses respond appropriately to harmony and order. Plato realizes the importance of early education and first impressions, and says a child cannot "distinguish the allegorical sense from the literal. . . hence. . . the importance of seeing that the first stories he hears shall be designed to produce the best possible effect on his character" (Republic, p. 70). Youth, he says, "is the time when the character is being molded and easily takes any impress one may wish to stamp upon it" (Republic, p. 68). This early education program is followed by military training for the soldiers and more sophisticated education for the guardians. It is Plato's dissatisfaction with the education poets offer which concerns me here. Plato wants strict control over the education of the guardian class. Any educational (re)source which shows itself to be a contender in the educational arena is subject to critical examination and possible expulsion. Poetry is such a contender.



Plato challenges the validity of the poet's assertions. According to him, the poet's work is a "third remove from reality, nothing more than semblances, easy to produce with no knowledge of truth" (Republic, p. 329). C. Rowe (1984, p. 149) explicates the dilemma:

They (the poets) portray life without having real knowledge of it: like painters, they deal in appearances, not with how things really are—which Plato identifies with how things would ideally be. They are, in fact, at two removes from the truth. The manufacturer of anything (beds say, or flutes) works either on the basis of knowledge acquired by looking to the form of the thing, or on the basis of correct belief deriving from the knowledge of the user. There is no such control over the product of the artist—the painter or the poet. What he will represent or imitate is what appears beautiful (or 'fine') to the 'ignorant many'; not what is beautiful, or beauty itself.

Within the confines of his own logical framework Plato is of course correct. His investment in words which lead to truth and a good society is considerable, and he is unable to rationalize the poetic mode as a kind of truth. Compared to the dialectic's linear access to truth, poetry is obscure and meandering, a shadowy thing. Without the truth, indeed, without an inherent obligation to represent reality, what can the arts provide? Plato knows what happens in the theatre where grown men lose self control and "weep like women." He knows well the orator's hypnotic ability to lull or sway a crowd into uncritical acceptance—not of carefully arrived at formulation of the truth—but anything just so it pleases the rhetor! There is no place for an individual stance in a mob. And in the theatre even "the noblest part of us, insufficiently schooled by reason or habit, has relaxed its watch over these querulous feelings" (Republic, p. 338). Furthermore, as Christianity would and has also told us, poetic representation "waters the growth of passions which should be allowed to wither away and sets them up in control, although the goodness and happiness of our

lives depend on their being held in subjection” (Republic, p. 339).

A second point in Plato’s call for censorship is the poet’s misrepresentation of the gods. In classical mythology nature comprises and is comprised of both creative and destructive forces. In the Demeter and Persephone myths, Demeter is both nurturer and ravisher of earth—capable of giving and taking life. She incorporates both good and bad. Plato argues that striving for the good means silencing the bad within ourselves and within our educational literature. Only if we concentrate on the good will we be good. One of education’s goals—coherence with reality—is achieved through acquainting oneself with all that is virtuous. The gods serve as exemplars. So Homer’s portrayal of the gods as lying and thieving is unacceptable. The gods must be paradigms of virtue. Plato berates Homer for his foolishness in describing Zeus as the “dispenser of both good and ill”. Such unworthy descriptions will allow the young men to adopt such contradictory behaviour, citing the gods as their example, says Plato. This is contrary to the “principle we have deduced” regarding the forms of things and the good (Republic, p. 69). Plato stresses the subordination of the poetic mode to the “principle”. Giving the example of Cronos, who mutilated his father, Plato says: “We shall not tell a child that, if he commits the foulest crimes or goes to any length in punishing his father’s misdeeds, he will be doing nothing out of the way, but only what the first and greatest of the gods have done before him” (Republic, p. 70). This seems to be the basis for Plato’s accusation that the worst of Hesiod’s and Homer’s faults were the misrepresentation of the nature of gods and heroes (Republic, p. 69).

## The Educational Uses of Poetry

An assumption underlying Plato's mistrust of poetry is that discursive or philosophical language—the language which Plato asserts leads to the truth—by laying words out in linear order thereby arriving at the centre, or truth, of what is being said. Poetic language uses metaphor and does not proceed linearly. It speaks from within—describing sensory experience and awareness as it appears to human beings. I discuss this in greater detail below, especially Northrop Frye's account of the differences between descriptive, philosophical and metaphoric languages. Plato (p. 331) bases his refusal to rationalize “chimeras” on the fact that

the poet, knowing nothing more than how to represent appearances, can paint in words his picture of any craftsman so as to impress an audience which is equally ignorant and judges only by the form of expression; the inherent charm of metre, rhythm, and musical setting is about enough to make them think he has discoursed admirably about generalship or shoemaking or any other technical subject.

Poetry for Plato was not a contender for logical, rationed truth. As he said, “strip what the poet has to say of its poetical colouring, and I believe you must have seen what it comes to in plain prose” (Republic, p. 331).

For Plato, the poetic genre is an invalid one for grasping truth, and so, grouping it with fantasy, he excluded it from being a valid way of explaining the phenomena of nature, mind and spirit, leaving that to rational inquiry. Plato values stories as an efficient means of conveying values, as moral educators. Young children, he says, are tender, and their minds are flexible. The story genre, with its affective imagery and compelling plot (the pleasure of reading for what happens next) is an effective way of impressing upon children images of good behaviour. But trying to govern the fantasy world of stories through normative standardizations which apply

to the “real” world defeats the purpose(s) of stories. Stories speak to (and about) our subjective experience—our emotional and imaginative lives. As Bettelheim points out, they provide the opportunity to project inner conflicts. Because story plots require tension created by the opposition of opposing forces, within Plato’s formula stories should have no rhetorical dimension at all—could not exist. Without a protagonist to prod, coax, love or bully the antagonist into growth, there is little motivation for the antagonist. In real life a pleasant and undisturbed existence may be desirable. In literature it is deadly.

However, if poetic language is perceived as one (alongside the scientific and philosophic) of the language modes by which we are able to know truth in its more holistic and diversified sense, then we can begin to examine what sort of knowledge literature embodies. While the philosophic and scientific modes address the nature of reality, the poetic one explores human experience of the body, feelings and thoughts. Plato educates for the “divine and noble essence”. By contrast, Bettelheim says that the “divine and the noble” is best educated through externalizing people’s lesser and base capacities. The irrational, emotive and destructive capacities of people need to be expressed through poetry, need to be voiced.

Like the gods of Greek mythology show, people are capable of nurturance and destruction, good and bad. And so I argue that Plato created an unhelpful emphasis when he concentrated on people’s rational nature to the neglect of the so-called irrational, people’s divine capacity to the neglect of their monstrous capacities. . . . Accepting the existence of polarities of our nature does not mean we condone or encourage all behaviour, or that we give inappropriate expression to our monstrous capacities. Indeed, one of the central dilemmas of life is the struggle to distinguish

between our impulses and exert control over our actions. Take responsibility for them.

What does it mean for Plato, for Bettelheim, to be human in the area of emotional response? Their contrasting views is characterized in their disparate responses to theatre. Plato offers a lively telling. "When we listen to some hero in Homer or on the tragic stage moaning over his sorrows in a long tirade, or to a chorus beating their breasts as they chant a lament, you know how the best of us enjoy giving ourselves up to follow the performance with eager sympathy." Upon reflection, however, Plato condemns "the behaviour we admired in the theatre" (Republic, pp. 337-338) as womanish, indecent. He cannot understand why he should react with such emotion when to life's real disaster he responds stoically. He says "nothing human is a matter for great concern" so why let a theatrical illusion cause anybody to "start behaving like a child who goes on shrieking after a fall and hugging the wounded part. . . ." (Republic, p. 336).

Rather than chastising themselves, Bettelheim's (1989, p. 9) viewers of the play Oedipus wonder at their deep feelings and try to trace their emotions through the mythic events and what the events meant to them:

With this, certain inner tensions which are the consequence of events long past may be relieved; previously unconscious material can then enter one's awareness and become accessible for conscious working through. This can happen if the observer is deeply moved emotionally by the myth.

The different attitudes of Plato and Bettelheim are obvious. Plato, while acknowledging the reality of both drama's effect and its consequence, says simulating emotions will make people become lesser rather than better human beings.

Bettelheim welcomes the deep feelings and sees the vicarious experience as an

opportunity to elicit/release repressed material.

Myths, however, Bettelheim warns, are not suitable for children. What children need is subtlety, a chance to project their feelings onto characters and situations while maintaining the distance they need to feel secure. But they cannot engage in difficult psychological struggles without certainty of a positive outcome. This is something pessimistic myth with its tragic conclusions cannot provide—and which the optimistic happy-ever-after conclusions of fairy tales can provide.

Admitting the dark underside of human behaviour into the educational discussion (and the classroom) is difficult. But I believe we have adjudicatory responsibility at all levels of action and awareness, including the thorny issue of emotions and imagination where both empirical and educational arguments come fully into play.

### The Psychological Accuracy of the Tales

Bruno Bettelheim's claims about the importance of fairy tales is outlined in his seminal book The Uses of Enchantment (1989). He asserts the psychological accuracy of the fairy tales' articulation of the developing psychic life of the child. He says the tales are a realistic portrayal, symbolically expressed, of such things as the basic affective tensions which constitute human experience—such as security versus fear, acceptance versus rejection, happiness versus despair. These organizing categories enable children to experience the challenges—the threats and terrors—of life which would be psychologically overwhelming were they to be presented to them in their unadulterated forms. Children can thus experience reality vicariously, says Bettelheim, conditioning and preparing their emotional capacities to accommodate the

full weight of manifested reality which is sure to arrive with all its crushing gravity later on. The models are not mere fantasies, says Bettelheim, but represent, through their fantastic forms, the unknowns of real life in epiphanies that can be apprehended by children in terms of the present resources of their immature emotional lives. They are a poetic formulation of adventure, of hopes and fears, of dangerous, gigantic, grown-up characters in idealized, if not always ideal, forms, in which good and evil are presented in their essential qualities, and not mixed unclearly with the mitigating circumstances and shadows of adult experience.

Consistent with his role as teacher and therapist of severely emotionally disturbed children, Bettelheim regards children's development as a series of problems rather than as the more-or-less natural acquisition of abilities. One success allows the next developmental problem into view. The need to make sense of one's experience is not confined to neurotic disturbance, but is an essential part of our adaptation as a species. While Bettelheim's claim that the fairy tales correct ego disturbances is at the least questionable, a less contentious claim is that within Bettelheim's concept, fairy tales provide a rich source for the imaginative thought needed for children's intellectual, emotional and imaginative growth.

Although Bettelheim says the effect of the tales is only possible because they are artistically crafted tales, he doesn't make any distinction between the literary features of fairy tales and the psycho-therapeutic uses to which he puts them<sup>1</sup>. Because of their psychological strengths, Bettelheim often appeals to the social uses of literature in making his psycho-therapeutic claims. But the description becomes the

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<sup>1</sup> Enchantment, p. 36.

prescription; what Bettelheim says fairy tales are (as literature) becomes what they should be (as the psychological processes which psychotherapy addresses). For example, he says “since polarization dominates the child’s mind, it also dominates the fairy tales”<sup>2</sup> (Enchantment, p. 9). Although psycho-therapeutic use can be made of the fairy tales, it is well to remember that they are stories. Stories have a historical existence along a story-telling continuum, for instance. They use literary techniques such as image and contrapuntal rhythm. Psycho-therapy and literature may have concerns in common, but it is well to remember that the tales are first and foremost literature.

### The Reality of Fairy Tales

Bettelheim (Enchantment, p. 73) says that the fairy tales may be “unreal” in the sense that fairy land with its supernatural helpers does not exist, but, he says, they are not “untrue.”

The child intuitively comprehends that although these stories are **unreal**, they are not **untrue**; that while what these stories tell about does not happen in fact, it must happen as inner experience and personal development; that fairy tales depict in imaginary and symbolic form the essential steps in growing up and achieving an independent existence.

Bettelheim makes a number of points. Fairy tales do not describe everyday reality; rather, their concern is to express a sense of what it means to live within a particular setting or society. The power of the tales, says Bettelheim, is that they address the subjective life of emotion and feeling not only in the ways all (western? middle

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<sup>2</sup> Another example of this occurs when Bettelheim says “the child is unaware of his inner processes, which is why these are externalized in the fairy tale and symbolically represented by actions standing for inner and outer struggles” (Enchantment, p. 149, 150). Also see page 36.



class?) children experience it, but from a child's point of view<sup>3</sup>. Unlike the adult who uses abstract, rational thought, the child's favoured method of making sense of the world is through fantasy<sup>4</sup> (Enchantment, p. 45).

Bettelheim says that fairy tale conventions conform to children's thought processes, thereby enhancing their sense of their reality. For example, in fairy tales evil is as omnipresent as virtue, and it is usually embodied in a character whose actions temporarily thwart the good (character) until, with patience, good luck and cheer, and usually with magical assistance, the hero is rewarded and the evil-doer punished. Bettelheim cautions that "ambiguities must wait until a relatively firm personality has been established on the basis of positive identification" (Enchantment, p. 9). Fairy tales subtly illustrate and personify inner conflicts and dramas, and suggest "how these conflicts may be solved, and what the next steps in the development toward a higher humanity might be" (Enchantment, p. 260). Even children's worst anxieties, frustrations, fears and doubts can be externalized, although not always consciously, through their projection of them onto the cast and setting of fairy tales. The distancing enables the children to see the story as something external to themselves, helping them to gain mastery over it (Enchantment, p. 55). The fairy tale also reassures children about current conflicts, it gives hope for the future and guarantees a happy ending. This is psychologically important because in order to carry on with difficult tasks, people need to be reassured that their struggle is

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<sup>3</sup> The fairytales are relevant in any culture, says Bettelheim. This means the tales, for him, are extra-historical and transcultural.

<sup>4</sup> Paley (The Boy Who Would be a Helicopter, 1990, p. 7) claims that fantasy is the medium best understood by children, and develops cognitive growth. Egan also addresses the child's attraction to fantasy in Primary Understanding, 1988.

worthwhile, that at the end of the day they will either understand what their difficulties have meant, or they will be rewarded in some way. In short, they need to feel heroic—like a hero<sup>5</sup>. The sense of ourselves as being at the centre of a drama keeps us alive through tragedy and privation.

The heroes in fairy tales act much as they do in all comic and romantic literature. Their qualities convince the readers of the good which the hero represents. Readers want to emulate heroic behaviour not because they are convinced of the morality of the story, but because they want to be like the hero. More exactly, they want to be the hero. Plato could have used the story structure and conventions to his purposes, convincing his students of the good not through didactic cautionary tales, but through heroification.

Conversely, Bettelheim's readings within the conceptual frame of id, ego, and superego, overstates the therapeutic role of stories, and does not adequately value the story in terms of its literary conventions. He comes to the same single-minded interpretation for every story. It is not apparent that stories always provide appropriate therapy to whatever ails a child. But Bettelheim's awareness of the potential of stories to help children clarify their understanding and deal with their feelings is appropriate. Stories, and not only fairy tales, are important at different times in our lives and in different (cultural) ways.

The Education Question: Harmony through Reason or Fantasy?

What then, must our response to the fairy tales be? Do the reassurances they

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<sup>5</sup> The practice of calling heroes of both genders heroes is an established practice among literary critics, and one I embrace for simplicity's sake.

offer contribute to a sense of well-being, and thus realistic perception? Or does emulation of “the good” achieve the conditions for right living and accurate perception? Plato’s definition of “good” implies a perfection and harmony. Gods must be described as perfect dispensers of goodness—not compositions of both good and evil (p. 71), not as beings who transform into different creatures, who exhibit strong emotions, terrifying language or violent sounds. These excessive traits encourage similar responses in children, he says. The ideal man controls himself by means of mental and moral discipline, and uses his reason to provide order and harmony to his emotions and feelings. Stories told to children should never describe fear or distress, as Homer does when he tells of Achilles’ emotional unsettledness. If our sense of reality is created through apprehension concerning the “good”, and if the achievement of the “good” is through adherence to its forms and manifestations, then with Plato we have to banish from our kingdoms all that is other than divine—all that contains base emotions or feelings. In short, all that we can know.

If, however, we agree with Bettelheim that rationality is achieved through emotional well-being, and if achieving emotional health means expressing negative as well as positive characteristics, and furthermore, if fairy tales do what Bettelheim says they do to create coherent, integrated people, then they should be used in the schools. Bettelheim also wants order and harmony, but sees the journey differently from Plato. Our initial experiences, Bettelheim says, are chaotic, and children seek organizing forms to bind and integrate their experience. We negotiate a strange city first by its gross landmarks such as major streets or tall buildings, and gradually make finer and finer distinctions, until we are so at home that we begin to recognize even the subtle character traits of our new neighbours. Similarly, we think about learning as a

gradual mediation, first among/between extreme opposites, then between subtler categories. “The manner in which the child can bring some order into his world view is by dividing everything into opposites” (Enchantment, p. 74). Oppositions are built into stories—few plots are without conflicts of one kind or another. Onto these projected settings readers can learn both the process of resolution, and the kinds of resolutions which are available to them. This is illustrated in Chapter Seven in The Golden Bird, where the hero moves through the story, gaining insight from the conversational story form, and from the points of view which certain characters embody. In stories as in life, harmony is built on the gradual resolution of tensions, and we go on our whole lives (re)defining the world and ourselves by (re)solving new oppositions and finding new (re)mediations.

It is interesting that Plato emphasizes order as a basic condition for human development. His idea of “the good”, however, is static and external to us. For Plato the “good” is that transcendent “other” knowable through the grasp of reality provided by rational discourse and right living. It is achieved by applying a moral form to reality, rather than through a personal struggle with contradictions within that reality. Bettelheim would say that our best impulses reside within us alongside our darkest impulses. Like Demeter, we are capable of both creating and destroying. It is only when we recognize our destructive impulses or cast them into relief via the fairy tales, that we can manage our primal nature, and move on to achieve greater rationality and perspective. Bettelheim shows great trust in the inner psychic processes, in human beings’ resilience and ability to transcend their destructive tendencies, and in the optimistic fairy tales to facilitate those processes/transitions.

Plato feared the power of poetry because he knew what it could affect. He

was less certain of reason to win the conflict of desires. The educational question should not just be what is good, but how we can achieve that good. Can fairy tales contribute to our ideal of achieving a true sense of reality? Both Plato and Bettelheim want this for children and so it seems that the issue is the extent to which our reason must remain in control in order that we coexist consensually with reality. On a continuum, Plato advocates control nearly one hundred percent of the time.

Bettelheim says that in order to gain the best possible control over the emotions, we have to allow for the childlikeness of our emotional lives. Rationality, he says, has very irrational beginnings.

Plato's censorship has been misinterpreted as ideological or moral opposition. I believe that the reasons for the moral imperatives against the literature are not located in children's interests as much as in adult fears, and perhaps understandably so. Psychic introspection is not an easy process for individuals, much less when parents observe its effects in their children. The family romance, as Freudians have it, is complex and the least accessible to our consciousness. Egan (1988) says that we commonly come to know our parents and ourselves last. Also, our primal urges frighten us and are not easy to deal with nor talk about. However, our illusions make us want to keep our conceptions of childhood unsullied. Perhaps this desire is part of the pastoral myth, a Garden of Eden where happiness is not contaminated with knowledge—be it of sex, sin or fear. And so adults, burdened with adult worries, maintain an unrealistic idea of childhood, ostensibly "for the sake of the children" but really as part of their own wishful dream. Unfortunately, this is often accompanied by ruthless, even hysterical censorship of anything that alludes to any "undesirable" aspect of human nature. I do not believe that we can achieve mental health by

silencing aspects of our nature or by curbing our attempts, through art, to embody our varied experience. Anthony Storr (Solitude, p. 92) says

the need to make sense of one's experiences is, of course, not confined to neurotic distress, but is an essential part of man's adaptation as a species. The development of intelligence, of consciousness, of partial emancipation from the governance of instinctive patterns, has made man into a reflective animal who feels the need to interpret, and to bring order to, both the world of external reality and the inner world of his imagination.

Bettelheim's language—psychic processes, unconscious pressures, obsessions—is the language of psychotherapy, not of education. While teachers and educators can be knowledgeable about Freudian psychology, it is not the school's task to analyze or apply such therapy, except in exceptional cases or circumstances. However, even without interpreting conflicts strictly in terms of psychoanalytical theory, we value Bettelheim's perception of the pursuit of meaning through oppositions and conflict solving processes is valuable. This is an educational use of fairy tales. The use of fairy tales in school also demonstrates to children, in appropriately understated ways, the legitimacy of their fantasy lives. Bettelheim says that "if a child is told only stories true to reality (which can mean false to important parts of his or her inner reality) then he or she may conclude that much of his or her inner reality is unacceptable" (Enchantment, p. 65).

### Rousseau's Educational Theories

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's explanation of one of Fontaine's fables is relevant here. It is important to my discussion because it follows Plato's reasoning, and offers a further argument against fantasy—an argument that with only slight variations fits well alongside many current accusations against the fairy tales in the school

curriculum. The complete fable (translated) follows:

The Raven and the Fox

Master Raven, perched in the trees,  
 Held in his beak a fine big cheese.  
 Thus he begins his tale to tell.  
 I tell no lies; if only your note  
 At all corresponded to yon fine coat,  
 And, out of his wits with joy at his words,  
 The Raven, his beautiful voice to display,  
 He opens his large beak and lets fall his prey.

In the following passage, Rousseau breaks the fable's lines and provides a running commentary which reflects his pedagogical concerns.

All children learn La Fontaine's fables, not one of them understands them. Could they understand them, the case would be still worse; for the moral is so complicated and so far above their capacities that it would rather incline them to vice than to virtue.

He chooses the first fable as an instance:

The Raven and the Fox

Master Raven, perched in the trees,

Master! What does the word mean in itself? What does it mean before a proper name? What is the particular meaning here? What is a raven?

Held in his beak a fine big cheese.

What kind of cheese? Swiss or Dutch? If a child has never seen a raven, what do you gain by talking to him about them? If he has, how can he imagine that it could hold a cheese in its beak? Our descriptions should always accord with nature.

Thus he begins his tale to tell.

Do foxes talk, then? And do they speak the same language as ravens? Take care, my wise teacher; consider well before you answer. It is of more consequence than you think.

I tell no lies; if only your note

“I tell no lies”: then do people sometimes tell lies? But what will your pupil think if you tell him that the fox says this only because he actually is telling the raven a lie?

At all corresponded to yon fine coat,

“corresponded”: what does this mean? Try to teach a child to compare two qualities so different as plumage and singing, and you will find how far he can understand you.

And, out of his wits with joy at his words,

A child must have already experienced very lively and strong passions to be able to comprehend this proverbial mode of expression.

The Raven, his beautiful voice to display,

It must not be forgotten that, in order to understand this verse and the whole fable, a child must already know the “beautiful voice” of the raven.

He opens his large beak and lets fall his prey.

The verse is admirable; the sound and sense correspond. I can imagine I see the wide beak open and hear the cheese rattle through the boughs; but this kind of beauty is lost on children. I ask if it is to children of six that it is proper to teach that there are men who flatter and deceive for gain. At most we might teach them that there are jesters who praise little boys to their faces and laugh at their childish vanities behind their backs; but the cheese spoils all; and they learn less how to prevent it falling from their mouths than how to make it fall from the mouths of others. This is another paradox and not the least important.

Watch children learning fables and you will find that, when they are capable of applying them, they almost always do so contrary to the intention of the author; instead of remarking the error from which you wish to keep them, they fall in love with the vice which profits by it. In thus relieving children from all obligations, I free them from their greatest source of misery, namely books (1964, pp. 116-119).

No doubt Rousseau is aware of literature’s effects, which he battles with sweeping questions. What do words mean? he asks. What is the significance of a title before a proper noun? Many of Rousseau’s questions can be answered at the level of literary convention. Master Raven is an ironic use of a proper title. Within the framework



of fantasy, foxes and ravens do talk, and as Rousseau says, this is “of more consequence” than we think. Literature is a cushioned experience, allowing a comfortable distance between our egos and character revelations. Metaphor does, as Rousseau suggests, compare different qualities such as plumage and singing, in ways the reader intuitively feels, rather than reasons. Children do not have to know the beautiful voice of the raven in particular—it is enough to recognize beautiful sounds, be they bird song or music. Yet, as anybody who has been with a two-year-old will testify, children already then experience very lively and strong passions. Rousseau says that the beauty of the sound and sense of “he opens his large beak and lets fall his prey” would be lost on children. As the Opies have recorded in their many books of childhood chants, rhymes and songs, children seem much closer to the aesthetics of sound and sense than Rousseau claims. Rousseau’s questions, though intended as criticisms, are very important considerations when reading literature.

Rousseau’s account here of the child seems to be entirely based on deficiencies or incapacities. He appears unaware of the value of the effects which he distinguishes, or the value of learning how they are created. He offers a literal reading of the tale, and, like Plato, says that books must model right actions in order that children be compelled to manifest good behaviour. He does not consider that perhaps readers are motivated to good behaviour when the hero of the tale, too, is thus inclined. Readers most commonly associate with the story hero. In many simple stories, the hero outsmarts the victim, as the fox outsmarts the raven. Both Rousseau and Plato are sensitive to children’s attraction to imaginary (versus realistic) stories, to the logic of fantasy versus the logic of reality, and both are aware of the power of affective identification with characters in stories as a precursor to imitating them.

However, their concern with moral education and the primacy/exclusivity of good examples lead them to apply to imagination the principles which apply to the physical world. Plato says, “children cannot distinguish the allegorical sense from the literal” (Republic, p. 70). Because identification occurs in children’s minds, he says, the characters should be good, and the actions realistic, plausible. Bettelheim says that the affective tensions of a story, and the search for a fictional solution, facilitate the resolution of personal conflicts. Because children do operate at an allegorical level they understand the story not literally, but emotionally, imaginatively.

Stories are powerful influences on behaviours as Plato and Rousseau note, but their power does not lie in imitation. Rather, stories create moral meanings through complex processes of identification with powerful characters and images and through the conflicts of the story.

### Realistic versus Fantastic Literature

C.S. Lewis (1966, quoted in Aitken, 1976/77, p. 65) says that fantastic literature is “accused of giving children a false impression of the world they live in.” Instead, he says, realistic fiction is potentially more problematic. About fantasy literature, he says:

I think no literature that children could read gives them less of a false impression. I think what profess to be realistic stories for children are far more likely to deceive them. I never expected the real world to be like the fairy tales. I think I did expect school to be like the school stories. The fantasies did not deceive me: the school stories did. All stories in which children have adventures and successes which are possible, in that they do not break the laws of nature, but almost infinitely improbable, are in more danger than the fairy tales of raising false expectations. . . In a sense a child does not long for fairy land as a boy longs to be the hero of the first eleven. Does anyone suppose that he really and prosaically longs for all the dangers and discomforts

of a fairy tale?—really wants dragons in contemporary England? It is not so. It would be much truer to say that fairy land arouses a longing for he knows not what. It stirs and troubles him (to his life-long enrichment) with the dim sense of something beyond his reach and, far from dulling or emptying the actual world, gives it a new dimension of depth. He does not despise real woods because he has read of enchanted woods: the reading makes all real woods a little enchanted. This is a special kind of longing. The boy reading the school story of the type I have in mind desires success and is unhappy (once the book is over) because he can't get it: the boy reading the fairy tale desires and is happy in the very act of desiring. For his mind has not been concentrated on himself, as it often is in the more realistic story (p. 30).

Realistic stories do not sustain children's psychic and imaginative mental playground, and do not honour the indirection and oblique approach as do fantasy stories ("for his mind has not been concentrated on himself").

Within literature, fantastic exaggerations often have the ring of psychological truth, while realistic explanations, however true to fact, seem psychologically untrue (Enchantment, p. 32). Literature also elicits our desire for we know-not-what. Countless writers have articulated the need to be stirred up "with the dim sense of something beyond" their reach. It is what gives everyday life depth and richness. William Stafford (1982, p. 20) writes: "For the person who follows with trust and forgiveness what occurs to him, the world remains always ready and deep, an inexhaustible environment." Because some adults have lost access to this expectant world does not mean students should be expected to do likewise. The contemporary child who complains of boredom, the "woman in the suburbs dying of her ennui" (Pound, 1959, p. 96) would benefit from the improved binoculars of an awakened imagination. The way, says Frye (1989, p. 43) "to stimulate the imagination is to read a good book or two. . . We can't speak or think or comprehend even our own experience except within the limits of our own power over words, and those limits

have been established for us by our great writers.”

Part of the educational value of the tales, then, is that they provide an imaginative space for readers to connect their images and beliefs with those of the work of art, and thereby make an adjustment or enrichment in regard to their understanding of the world. The truth of literature is a psychological one; a story is **true** to the extent it provides a convincing set of feelings and perceptions which fit one's experience of the world. By means of their imaginative features, one can argue, fairy tales can facilitate achievement of a more inclusive sense of reality—thus a truer rationality.

#### The Use of Fantastic Tales in Education

Since Plato the discussion surrounding fantasy has not decelerated. Because of the increasing and vast volume of literature surrounding fairy tales, both critical and creative, and the parallel development of increased sensitivity in the areas of language and social relationships, it is difficult for teachers to know how, or whether they should, use the tales. Using the fairy tales within education does not mean their uncensored use, rather that the reasons for censorship must be educationally valid, such as being in the interests of the children. The classroom teacher can best judge the tales' merits over against her students' capacities. But which version, traditional or current, should be used?

Obviously, we need to become clear about our attitudes toward the emotions and toward fantasy. Do we tell, within the secure environment of the classroom, the often violent, seemingly stereotypical stories which Bettelheim tells us children need in order to anticipate and pass safely through the trauma of their childhood and

eventual, adult world? Do we ban the tales from the classroom, as the Women Teachers Federation of Ontario, after conducting a major sociological content analysis of the fairy tales, was nearly able to do at their annual general meeting in 1987? Or do we, like Vivian Paley, acknowledge the fears with which children enter school, and purposefully use the fairy tales to help children articulate their fear? Are fairy tales foundational for a literary education?

These approaches, and the kinds of questions and answers we as individuals iterate are as determined by our culture and society as are the texts we examine. It is not surprising, then, that current literary criticism deconstructs traditional sources of authority and stresses the need to accommodate a multiplicity of perspectives. Demands for a new curriculum come from minority groups, feminists among them, who bring a wide range of intellectual traditions and a cultural mandate derived from the more and more widely held view of this country as a nation of aboriginal peoples and immigrants. Whether our current awareness and frames of reference are just as exclusive and excluding as those of the past is yet to be seen. We have gained something from shedding our naive notions of the tales, especially our belief that the tales are the unsullied voices and truth of a peasant people. We have also gained insight into the tales and ourselves from various critical fields such as Marxist, feminist, and deconstructionist literary theory. In light of these awarenesses, it seems reasonable to suggest that the tales may, historically, if for no other reason, be worth reconsidering before their fate is sealed into a nail-studded barrel and rolled off the education agenda.

Considering the tales for education must, of course, mean something different from acknowledging their cultural viability. Fairy tale motifs will, no doubt, exist

within our culture as long as they are ideologically potent. Within education, however, our task is not to prove them right or wrong, but to decide if they help meet our educational goals, and, if so, explain their point and value as a means to achieving our goals. Placing the tales within an educational context, then, means determining whether they contribute to current notions of the “educated person”, and if so, how. Because the use of the tales will be within the context of the study of literature and language, my thesis question is whether the Grimms’ fairy tales are compatible with what I perceive to be literature’s educational function. Do they provide students with a cultural means, and the forms and motifs which literary language provides, to better understand, both personally and collectively, the human predicament? Can studying the specific forms and contents of the tales contribute to a literary literacy, which in turn is one among other “languages” necessary to achieve the educated person?

Awareness that the process of education starts with normative claims is also important when considering which “languages of understanding” society (particularly the educational system) champions, and which it devalues. Our bedrock propositions are exactly that: fundamental statements which are not necessarily empirically verifiable or objectively knowable. Rather, they are accounts which make the most sense and seem the most useful. Once we realize that the world, as it is to us as community members, is the only world we can know, and that our knowledge of the world’s different aspects is determined by our intentions, i.e., the questions we are asking about the world, we realize that truths about the world do not expose the thing-in-itself, but expose how we “language” about it. This has ramifications for the criticism and adaptations of the Grimms’ fairy tales, which, as I will show, have

more to do with the values and claims of the society of which they are a part, than with the tales themselves. A quick survey of the reception of the tales over the decades, for instance, reveals in each critical account or adaptation how a particular society views childhood, children, and how (and what) children do or should learn. For example, is a particular society comfortable or uneasy about using (or even allowing) imagination and fantasy as part of their children's experiences? The importance of situating our point of view through awareness of the language we use is central to this thesis, and, I will argue, to our effectiveness as educators. As those responsible for the curriculum, we need to make choices not only about content, but choices regarding the form of discourse which will ensure our eventual result, and about forms which adequately express our values and judgements.

The discussion proceeds on at least two levels: first, what constitutes a literacy program in the schools, and second, the role fairy tales can play within this conception. It also means determining what sort of readings and use of the tales are possible in our current educational system, that is, determining the context for fairy tales which current curricula demand. How is literature valued and used within the system today? Is metaphoric language just one among other language uses, such as functional or expressive, or are its aesthetic aspects understood and valued? What value is given to the aesthetic within current notions of literacy? In our normative claims about literature, and in our assertion of certain literary approaches, what do we undervalue, or fail to recognize? What do our approaches assume about the nature and form of literature, and how are they different and similar to the concepts formulated here? By articulating a concept of literature I will provide the theory and basis for this discussion.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## THE SOCIAL FUNCTION OF LITERATURE: AESTHETICS AND IDEOLOGY

A reason for devaluing the aesthetic in education is our unwillingness to risk involving our emotional and fantasy lives in educationally formal ways. Aesthetic education has formally been in the Arts part of the curriculum. Fantasy and imagination in the core courses (including English) have generally not been considered important except incidentally. In this chapter I identify two main non-aesthetic uses of language—as a vehicle for historical or sociological thought, and as an efficient means of communicating. These uses are based on approaches to literature outlined by traditionalists, progressivists, and socio-linguists. Classrooms incorporate the different uses through such programs as the Writing Process, Writing Across the Curriculum, and through literary, feminist and deconstructionist theory. The different programs in the schools make certain assumptions about literature and how it can (and should) be used in the school. The emphasis on language, in classrooms and in curriculum documents, has gradually evolved to its full flowering in current deconstruction theory. It is interesting to trace the development of the shift in the study of English from a literature orientation to a language one, and to determine how each approach accomplishes, or fails to accomplish, our educational goals.

Underlying many current educational programs are the Platonic and Rousseauian concerns about fantasy's (in)ability to provide children with realistic conceptions of the world. Either literature's content expresses false concepts, or



literature's non-linear form does. How are these ideas reflected in curricula and in the classroom? What are the risks of using language aesthetically, and teaching the aesthetic appreciation and use of literature? Conversely, what is the risk of devaluing or ignoring the aesthetic? Of emphasizing literature's social utility? Fantasy is risky, and literature taught in the school requires thoughtful consideration before, during and after the experience. The risks of not using the aesthetic, however, are usually greater than not using it.

In education our normative claims direct our pedagogy. We can only define the educated or literate person in general ways; and one of our tasks as English educators is to justify the means and route to our literacy goals. In English studies this is an especially complex task because the arts, with which English is sometimes associated, exist at the periphery of the curriculum. Furthermore, metaphoric language is not readily considered (alongside science, for example) as one of the languages essential to the educated person. The following discussion (over two chapters) attempts to unravel the progress of English studies is tethered to the notion of the educated, literate person. At one end of the English curriculum exists an elevated, often élitist approach toward literature. At its most current end is the scepticism of deconstruction theory.

### The Educated Person and Educational Aims

We are born into a cultural community and it is through its agencies that we become who we are. Gains in consciousness about ourselves and our existence in the world are achieved through mastery of the cultural forms which make identification, classification, description, pattern, and meaning possible. This quest for personal and

public meaning that is characterized in the need to be, and the need to belong, is one of western civilization's abiding preoccupations. It follows then, that education is, in part, about the gradual mastery of communal symbolism which gives expression to our individual and communal identities.

### Languages of Discourse

Gaining awareness or consciousness of ourselves and the world is an educational goal which most educators agree on. Barrow, in The Philosophy of Schooling (1981, p. 43) states that the educated person "must have some awareness of our (humanity's) place in the totality" and is one who "appreciates and is alert to people as individuals." How people conceptualize such understanding, and how schools facilitate the process, however, are many and various. Abbs (1982) refers to "epistemic communities" such as art, math and science, while writers from different disciplines (Frye, Taylor) have used the ideas of "languages of discourse" and "conversation" to speak about the mediating ways by which we come to be educated. Frye (1990) identifies the symbolic forms in terms of descriptive, conceptual, rhetorical and metaphoric language. Oakeshott (1989, p. 37) calls students educated when they converse in what he calls the "languages of understanding." These "languages" include philosophical, scientific, historical and poetic or metaphoric modes, and students must learn how to understand and express themselves within the particular conditions of each discourse. While the developing of a consciousness gained through these modes or communities is one of the functions of education, the various "languages" are not valued equally. The stress is on the abstract languages of math and science. Educators such as Wells (1986, p. 204) argue eloquently for the

importance of expressing our knowledge in a variety of ways:

the first mistake is in assuming the imaginative and affective response to experience is of less value than the practical and analytic—or, indeed, in thinking that they are in competition. Knowledge has moral and aesthetic dimensions as well as practical and conceptual ones, and a fully mature response is one that achieves a balance between them.

As we grow in years and understanding, we achieve more symbolic modes of expression, or master one of the modes, thereby learning to make finer and finer distinctions about our particular subject or concern. So, for example, the scientific community, through the development of technology and theories, has become increasingly sophisticated about the physical world, developing both grand theories of astrophysics and the deep science of particle theory.

#### Frye's Account of Language Modes

Descriptive language, says Frye (1990) is useful to science and wherever else the aim is to convey information about an objective world. When we read a newspaper, for example, we want to be sure that what we are reading is accurate; that there is a close correlation between the words that we read and the world out there. We are not as interested in the author's fantasies, flourishes of language, or his or her imaginative conjectures about the subject. Frye says a verbal structure is true, and the details of its content facts, if it seems to be a satisfactory verbal replica of what it describes. Scientific language, then, is at the extreme of the "descriptive continuum."

Unlike scientific language, which eliminates the human perspective as far as possible, metaphoric language aims not to transcend human perspective, but to embody it. To speak from **within**, while at the same time expressing its findings objectively for others to examine. Through articulating our experiences in stories,

songs, poems or other media, and sharing our responses to art with others, our feelings, emotions and instincts are confirmed, refined and/or adjusted. Human experience is the fundamental point of reference in art, and a work of art's success can be measured, in part, by the feelings and responses the work is able to create in its audience. These responses, as well as the poetic forms, can become conventionalized over time.

However important education of the senses may be, metaphoric language is not a dominant language in educational discourse today, like scientific or philosophic discourse are. The importance and relevance of metaphoric language in achieving the educated person needs to be asserted. O'Hear (1988, pp. 19-20) articulates his ideas about artistic expression by contrasting it with scientific discourse. Of artistic expression ("including, of course, literature"), he says,

for here we have a realm of discourse and expressive activity, which, like science, but in contrast to science, focuses explicitly on the imaginative exploitation of human perspectives and concerns. In so far as a work of artistic expression is regarded aesthetically (which is part of what is involved in seeing it as a work of imagination, produced as an end in itself), it will be contemplated rather than consumed or destroyed. But in so far as such a work is itself intended to be an object of experience, relating to human perspectives and concerns rather than prescinding from them as science does, like science it will be intended to arouse in the perceiver attitudes such as attraction, repulsion, formal and intellectual interest and even, on occasion, involve moral assessment. Unlike a scientific theory, its success or failure should be assessed in terms of the responses it evokes.

Literary language, then, has intentions and forms different from science. Science attempts to eliminate the human perspective as much as possible, and achieve a viewpoint of the world in which subjective bias is diminished. The conditions of scientific research, and the scientific methods of control and verifiability were originally thought to ensure objectivity. As science itself, and philosophy tells us,

objectivity is impossible. Science has changed, but public perception has not. The myth of science still accomplishes scientific “truth” in terms of public perception of the scientific spirit or intention. Popular belief in measurement and verifiability is prevalent in our school systems and bureaucracies. Metaphoric language, by contrast, aims to incorporate human experience, to speak from those perceptual and cognitive processes which ground our experiences in our bodies, allowing us to derive pleasure and emotional significance from concrete images.

### Metaphoric Language

Metaphoric and descriptive modes exist at either end of a continuum of kinds of utterance which have evolved with human development. Logical writing, or philosophy, says Frye, was elaborated by the Greeks, and is distinguished by its linear progression—each statement follows from its predecessor. Conversely, rhetorical writers aim to produce kinetic effects upon their audiences, to sway or lull through the use of rhythm and by appealing to powerful myths. Descriptive writing, which depends upon such technology as scientific experimentation, and historical archives, is a later form to emerge. The most primitive mode of thought and speech, says Frye, is mythic or poetic language, where distinctions between subject and object are flexible, and aesthetic response arises from their juxtaposition<sup>1</sup>. Poetic responses are different from responses in other language modes in that fantasy and reality co-exist, and “ordinary consciousness is only one of many possible psychic elements”

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<sup>1</sup> Within Frye's framework, no text is purely one mode or another. Even the most rigorous philosophical text use rhetorical devices, however subtly, to convince their audience. Different modes, however, are recognizable, and, perhaps most importantly, proceed out of particular intentions.

(Frye, 1990, p. 22) which comprise our responses. Thus stories depend on readers' "half-voluntary, half-involuntary, integration of the conscious will with other factors in the psyche, factors connected with fantasy, dreaming, let's pretend, and the like" (Frye, 1990, p. 99). The very act of reading a story is participating in its fantasy, and yet we assume its conditions to be true for the duration of the story.

Frye illustrates how metaphoric language conjoins discrete entities. Frye's examples of the blurring of the distinction between subject and object are the sun-god and sea-god. Natural elements are identified with a supposed personality, and function as explanations for natural occurrences. Myths, says Frye (1990, p. 23),

take us back to a time when the distinction between subject and object was much less continuous and rigid than it is now, and gods are the central characters of myth because they are usually personalities identified with aspects of nature. They are therefore built-in metaphors. Gods repeople, so to speak, non-human nature: sun-gods and sea-gods and storm-gods bring nature back to a personal habitation, and provide it with what has been called, in a different context, an "I-Thou" relationship in place of the environment of ordinary consciousness where everything in it is an "it."

Thunder is thus explained as god clapping, floods or drowning as an angry sea-god's ranting. These miniature stories (the god or mover or force contained by or as the sea, who effects human life) are the metaphors upon which literature is based.

Metaphors are the conjunction of images or elements which defamiliarizes and facilitates readers to "re-cognition" of quotidian knowledge. They also contain the basis of plot; nature the antagonist against the human protagonist.

Literature uses metaphor at the level of words or images, but a reconciliational thrust occurs at the level of theme, idea, or situation. For example, the fairy tale The Golden Bird contrasts a world view which values ownership (as seen in the king's relationship with the golden apples which he counts and "owns") with one which

values a conversational or dialectical relationship with the world (embodied in the hero's attentiveness to the bird, and his conversations with the fox). These contrasts are contained within the story's dramatic counterpoints, the binary opposites which are the organizers of such stories as well as of children's abstract. Egan (1979, p. 13) says that within fairy tales, "these binary opposites are then elaborated by a process of mediation between the binary poles." Literature's thrust toward reconciliation, inherent in its oppositions, then, is also discernible at the level of theme and convention.

What is distinguishable about literature at its most basic unit of composition, metaphor, is also what distinguishes it on its largest scale. Metaphor juxtaposes discrete entities. Literature brings people together. Writing, while a solitary occupation, is perhaps more than any other art form communal in its intentions. Its subject is human beings, and because writers are themselves human, there is an affinity between creator and subject particular to writing. One reason humans feature so prominently in literature is because people are limited in their access to different experiences. Writers cannot, for example, write from the point of view of a dog because they do not have access to a dog's sense of the world. They compensate for this lack by attributing human characteristics to the dog—personifying it—and in this way come as close as possible to experiencing "dogness." This illustrates literature's intention and method of conjoining human consciousness with "other", be that dog, tree, or human being. Wayne Booth (1988, p. 69) asserts pedagogical significance to this function when he says that literature

serves a value that perhaps we could all embrace: genuine encounters with otherness. Pursuit of the Other (is) among the grandest of hunts we are invited to; from birth onward our growth depends so deeply on

our ability to internalize other selves.

Literature bridges discrete entities; its very impetus and forms are such bridges.

Alternately, from the readers' perspective, a book's invitations to experience "otherness" is accessible only if readers take up the invitation, building the bridge from their end, projecting themselves into the story. This "grand hunt" for the "otherness" of both the external world, as well as of the mystery of our inner selves, draws us to literature and art. It also draws us to other people. Metaphor invites multiple responses and interpretation, and its emotional content inspires readers to hold points of view. This distinguishes the literary experience from a discursive representation of experience. We want to **talk** about our literary or artistic experience. After viewing an artistic performance, film, or sharing a book, we want to compare/verify our impressions. Our discussions are often eloquent and heated! Sometimes we encounter another perspective or recognize something that rings true. We feel as if we've known this something all along, but that we just now have remembered it<sup>2</sup>. Or something that has long been familiar is rendered unfamiliar, and we see it in a new light. These experiences, shaped by the significance we bring to them, can be shared, and our perceptions confirmed or disputed by others. Gordon Wells (1986, p. 195) defines literacy as the struggle, through all the forms of communication we have available, to discover what it is we mean. Stories

do not only offer a personal interpretation of experience, however. Because they occur in the context of social interaction and are produced in conversation, they, like all other conversational meanings, are jointly constructed and require collaboration and negotiation for their

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<sup>2</sup> This idea of remembrance is dramatically illustrated in Helen Keller's account of the first time she understands the connection between sign and symbol, saying: "Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten—a thrill of returning thought...I knew then that w-a-t-e-r meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand" (quoted in Langer, 1957, p. 63).



achievement. In this way, members of a culture create a shared interpretation of experience, each confirming, modifying, and elaborating on the story of the other. Each of us is inducted into our culture and comes to take on its beliefs and values as our own.

Literature is a many faceted conversation: a writer “converses” with the world, articulating his or her experience of it; a text engages a reader in a dialogue; and readers have conversations among themselves about literature.

### An Aesthetic of Literature

Aesthetic experience is often understood as a particular, usually sophisticated, response which occurs within defined parameters and meets certain criteria. It is often limited to certain kinds of experiences (such as visiting art galleries) and people (those whose social class provides access to such activity) and giving the term aesthetic élitist connotations. My use of the term has to do with a continuum of pleasure; moments in which the emotions and the imagination are caught up in delight.

Impressions can be fleeting, but some are “held” so that the experience becomes distinct from its mundane environment. The experience is abstracted. Iris Murdoch (1989, p. 87) says that art presents us “with a truthful image of the human condition in a form which can be steadily contemplated; and indeed this is the only context in which many of us are capable of contemplating it at all.” Langer (1953, p. 212) says the distinguishing mark of art (poetry) “which makes it quite different from any actual segment of life, is that the events in it are simplified, and at the same time much more fully perceived and evaluated than the jumble of happenings in any person’s actual history.” Along this continuum, advertising, television, jokes, pop

culture and literature all contain, in their ability to elicit audience response, and to varying degrees and effects, elements of the aesthetic. Aesthetic pleasure extends from the entertainment value of cultural objects, to answering serious questions about ourselves and our existence in the world. Philip Larkin eloquently speaks about the impulse of human beings to “surprise a seriousness in themselves.”

Artistic creation may take the form of a personal exploration through journal writing, learning an art form or arranging the objects in our homes (or in our minds) to create pleasing effects. We only need think how often we set up the conditions for a good conversation, for example, talking with our friends over coffee and ice-cream about the film we have just seen, and not just about the film, but talking **through** its images, themes and conventions about things that are important to us. Art is a “setting” or context for conversation and it is the images and metaphors which speak about the ideas, feelings, objects and relationships which are closest to us, and often the most difficult to articulate to our satisfaction.

Literature offers many pleasures, including the pleasures of its conventions. The formulaic opening of the fairy tale’s “once upon a time” offers us the pleasure of anticipating the adventures of a youngest son or daughter, of being the hero and experiencing his/her adventures, of seeing the wicked getting their “just desserts”, of crossing the effortless boundaries between the real and otherworldly, and of knowing the story will end happily ever after. And reading the tale, of course, gives the pleasure of having expectations satisfied. This is comparable to the adult satisfaction of attending to an opera whose outcome is guaranteed, giving the listeners a limited, protected space in which to project their own struggles of good over evil. In literature there is the pleasure and surprise of words jammed against each other in

startling ways, of “getting the joke” embedded in a story, of an image in a poem that makes us think “aha, I know about this” or “I wonder”, of the rhythmic or unsettling patterns of words, of the fright or delight we feel as we read a “whodunit” mystery, of recognizing the way the illustrations and the words of a story complement and further each other, of the pleasure of learning how literature creates its effects, and of seeing through the manipulations of the text to its conventions. This idea of “getting” the story gives the same pleasure (we nod our heads in recognition, or smile, or say “I see”, as if a light were switched on), that we often experience when we learn something new, whether that is swimming stroke, the solution to a math problem, or how literary conventions work. It is important to recognize the connection between learning and pleasure, and the universality of this experience. Each of us has at sometime suddenly become aware, understood something which up to now eluded us, and felt the pleasure which flows current-like through our bodies. Plato’s analogy of “seeing the light” continues to resonate meaningfully within human imagination. This same response can be seen on children’s faces when they “get the joke”, thereby gaining entrance into the community of those “in the know.” Pleasure is an important component and indicator of learning, as important to human beings at age two as at seventy-two.

### The Impulses of the Body into Art

Characterizing my use of “aesthetic”, then, is the connection between pleasure and knowledge, which in literature is a connection between responding to literature and following that response into deeper knowledge of the conventions of the text and, ultimately, of ourselves and our place in the world. The pleasure of the text has a

connection to the body. Abbs (1982, p. 40), in speaking about literature as an expressive art, says

within impulse is the desire for reflection, a desire for an image which will hold, comprehend and complete. This desire is buried in the body, bound into our instincts, and innate propensity. Art is the life of the body, projected, developed and taken into consciousness.

During a day we have countless nudges, shaped as ideas or thoughts which occur to us, or vague feelings, which in themselves are fleeting and uninformative. Sometimes such an impulse takes hold. Something in the outer world: an image or other sensory experience conjoins with our inner reality, and we are moved to reflection. This relationship is captured in the fairy tale Rapunzel, where the wife's internal longing for a child is externalized in the parsley she suddenly notices growing at the back of the house. One assumes parsley had always grown in the garden. What is important, therefore, is that events or forces constellate to bring the story of the wife's longing for new life into being. So often the important thing catches us from behind, through means other than waking consciousness.

Our impulses become accessible when they are shaped by cultural forms and traditions, and by the needs and desires of the individual and the community.

Physical origins of desire/the aesthetic are, however, central to understanding art.

Abbs (1989b, pp. 7-8) says the arts

are the expressions of our bodies, of the pulsing rhythm of the blood, of the inhalation and exhalation of breath, of the immediate delighting in sensations; in sounds, colours, textures, movements, perceptions. It is for this reason (we) must honour the perceptual mode. Of all the modes of intelligence that can be tabulated, the aesthetic seems the most primordial. Yet, while the arts have this source in the biological, they also have another origin, namely, in the historic world of culture and, more specifically, in the whole symbolic field of the particular arts discipline. As soon as we sing, make stories, narratives, dance, paint, we not only express and satisfy bodily rhythms we also enter into and

depend upon what is symbolically available, on what has been done by previous practitioners and on how much has been effectively transmitted. Art comes out of art, as Mathematics comes out of mathematics. We improvise with and even extend artistic grammars but we rarely invent them; they are 'there' in the culture and it is in the transpersonal culture that art is both made and understood. The development of the sensory mode as a means of apprehending the nature of human experience depends upon the availability and range of these artistic grammars, and established narratives.

Conceptualized in terms of its sense or consciousness-making capacity, art occurs along a continuum. The beginnings of art are located in the unarticulated impulses of the body. An artifact or "virtual experience" stimulates an audience's response. This response can, in turn, be used to create another artifact. But all responses or impulses require, for their full realization, the informing traditions and tools of the community.

The connection between impulses—which at the extreme of the art-making continuum are inarticulate cries, and the daily streams of half-glimpsed images and fleeting thoughts—and the expressive symbols communally shared, is particularly important in a theory in which the expressive elements of literature play an important role. Abbs (1982, p. 35), in describing the connections, sketches a continuum along which art-making occurs:

one of the functions of the art-maker is to enter into a creative relationship with this flow of impulse and its spume of imagery. By entering into such a relationship he brings a further shaping creativity to the spontaneous creativity of his own nature. The art-maker elaborates, refines and deepens the spontaneous movement of psyche towards imagery and reflection. His aim is to convert the hidden elusive art of his own being into the visible and enduring art of culture. He gives subjectivity an objective representation so that he can come to know his own experience. The art-maker, always working within his own historic culture and with the tools and traditions made available by that culture, is thus an agent in the promotion of consciousness, both his own and that of his audience who recognize in his work the hidden forms of human experience taken to fulfillment.

Although the different aspects of the art-making process are not discrete, characterizing them as if they were helps us to understand the pattern of art-making.

### Cultural Tools and Traditions

Abbs (1982, p. 63) talks about the importance of absorbing one's culture. Contradictory as it seems, children and artists need to mimic the inherited voices (the conventions and tools of art making) in order that they find their own "voices." Abbs calls this creative mimesis. By absorbing the inherited students symbols can use them in personal ways for the elucidation and celebration of their own experience. When children have some control over story-telling conventions they are able to shape their feelings and thoughts into coherent patterns. Abbs' ideas coincide with the Oakeshott's ideas about educated people expressing themselves in several symbolic forms. The greater their control over literary conventions, and the greater their image-board, the greater the possibilities for students' differentiated and sensitive perceptions, feelings and thoughts. Not all children are story-tellers in the more formal sense. Nor are children mature artists. But artistic vision and artistic processes are available to everybody. Most people benefit from articulating their experiences, from comparing their experiences with those of others, from reading and viewing art with increasingly greater refinement. In this way, "readers" or "members of the audience" are also involved in artistic processes.

I believe Abbs' theory is only partly applicable in the educational realm. He assumes that children have the mature artist's ability to stand outside their culture—to be critical of it while at the same time being absorbed into it. In Abbs' view, children would learn to use literature's cohesive literary forms without assuming them

as cultural norms. Many of the Grimms' fairy tales, for example, end with a wedding. Despite the spectrum of relatively satisfactory possibilities, an astonishing number of the tales end up with just the one of marriage. Feminist critics say that one story ending with a marriage does no harm; a hundred establish a convention and presumably, an expectation and a cultural norm<sup>3</sup>.

Mature poets depend upon the poetic tradition and on their culture for the tools and for the content of their poetry. But within the inherited tradition there are many tensions, such as traditional versus subversive forms, male versus female point of view, and dominant cultural positions versus those of peripheral cultures. Abbs' point, therefore, needs clarification because more than just dominant traditional forms should be the content of education. Different forms and techniques of poetry should be available to students and different voices should be heard so that they can choose which inherited cultural symbols to emulate in the process of gaining their own voices.

### The Shaping Community

The artistic process can be generally understood as a mediating or dialectical process. The emotional source of art gradually becomes embodied in the literary conventions which best express its intentions. For example, what starts as a feeling of passion in the artist, might, through story convention such as characterization of plot result in a symbolic expression—Langer's "virtual experience"—of that passion. The artifact does not spring forth fully formed, so a responsive, critical community is

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<sup>3</sup> The issue of literary conventions/cultural norms is complex, and addressed in chapter six.

essential to the artistic process. This community can be historically constituted—the writers/genres who/which preceded the artist—or current ones. We speak about national or regional art, but students in the classroom also form a community. They share books and writing. They share the artistic creations, but perhaps more importantly, share in the dynamic flow of feelings and understanding which the more objective representation allows. Art's ability to moves us to reflection, then, culminates in the shared experience of the community. These shared experiences can become the conventions and tradition—to be embraced or rejected by the next generation.

#### Literature as a Developer of Consciousness

Iris Murdoch (1989, p. 84) says that literature **impresses** us—alerting our imaginations with its sensory and emotional input. It offers us a truth we comprehend with our imaginations. Often it startles us out of the complacency of our everyday life. She says

by opening our eyes we do not necessarily see what confronts us. We are anxiety-ridden animals. Our minds are continually active, fabricating an anxious, usually self-preoccupied, often falsifying **veil** which partially conceals the world. Our states of consciousness differ in quality, our fantasies and reveries are not trivial and unimportant, they are profoundly connected with our energies and our ability to choose and act. And if quality of consciousness matters, then anything which alters consciousness in the direction of unselfishness, objectivity and realism is to be connected to virtue.

Drawing on Plato's analogy of the cave, Murdoch explicates the human struggle to achieve a consciousness which comprehends and appreciates nuance and complexity. Both nature and art facilitate consciousness. Through the natural world, she says, we transcend our selfish tracks, our mindless daydreams. Looking out her window she



observes a kestrel. Wholly absorbed in attending to the bird for even a brief moment, she returns to her previously troubled state with a new perspective that does not eradicate her problems, but provides her with a wider perspective of them. We understand this process most commonly, she says (1989, p. 85) as our love of beauty, which is “a self-forgetful pleasure in the sheer alien pointless independent existence of animals, birds, stones and trees. ‘Not how the world is, but that it is, is the mystical.’”

Murdoch continues, saying art, as a human product endowed with significance and form is of a higher order than nature. Murdoch (1989, p. 86) says that the arts, especially literature and painting, are created in the knowledge of the pointlessness of existence. “The pointlessness of art is not the pointlessness of a game; it is the pointlessness of human life itself, and form in art is properly the simulation of the self-contained aimlessness of the universe.” Good art resists easy patterns and consolation, while bad art, Murdoch says, exploits the “recognizable and familiar rat-runs of selfish day-dream”, and so art must move in the opposite direction toward consciousness, rather than in the direction of placation or self-indulgence. Frye (1990) speaks to this as well, but in terms of myths that console (most often those of romance and those exploited in the popular media) and myths that shock and startle.

Murdoch suggests that our daydreams often consist of the easy patterns of consolation. These patterns are the antithesis of good art, which Kafka said need to be powerful enough to break the frozen seas inside us. But it is not just a matter of lazy daydreaming. Our emotions can be obsessive and blinding, and they can limit our ability to see clearly how we can gain control over them. Writers say that writing about their experiences creates the needed distance. The problem (feelings, emotions,

circumstances) and the solution to the problem become clear. The problem can be seen as one particular circumstance among many, and the writer can move from a position of helplessness in the face of anxieties to one of power. The writer can choose another path or point of view. Out of the chaos of our emotional lives comes the ordering of narrative, and the possibility of change.

This is not to say that the sole purpose of reading and writing literature is therapeutic—the ability to recognize and change undesirable behaviour—but that the arts explore human perspectives and concerns. They are a valuable source of knowledge about our common subjectivity. Frye says that literature is a map of the imagination, a chart of the thoughts and feelings—the imaginative experiences—of human beings.

Good art reveals “what we are usually too selfish and too timid to recognize, the minute and absolutely random detail of the world, and reveals it together with a sense of unity and form” (Murdoch, 1989, pp. 85-86). We gain consciousness when we are shocked or startled out of complacency and into “unpossessive contemplation”, or as Abbs says, when our usual fantasies or reveries are altered in the direction of “unselfishness, objectivity and realism.” Writing techniques are strikingly apparent in literature, and “all forms of literary art, including so-called **non-fiction** that has artistic value, may be understood by the specialization and extension of poetic (literary) devices” (Langer, 1953, p. 213). Literary works consistently provide the best occasions for such learning. So what happens when literature is no longer the focus of the English program, when language—the ordinary social and instrumental uses of language—become paramount. What gains and losses do we incur?

## The Shift From Literature to Language

In the early 1900s a list of books (English, American and Canadian writers, the Bible, myths and legends) to be read and studied comprised the curriculum. Studying literature meant recognizing literary conventions. The student would be asked to demonstrate this knowledge in a formal examination. Depending on the sensitivity and ability of an individual teacher, the aesthetic qualities and meaning(s) of a poem or story would be secondary to gaining the required facts. In the office I inherited from a retiring colleague (who inherited it from his predecessor), I found a 1935 Poetry and Place whose marginalia is studded with “simile” “alliteration” and “metaphor.” Teaching for the testable “bits” of knowledge to which such marginalia testifies is one of the often criticized aspects of the traditional liberal arts education Canadians inherited from the British.

Critics such as F.R. Leavis (who is identified with the aptly named publication Scrutiny) were instrumental in establishing what is commonly called the Cambridge School. Leavis stressed the moral nature of literature, and its ability to offer alternatives to a culture he perceived to be sinking into the clutches of materialism and crass hedonism. While there are still aspects of the Cambridge School which we continue to value—such as writers’ need for a critical community—and while my cursory sketch is little more than a superficial nod in a far broader direction, complaints against traditionalist values are still being voiced today. The socio-linguists in the 60s in Britain claimed that the traditionalists (the Cambridge School) perpetuated a privileged, closed canon created by the élite class of which they were a part. Meaning was also privileged in that students, instead of engaging with a story or poem emotionally or imaginatively, were obliged to grasp the author’s (read:

teacher's) one true meaning. Despite unegalitarian teaching methods, books were read, and children were initiated into a heritage (if not necessarily their own) of myth and literature. It may have been assumed by educators that the canon was inclusive enough to reach a broad audience.

The criticisms, as they are articulated today, can be found in Constance Weaver's (1990) Understanding Whole Language: From Principles to Practice, where we see the undesirable "transmission" model of "traditional classrooms" contrasted with the greatly desirable "transactive" method of Whole Language.

Weaver (1990, p. 20) explains that the transmission model is one in which

teachers often teach isolated skills, students practice them, and then are tested for mastery of the skills. It is simply assumed—but rarely proved—that skills so learned will be put to effective use.

Furthermore, the extensive teaching/practicing/testing of skills often leaves little time for students to engage in the behaviors wherein they are expected to apply those skills.

The effects of the movement begun by the socio-linguists is in its fullest flowering in the Canadian school system today.

### The Socio-linguistic View of Language

Both Writing Across the Curriculum and the Writing Process—variants or constituents of Whole Language approaches—are interested in language as a medium. Language understood as an essentially neutral and multi-disciplinary communication tool has roots in the socio-linguistic movement in Britain in the 60s and 70s. This movement is associated with Bernstein, Barnes, Britton and Halliday and includes such publications as the Bullock Report, Language in Use and Writing and Learning Across the Curriculum 11-16, all of which challenged existing notions of the teaching

of English, especially those which served privileged views of literature as a high form of culture, and unwittingly advocated the dissemination of knowledge in discrete entities without connection or significance to students' lives.

The socio-linguist view of literature derives more from sociology and linguistics than from literature or philosophy. It is partly based on the notion that language, as a system of codes and registers must be examined for its relation to social class and its effectiveness as a communication tool. Literature, of course, proves very useful in examining power structures as it delineates social arrangements more clearly than we are able to do in our lives. This use is of particular interest to feminist discourse in that the social structures which have suppressed and confined women are recognizable in literary works whose plots and themes denigrate and restrict the female characters. The communicative aspect of language was important to the socio-linguists because it removed the study of English from the rarefied air of élitist codes of reference to more accessible levels of engagement. Accessibility was, after all, an impetus for this movement which promoted spoken language, and which claimed that meaning resides not in authority's restricted codes, such as the literary canon, but in the personalization of meaning through the "formative energy of the mind seeking order and pattern" (Abbs, 1982, p. 18) through whatever cultural means were most appropriate to students' particular needs and backgrounds. So, for example, language dialect, it was argued, "is not a corruption of English but a distinct expression of it, as valid, because it exists and is used, as any other form" (Abbs, 1982, p. 18).

Obviously this is not a comprehensive account of the socio-linguistic movement, but it makes the connection between it and current classroom practices.

The effect of the movement within classrooms is the increasingly noticeable shift from literature to language. Within “language”, literature is one among other language uses, such as the descriptive language of newspapers or the slogans of advertising. An emphasis on “process” has also facilitated other notions about how the subject of English should be taught. Slogans such as “the primacy of process”, and “learning through writing” will be familiar to many teachers.

One of the most disturbing aspects of this shift is that the metaphoric basis of literary language is ignored. While metaphoric language does have contextual relevance to the “real” world, it also makes aesthetic connections, ones which approach truth imaginatively and emotionally. For example, in order for a story to explain something of the benevolent nature of the world, characters may have to heed the advice of foxes, or implore the natural world for assistance in sorting beans and lentils. The imaginative truth of a story often subverts more easily observed message.

When literature is understood only in terms of its content, a one-to-one correspondence between text and reality is assumed. For instance, this correspondence occurs when we read the word STOP on a red hexagonal road sign. We immediately stop the vehicle we are driving. The stop sign commands an action. This relationship of sign to the meaning it signifies is denotative—language labels as directly as possible a “real” world. The socio-linguist’s interest in language is primarily as an abstract system and literature, within this framework, expresses a singular reality of experience. Literature’s denotative rather than its connotative aspects (that is, its associative, historical and contextual meanings) is emphasized. No distinction is made for literature as a specific language use, different from other (such as descriptive) language uses. Literature’s value, rather than residing in its cultural

significance as a symbolic form, is levelled to its effectiveness as an essentially cognitive, and largely utilitarian, tool. Also, the application of social science methods of measurement means that language, as a series of registers or codes, can be instrumentalized. Language can be thought of as an essentially neutral communications system, with contents that are either acceptable or non-acceptable.

In the United States beginning in the 70s with Donald Graves, this technicism was applied directly to the hitherto elusive art of writing and it became the Writing Process. Although the Writing Process does not acknowledge its connections to the socio-linguistic movement—indeed, its lack of theory gives the impression of being “sui generis”—its instrumentalization of the writing process, treatment of writing as a subject, and separation from the traditional notion of literature as products, connects it to the socio-linguists. Graves’ appeal centres on his claim that the Writing Process, with its instrumentalized stages—writing, editing, rewriting, conferencing, and publishing—can be learned by teachers and duplicated in their classrooms. The process of poetry, however, and becoming a good reader, is a far cry from industrial and commercial theories of process. Poetry is halting, it requires risk-taking. Is it possible, I wonder, to instrumentalize writing into a staged process such as Graves advocates? On what model or theory are his claims based?

Ask twenty writers about the artistic process, and you will learn that their understanding of the process does not coincide with Graves’. Their twenty different answers will range from the bizarre (poems, you may be told, depend upon the sharpness of the writer’s HB pencil), to the superstitious (Atwood is among those who are superstitious about their own writing). Although there are straightforward things to be said about the process of writing, the artistic process is mysterious. It is

startling to think of any program—especially one without any explicit connections to theory, and one that bears resemblance to commercial and industrial production rooms—declaring intimate knowledge of the artistic process. Also startling is the apparently “*sui generis*” nature of Graves’ work, which makes no explicit connections to previous literary thought or theory.

As is so often the case with advances in thought, and the practice that results, there are both gains and losses. *Writing Across the Curriculum*, to cite another educational “advance”, fails to appreciate that the memo or business writer and the story teller do not have the same interest in language. While both want to say something, the former concentrates on conveying a message, while the latter is interested in what language can do, and the effects it makes through its conventions and form. The memo can of course be creatively written, and have aesthetic appeal. Advertising— commercials, billboards—often constitute rich aesthetic experiences. But within the classroom, the most consistent and most concentrated source of imaginative writing is literature. But using literature does not guarantee that it will be valued aesthetically. Writing programs that at their worst place literature on the same level as functional and utilitarian language uses, and ignore literature’s interpretive aspects, fail to realize literature’s educational potential.

#### Accountability and Applicability

Dubious assumptions exist within the Writing Process as well. It is doubtful, for example, that artistic processes can be instrumentalized as Graves asserts, or that the act of writing itself, rather than reflection, provokes students into thought. Furthermore, I do not think that educational activity should be based first and



foremost on commercial or industrial production models.

Since Dewey, the practical emulation-of-the-world emphasis in education has been variously translated, and it continues to be as debatable now as then whether education should draw on commercial or utilitarian social processes. The opposing view is that school is a privileged time with aims and methods different and separate from economic and political practice. The intention to prepare students for the demanding world they will face outside school is correct, but the assumption that so often follows, is not. Preparation for the world does not mean the school must emulate the world. Pressures to be technologically flexible and adaptable often magnify the “processes of literacy before we have come properly to understand those processes in ourselves” (Holdaway, 1986, p. 1). **How** we can best prepare students for a highly competitive society is a question which must not be overlooked. Turning our classrooms into computer rooms and centres for networking will not automatically achieve our goal of computer or other literacies. Perhaps because we live in an age of mega-corporations, of a complex and highly technical society, we need to be all the more aware of the specialized and privileged, even cloistered, time of schooling when the aesthetic can be valued as an important way of gaining knowledge of the often manipulative and coercive world outside the classroom.

## CHAPTER FIVE

## LITERATURE IN THE CLASSROOM: THEORY AND PRACTICE

In this chapter I examine government documents (British Columbia Ministry of Education and Ministry for Multiculturalism and Human Rights, 1992, Evaluating Writing Across the Curriculum: Student Samples for the Writing Reference Set, British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1989, The Primary Program (Response draft), British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1990, The Intermediate Program: Learning in British Columbia, (Response draft), Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1992, Everybody's Schools: The Common Curriculum (Draft)). I move quickly through these documents and concentrate my criticism of the texts used in English and language arts programs. Based on the concepts of literature and language which the documents suggest, I aim to provide a context for the study of English which current curricula demand.

There are a number of similar emphases in the current ministry documents in both the provinces of B. C. and Ontario. The most striking change between current programs and those from the 60s is the shift from literature to language<sup>1</sup>. Today's Language Studies or Communications were once called Literature Studies, or English. The document guidelines for reading and writing programs do not distinguish among different kinds of language, nor between utilitarian and artistic uses of language. Literature is seen

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<sup>1</sup> Others have commented on this phenomenon of the movement from "literature" to "language" in more thorough, compelling ways than I do here. See Gutteridge, Don. (in press). Stubborn Pilgrimage: Resistance and Transformation in English Teaching in Ontario, 1960-1993. London, ON: The Althouse Press. Also, Bodgan, Deanne, 1981, 1991, 1992.

as a vehicle for thought and is used as a tool transferable along a continuum of reading purposes which range from the sports page of the newspaper to The Robber Bride. Competence in one language area, it is believed, ensures competence in another. The other use of literature in these documents is as a vehicle of thought, particularly social issues.

Literature can be used as a vehicle for historical or sociological thought, as a means of efficient communication, or as a symbolic mode useful for self-knowledge and expression. These uses can be divided into aesthetic and non-aesthetic uses of literature. Within the schools, through programs such as the Writing Process, Writing Across the Curriculum, and through the effects of what Willinsky (1992, pp. 31-32) calls “post-modern literacy” or a “post-modern regard” for text, the emphasis is increasingly upon functional language use, and upon a sociological interest in language. Such an emphasis is reflected in many contemporary curriculum documents. Thirty years ago literature lay at the heart of English education. Since then, sociological and linguistic interest in language, the combined influences of accountability characterized through a practical applicability, and more recently, the effects of post-modern deconstruction, have resulted in a shift of focus within the study of English from literature to language.

#### Literature as Efficient Communication

Writing is discussed in Evaluating Writing Across the Curriculum: Student Samples for the Writing Reference Set. Under the heading “Writing to Learn”, the document asserts that students

use writing to clarify their thinking, to share their thinking with others,

and to demonstrate their understanding. They understand and remember the information they represent in a new form, whether they create a list, a mind-map, a summary, a chart, a paragraph answer, or a poem.

Writing to learn involves students in changing the words or ideas of others in some way, such as: (writing) a dialogue between two parts of a mathematics equation; using an appropriate format, whether it is organization of text or a graphic (emphasis mine) (p. 6).

Writing a poem is undifferentiated from making a list. "Organizing text" (writing a story? compiling a table of contents?) is undifferentiated from making a graphic. This "democratization" of tasks is not helpful for the student who needs direction in order to become a better reader. It is also unhelpful for the novice teacher, who can only be confused by such things as a "dialogue between two parts of a mathematics equation." The purpose of English and language arts is, in part, to help children distinguish the form and function of different forms of discourse. Langer (1953, p. 213), as we have seen in the previous chapter, says that all writing which has artistic value can be understood by the extension of poetic conventions. It is hard to understand the artistic value of a mathematics equation. In a section of the document called "Writing for Self-Realization", the writing purposes are listed as "expressing opinions" and using a "personal voice." Without stating that the aim is "expressive writing" (Britton, 1970, Gutteridge, 1990) as opposed, for instance, to transactional or descriptive writing, the tasks are unnecessarily unclear. Also worrisome is the lack of a psychological basis for the claims made, and the lack of discrimination among rhetorical devices. The document's tendency is to collapse literature with other forms of discourse.

Language is treated as a tool transferable along a continuum of reading purposes. In its study of reading, the Ontario Ministry publication, Reading, Grade

6: A Report for Educators (pp. 5, 54, quoted in Cavanagh & Styles, 1992, p. 33)

says:

The materials used in the classroom should reflect the various forms that print may take. . . disappointing was the low use of multimedia materials and 'real world' texts such as newspapers." Reading materials should include literature, magazines, newspapers, advertisements, media scripts, computer screens, reference materials, the writing of other students, and non-fiction prose.

While the wide variety of reading sources and genres may be educational, the various purposes of the different documents must be clear. Once students have some control of literary convention, it is possible to critically examine other "print", but such activity must be an extension of the main task—teaching literary function and form by reading and studying literature.

#### Literature as Cultural Transmission

Literature is often assumed to be a vehicle or container of important historical, sociological or anthropological concepts, with the emphasis on the ideas the literature contains. In contrast to Plato's concern with form, literature is little more, within this formulation, than a vessel for thoughts, with scant attention given to style or emotive content. This concept of English (as subject) is found in many curricula, where, as part of the humanities, it is seen as being more akin to history or social studies, than as being one of the expressive arts such as music and drama. While I do not intend to argue literature's place within the curriculum, I believe it is important to understand that as a subject, while not consigned to the edges of the curriculum as the fine arts so often are, it is an expressive use of language which depends upon imagination and emotion for its effect. Through its interest in questions such as

“what if” and fantasy, “let’s pretend”, it extends its exploration to the periphery of human experience. In the current Ministry documents these features are not valued, and are mostly ignored.

In Everybody’s Schools: The Common Curriculum, literature is not mentioned in the ten elements which comprise the common curriculum. Instead, “language, communication and critical thinking” forms the title as well as the thrust of instruction in the area of English. The document says that “language is central to social, emotional and intellectual development” (p. 16) and that “language establishes links between one’s cultural and linguistic heritage and the surrounding community.” Literature is rarely mentioned, and only as a “reflection of the ideas, values and concerns of a society” (p. 16). Literature is the vehicle by which the culture is transmitted (p. 19) and the way other “times, places and people’s lives” are explored (p. 19). Literature does reflect, transmit and allow exploration of “other”, true, but is itself a particular form of discourse and an art form. As such it does more than the document’s verbs allow. Literature is more than a vehicle for thoughts.

The humanities are often judged in terms of the prevailing categories and procedures of the dominant rational paradigm which is science. Current educational trends do not indicate that we as educators understand the significance of the forms we choose, especially in the study of English. Literature’s uses are often unrelated to the particular ideas and information and sense of the world suggested by its conventions and styles. Literature as a vehicle for the discussion of social concerns is widespread. For instance, social studies and English are integrated in many British Columbia schools. This integration is partly in response to the Program documents (particularly the Intermediate Program) recently drafted by the British Columbia

Ministry of Education (1990). Typical of many reform initiatives, it lacks a clear account of the concepts which underlie the curriculum document; either the concept of integration or of social studies and English.

The “integration” movement is worrisome because when English is conjoined with social studies it becomes more firmly entrenched within the social sciences. There is no sense of its expressive qualities, and its kinship with the expressive arts such as dance, drama, music and visual arts. Literary studies as a discipline, or even as a valuable way of understanding the world, are undermined. Although (or perhaps because) the program documents are not prescriptive regarding integration, the schools and teachers implementing the program make theoretical assumptions about how these distinct subjects should be integrated, without perhaps fully appreciating their respective areas of concern or their underlying principles. My main concern is that English be recognized as a distinct area of study whose forms and conventions presuppose a certain view of the world and contain certain ways of posing and answering important questions. I do not suggest that social studies and English can or should not be integrated, but that English suffers an intolerable narrowing and distortion when relegated primarily to the service of social issues, or when it becomes little more than a platform for discussing current societal concerns.

Literature as a transporter of thought, whether it be social issues or cultural ones, or the Arnoldian sense of “the best that has been thought and uttered in the world” is obvious in language which implies literature’s usefulness as a transmitter or reflector of, or as a means by which we “appreciate” our heritage, ideas, values and concerns. Although our appreciation of literature may be more culturally inclusive than it was in the 50s, the fact that literature is associated with appreciation harkens

back to traditional concepts of the study of English. Rather than being a source of pleasure, or a cultural means of making and articulating personal and communal identity, literature has come to mean appreciating a heritage (which may or may not be yours). The closest the British Columbia document comes to valuing literature as a mode of discourse with particular forms and contents is when the document suggests literature be used for “exploring other times, places and people’s lives” (p. 19). Even here the content, and not how that content is constructed, is what is understood as “exploration.” The understanding that literature provides, and not the way it achieves its effects, is most valued. The document is limited by its literal use of aesthetic experience.

One can argue that good literature will always find its way into the classroom. This might be true, but it is not enough to rely on good sense, or the hope that teachers and librarians will take the time and effort to bring good stories, poems, dramas and children together. Furthermore, the uses of literature must be understood and articulated within curriculum documents—otherwise there is too much chance that literature will not be put to its best uses.

### Current Curricular Demands

In considering a role for fairy tales in the language arts curriculum, educators should be concerned with not which version of the tales is the right one, but what role fairy tales play in fostering literacy. What does our selection and presentation of literature offer children in terms of cognitive, emotional and imaginative development? How can we ensure that children learn the appropriate skills and modes of discourse to develop the capacities needed for them to become literate?



For me the Grimms' fairy tales form an integral, valuable part of children's literary education. I argue for their use as story models and as imaginative sources for exploring culturally and personally significant motifs and themes. This exploration is part of literature's larger role within a literacy program, which is to help children make moral and emotional distinctions, to become increasingly discriminating in their perceptions, and to articulate their thoughts and desires.

I begin by looking at how current literature programs use fairy tales and what assumptions about literature their curriculum strategies reveal. Although my examination of the curriculum documents is not exhaustive, my analysis is indicative of current trends in English and language arts instruction, and of the comprehensiveness of each book's view of what it means to be literate.

### A Glance at the Field

A survey of current titles in the professional literature suggests certain developments in the area of study called language arts. Titles such as Creating Classrooms for Authors: The Reading/Writing Connection (1988, Harste, Short & Burke), Towards a Reading-Writing Classroom (1990, Butler, Turnbull), convey the sense of a holistic approach to language arts: learning embedded in meaningful activity. Reading and writing are seen as being intricately connected, the one following from the other, with both contributing to the purposeful activity of the writer, or the more authoritative "author." Calkin's (1983) Lessons from a Child: On the Teaching and Learning of Writing, Cambourne's (1989) The Whole Story: Natural Learning and the Acquisition of Literacy in the Classroom, and the once influential, Writing without Teachers by Elbow (1973) stress the child as central to

the processes of literacy. What becomes apparent on examining these books is that their notions of literature and literacy are based on three influential camps which continue to struggle to provide a comprehensive understanding of English and language arts: the traditionalist, the progressivist and the socio-linguist. The traditionalist presence is evident where authentic, rather than contrived, books are used (such as Basal Readers), as well as where notions of critical audience prevail. Both these latter features are subsumed by progressivist notions that reading and writing need to be meaningful to children. Rather than reading's prime purpose being the mastery of certain skills, for example, progressivists believe the relevant skills will be acquired as a matter of course if the reading is purposeful and engages the child (a condition more readily attainable with trade books than Basal readers). The influence of traditional concepts of literacy is tempered by the dominant traditions of socio-linguistics and progressivism. I have chosen (on the basis of their use among language arts Instructors at Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, B.C.) to examine three publications, namely: Bringing It All Together: A Program for Literacy, (1990, Johnson, and Louis—Canadian), Creating Classrooms for Authors: The Reading-Writing Connection, (1988, Harste, Short, Burke—American), and Changing Stories (1984, Mellor, Hemming, Leggett—British).

#### Sources of Writing and Reading Models

The American publication, Creating Classrooms for Authors: The Reading-Writing Connection, (Harste, Short, & Burke, 1988) makes only two references to fairy tales, but it provides a theoretical model of the study of language arts which has emerged since writing process programs were popularized by educators

such as Graves and Calkins, and which are still widely used. At first glance, the most striking thing about this book is its use of the word “author” rather than the more colloquial “writer.” “Author”, etymologically linked to “authority”, and historically connected to ideas about western, patriarchal literature, suggests the creation of something that did not exist before. It connotes ownership. The OED variously describes author as: “a power to enforce obedience; a derived or delegated power; a power to inspire belief; and a person whose opinion is respected.” Johnson and Louis have forfeited the historical definitions of the word, preferring the more democratized “making meaning through any of the available communication systems. . . to achieve personal and social goals” (1990, p. 5). They also relate authoring to learning, stating that “learners must actively construct knowledge for themselves” (p. 5). It is because they take responsibility for the literacy process, the editors say, that children are called authors (p. 9). These two notions, meaning-making through literacy processes, and self responsibility for learning, are two dominant themes in their book.

The classrooms which are suggested by the descriptions in Authors seem to be places where reading, writing and thinking can occur. The authoring cycle, which is the major “curriculum strategy” of this book, starts with students’ “life experiences”. Through exercises and interventions such as uninterrupted reading and writing, setting up authors’ and editors’ circles, self-editing, and publication (as an example of “celebrating” authorship) students’ work is enriched and reshaped, becoming the life experiences and occasions for further reading, writing and related activities (Harste, 1988, p. 19).

Children arrive at school with well-developed learning strategies. These can

then be incorporated within the school's overriding curricular model. "Children have no place to begin a unit of study other than from what they currently know, perceive, and feel. Curriculum has no other place to begin than with children's current concepts and language" (p. 54). The program is driven by "littering" the classroom with print (newspapers, production centres, books) and the utilization of the multitude of "print" occasions (memos, invitations, requests, letters) called for in everyday life. Children do not just master the "multimodal" systems of literacy, but are encouraged to reflect on the processes themselves. "Discussions should centre around how they used language. . . what they learned about the communication system itself; and what they learned through its use" (p. 16). Such insight is understood to generate enthusiasm and motivation because when children "understand what they are doing here and now in the classroom relates to becoming a strategic user of written language for purposes of learning" (p. 52) their work will gain the kind of meaning and significance which Egan (1979, p. 91) calls "aliment." Egan says that knowledge becomes accessible when it exists within an organizational and meaning context which serves both that knowledge, and in a manner appropriate to the child-learner.

Authors says that classroom learning wedded to purposes provided by the world outside the classroom create meaningful conditions for learning. Meaningfulness is also pursued through communicating

for real purposes. If children engage in a muted form of the process, they come to understand what literacy is like under such conditions. Often "school literacy" is something quite different from "real literacy." It ought not to be. Functional activities allow children to experience literacy as it occurs in the world outside school (p. 11).

Another source of knowledge about the "world outside school" is available though literature.

Literature provides readers with an important way of learning about the world. Literature combines both knowing and feeling. Literature educates and entertains. It stretches the imagination, allowing readers to see their world in a new way and to imagine other possible worlds (p. 293).

The actual exercises surrounding the literary activities, however, provide little indication of the rich conception of literature described above. For instance, on the first day of the discussion of a text, “the teacher begins the discussion. . . by asking a broad question, such as “What was this story about?” or by asking students to “Talk about this book while I listen” (p. 295). The students are to read the literature, form discussion groups, list the issues they want to discuss, and decide as a group what they will prepare for more intensive discussion the next day. But neither theory nor direction is provided for the kind of questions which ensure meaningful discussion. Strategies included in other parts of the book, such as Literature Response Activities and Literature Logs can be incorporated into the Literature Circle (p. 296), but again, without a sense of the form and nature of literature, the educational value remains uncertain.

In some ways the activities described here echo those of the community of readers described in the previous chapter. In both instances, reading, writing and discussion occur. When the aesthetic is valued, and when literature is understood as a symbolic meaning system comprised of forms and conventions, literacy goals can direct the literacy program. When the emphasis is literature as “just one kind of literacy that students need to become proficient readers” (Harste, p. 293), and there is no mention of the kinds of knowledge literature provides, as distinct from the knowledge derived from “functional activities” (p. 11), and when even the meaning of “language” is unclear, then the educational goals do not seem related to literature

or literary language. And that is precisely the difference between “communities.” The Harste program is based on a process derived from the commercial world. Literary experiences must fit the mold, rather than shape the classroom experiences.

### Plot Profiles and Story Maps: Strategies to Bring it all Together

Bringing It All Together: A Program for Literacy aims to provide language instruction “that carries learning opportunities to a wide variety of children” (p. 9) and that takes place “within a series of intertwined cycles: fresh input from the teacher followed by increasing autonomy for the learner and decreasing teacher direction” (p. 30). The “intertwining” occurs at different levels; for example, increasingly sophisticated attention is given to texts. Once children are “armed with a repertoire of basic skills, the writer has a new purpose: to become familiar with a wide variety of written forms, knowledge gained initially by listening and later by reading. Learning to compose within the constraints of a given form is a major accomplishment for the novice” (p. 5). Much of the value of the book lies in the strategies for “learning the organizational patterns of stories, poems, expository and functional texts” (p. 9). Another “intertwining” is the “environmental” approach which creates situations where “genuine written communication is required”; situations in which “children rise to the demands placed on them” and through which “their language grows” (p. 5). This book, then, bases holistic language development on “real communicative situations” provided by an “environment” which includes message boards, orders for snacks, letters of complaint, notices to be sent home, and so forth. Also, citing Holdaway’s emergent reading continuum, the editors of Literacy suggest strategies for revealing structural frameworks of literature will give

children meaningful exposure to language at whatever point they are along the continuum (p. 8).

The activities centred on fairy tales in Literacy are used to teach about the fairy tale genre. Using a structural analysis approach in such activities as disseminating plots, it teaches the forms and patterns that compose fairy tales. Skills such as vocabulary building and increased comprehension are largely (significant) byproducts of the analysis.

The fairy tales used are ones familiar (or made familiar) to children. Snow White is presented in a section called “Lazy Letters” which, despite its playfulness, utilizes the student’s ability to summarize the main events of the story. The children are encouraged to imagine, by means of a multiple choice format with ridiculous options, Snow White writing to her father about the events that have transpired since she was abducted by her wicked stepmother. In the same section, Rumpelstiltskin is used to illustrate “word webbing”, in which students must map or connect “story words”, which require a literal understanding of the story with “thinking words”, which require inferring the author’s intentions or alternative meanings. For example, “story words” include: gold, spin, name, marry, miller, necklace, brooch, and first born child. The words the children are asked to connect these with are: liar, greedy, magical, boastful and desperate. The extension of this exercise is to help children think about connections among and between characters and events in a story, and to help them articulate abstract concepts.

Chapter Three, titled “Bringing It All Together”, stresses the importance of integrating of literature based on theme, archetype and pattern, though the editors’ “first choice for the focus of a literature unit” is a structural approach (using such

activities as plot profiles and story maps) whose appeal is derived from “delight in rhythm and pattern” (p. 95). Hansel and Gretel is used to illustrate plot profile, and as part of a unit called “Home is Best”, which involves recording the plot elements that move a story along its circular route back to its beginning point of home. In the case of Hansel and Gretel the children leave home, are lost in the woods, are captured, and so on until they are reunited with their father. Making the underlying patterns of stories explicit, also emphasized in the British series, may help children in anticipating and identifying patterns. Little Red Riding Hood (hereafter noted as LRRH to indicate the book, LRRH to indicate the character) and Snow White form part of another longer project on story mapping, called “The Problems of Getting There”, in which children have to reconstruct the heroine’s journey, noting where significant events occur. In the case of LRRH, her own house in the village and the grandmother’s house appear at either ends of a continuum along which LRRH meets the wolf. Snow White’s journey, the editors tell us, is more complex. Some points of reference (such as the Prince’s castle) are arbitrarily located, but once they are placed on a map, the children seem to know how to continue. The activities stimulate and incorporate a multitude of language skills, although skill development is not the central purpose of the activity.

What do all these activities add up to? As in Authors, there are lots of ideas floating around, but literacy education is not a grab-bag of ideas. While many of these activities can be incorporated into an educational framework, their utility as learning/teaching tools seems tenuous. It is not easy to see how “Lazy Letters” teaches anything meaningful about Snow White. The exercise does not seem to emanate from the story. There is no observable connection between traditional tale



and this adaptation. The powerful mythic themes are not used. As with Authors, the process (the tourist card format) is borrowed from the commercial world without ensuring its educational appropriateness. The task is fun, but if students' experience of the tale is limited to this, then the task is limited in its use as an educational tool. Many of these strategies do not transfer well to higher grades nor to a more complex story. For instance, when the spatial relationships among the story's events is even slightly complex (as in Snow White) the value of "story mapping" is dubious. Literacy does not bring "it all together." Rather, it offers a fragmented and puzzling approach about what it means to read and write and to encounter literature meaningfully.

#### Five Tales, Five Endings and Five Concepts of Gender

The British publication Changing Stories is not, as are the two already examined here, a book aimed at a comprehensive language arts or literacy program. Rather, it is a unit study of the fairy tales. However, it makes similar assumptions about literature as do the aforementioned programs. It uses a structuralist approach as a way of providing a basis for understanding similarities between as well as social implications of different versions of a fairy tale. Students can become aware that literary choices reveal a society's attitude toward children, and that conceptions of childhood have changed dramatically since the early 1800s. As well, through exposure to a variety of recitations or tellings, students can understand that fairy tales, though told in different ways, all tell the same story, thus providing literary continuity. Students gain a historical awareness of their literary roots and the constant, seemingly eternal, or as Frye says, "primary" human concerns.

Feminist scholarship is especially interested in the context in which a work is conceived and written and presented. Fairy tales afford a particularly interesting chance to study context between very different conceptions of childhood are offered. For example, the tales of Perrault and Grimm are vastly different in this regard. Changing Stories examines such changes, combining a folklorist's interest in compiling variants of a tale with the literary critic's interest in interpretation.

Five versions of LRRH (taken from Jack Zipes' 1969 The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood) are examined for the changes writers made "to suit their own ideas and to suit the readers they had in mind" (Changing Stories, p. 31). As students read the stories, they are to note the specific characteristics or behaviour of LRRH evident in each telling of the story, and who the projected audience is meant to be. Differences are suggested by the endings of the five stories (chronologically presented, starting with the story Zipes suggests is as close as text comes to orality). In this orally proximate version LRRH escapes the wolf by using her wits; in the Perrault version she is eaten; in the Grimm version she is eaten, then rescued; in the James Thurber (1939) version she takes out her automatic and shoots the wolf; and in the Merseyside Fairy Story Collective (1972) story, she stabs the wolf with her "great sharp knife", thereby saving both her and her grandmother. The authors of Changing Stories comment that the version closest to the oral sources presents LRRH as a bawdy, quick-witted lass who uses "not very polite" actions to "get clear" of the wolf and escape. The warning to be wary of strangers is not aimed at correct moral behaviour, but at self-preservation/survival. Perrault's 1697 version, the editors say, shows that LRRH isn't "very capable of being much help to anyone—not even herself. She is punished not because of her helplessness however,

but because she behaves very badly by talking to a stranger” (Changing Stories, p. 45). Grimms’ LRRH, the editors say, “provides a model of good behaviour and manners for young ladies” and “so that children reading it won’t be upset by a violent ending, the heroine is given another chance to think about how nice young girls should behave” (p. 45). In Thurber’s story, LRRH “is not tricked for a minute and takes direct action against the wolf” (p. 45). In the Merseyside version, LRRH has to “overcome her own fears” and “learn that she can be independent and rely on her own strength and abilities” (p. 45).

In their introduction, the writers of this book say that their project focuses on “English and Gender”, which their final comments on the LRRH unit make clear. Many fairy tales are “about girls (who) are weak and silly, and about boys who are brave and adventurous” because the “first collections of fairy tales for children were put together over a hundred years ago, when women and girls were supposed to be weak and helpless. . . and most of the editors who chose these stories were men.” The male bias regarding selection and printing of tales with weak heroines “over and over again, while the rest were almost forgotten” (p. 46) results, apparently, in the current inequity of gender roles in the tales we know best.

The interpretation that male-dominated publishing practice has given us the particular handful of tales which have become immortalized, or at the least, proverbialized, models of behaviour, is certainly questionable. The question behind this assertion, however, is interesting. Why do **these** tales continue to fascinate us? In my experience, asking students to name the fairy tales they know, the list is usually limited to seven or eight of the best known such as Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty and Snow White. McGlathery (1991, p. 187) says that the handful of stories that have

become popularized in this way have done so because each one is a carefully disguised depiction of a particularly thorny aspect of human desire. We tell tales, he suggests, to remind ourselves of the destructive potential of powerful desires. He explains why this cautionary LRRH, rather than a more overt story of a maiden and her animal suitor, has been unconsciously perpetuated to represent the dangers of

thinking of one's lover as a beast, or as beastly, (which) may make the encounter all the more exciting. Not surprisingly though, for us the proverbial fairy tale maiden confronted by a beast is not one of those with an actual animal suitor but Red Riding Hood, whose emotional situation is much more innocent in view of her tender age.

Within this purview, the fairy tales operate as veiled reminders of the power of sexual desire, and the need to direct those impulses toward the continuation of the human species. A tale such as LRRH is a suitable talisman, McGlathery suggests, because LRRH's innocence acts as a charm against the threat of illicit passion. Frye (1990, p. 43) says that literature is not so much about desire, but about our anxiety regarding its fulfillment.

And the longer we look at myths, or story-telling patterns, the more clearly their links with primary concern stand out. Human life being what it is, it is not so much the satisfaction of these concerns that are featured mythically as the anxiety about them not getting satisfied.

The primary concerns to which Frye refers include such things as food and other necessities related to bodily needs: liberty of movement, property, and sex, including for the propagation of the race.

With suitable guidance, Changing Stories can help students understand the social, historical contexts within which stories are conceived or adapted. Part of that awareness includes the gender messages immured in the tales, and the gender-specific and gender-appropriate behaviour the tales advocate.

## Traditional, Progressive, and Socio-linguistic Influences

Many of the strategies in the curriculum books discussed are derived from traditional, progressive and socio-linguistic notions about English/language arts. Progressivist notions of the value of the creative self and the importance of process, traditional notions of critical audience and the importance of “quality” literature, and the socio-linguistic concern about decoding textual meaning and ideological content form some of the main components of current literacy programs in Canada.

In these books, traditional views of élite audience and a canon of “high” literature are translated into democratic notions of working together to achieve common goals, while acknowledging the variety in literature as defined by genre and history, but defined also by gender, race and class. The emphasis on audience as an important component of the writing process indicates the value we attach to creating a classroom community which is mutually supportive and critical. However, there remains the question of the sort of audiences the children are urged to become.

Authors presents at least two conceptions: one a popular sense of audience as recipients of products, such as parents receiving a child’s invitation, or a class member receiving from another a thoughtful greeting on the message board. The other sense of audience is a critical one, reflecting the child’s attempts at communicating, so that when others perceive the intended meaning the child knows he or she has succeeded.

The world outside of school might be a healthy alternative to the idea of teacher as sole audience and arbiter of students’ work. Whether commercial or bureaucratic structures should be the dominant influence on English classes is another matter. Authors is not clear to what extent our focus should also be commercial or

literary—that is, concerned with the making and appreciating of literature. At one point such activity is called “school literacy” (Authors, p. 11) which is intimated to be of lesser worth than “functional literacy” with its supposedly progressive connections to the outside world. Ambiguity in the text’s messages is confusing to the reader.

The title, Creating Classroom for Authors implies Rousseauian notions about “the child as poet”, about the primacy of feeling, and about the nurturing and developing of the child’s expressive capacities. Although the structure of the program seems to facilitate writing and creative expression, the writing tasks centre on realistic concerns. There is little guidance on what the discussion of literature includes or how it proceeds or what the relationship between reading and writing is. There is minimal discussion about the nature of literature and the literary mode, leaving the reader unsure whether the curriculum model is driven more by a sense of a “production room” than by literary concerns (pp. 25-37). The title also suggests emulation of usual “writerly” concerns such as writing style, formal knowledge of poetic convention, story structure and so on. The “authoring cycle”, however, with its editing centres, consulting stations, and cyclic production schedules, evokes a newsroom. While those writing tasks that meet commercial and mass media needs can be broken into stages, writing, like the stories and poems produced, eludes instrumentalization. Writing often proceeds from the aesthetic pleasure of other works. English and language arts programs cannot ignore the creative aspects of language in favour of that which is more readily systematized.

Self-responsibility for learning is another prevalent idea in these texts, and one which can be traced to John Dewey (Hoogland, 1991). Dewey’s thoughts about the

connections of school to the larger economic and political society provide a background to understanding how sociological thought and utilitarian purposes have influenced the teaching of English whose main focus, over the last 25 years, has shifted dramatically from literature to language, from aesthetic purposes to utilitarian ones.

Education's role in promoting the student's will to learn and to become responsible for facilitating that learning is fundamental to Dewey's work. He says that authentic learning experiences occur at all stages of life and are those activities which students undertake out of their own compulsions and desires, activities which effect consequences. In order to utilize children's natural proclivities, says Dewey, educational experiences must centre on the powers and abilities children already possess, and the kinds of experiences appropriate to them. Dewey identifies those powers and abilities in much the same way the editors of Authors do, as activities starting from the familiar and the local in terms of both children's knowledge and their experience, expanding in ever-increasing fields of experience outward to embrace abstractions and foreign experiences. This is also evident in the children's writing in Authors that focuses on day to day activities and familiar childhood occurrences such as stubbing one's toe, visiting the dentist, or going to the nurse's room. The theme of responsibility for learning also occurs in Literacy, notably in a chapter called "Reaching Out", where Johnson and Louis suggest routines designed to teach elementary school children to apply learned concepts to new material, and to take "responsibility for their own learning."

Progressive notions also include, perhaps most noticeably, the concept of "real purposes." In linking school literacy to the outside world, the editors invoke

Dewey's educational theories about learning being continuous with a person's actual experience of the world. As miniature communities, schools provide the kinds of practical activities that concern society. And because the problems they tackle are real and pressing, they provide emotional involvement within the classroom and a social cohesiveness and contextual continuum with the society at large.

Johnson and Louis also interpret language use which is embedded within the "meaningful flow of everyday events" (p. 207) such as writing, for example, "real letters to real people for real reasons (which) is better than learning the form of a contrived letter to an imaginary person for no good reason" (p. 207). Egan (1979, p. 15) however, makes a strong case against a purely functional interpretation of what is meaningful to children. Egan says that what is immediate and known, that is, the daily events and circumstances of life, is not necessarily what is closest to children, who may be better able to understand or make sense of the world when they are imaginatively engaged with it.

Children's major intellectual tools and categories are not rational and logical but emotional and moral. This is not a casual nor insignificant difference. It means that access to the world must be provided in the terms of emotion and morality, or knowledge will be simply meaningless. . . . Our purpose is to connect the child's imaginative and vivid feeling and thinking to the wonders of the real world. . . .

Within Egan's framework, mastering the art of letter writing may involve writing a "contrived" letter to an imaginary person (a fairy tale character, Luke Skywalker, or a Ninja Turtle hero, for example) for "no good reason", which to the child may well be more "authentic" than writing to the "real" next door neighbours for the "real" reason of inviting them to the school social.

What becomes clear is that there is a dichotomy not only between educational



approaches (Dewey's "expanding horizons" perpetuated in Authors' versus Egan's educational model of "sense-making capacities") but between concepts of functional and imaginative language systems as routes to literacy. Within functional literacy, literature is little more than an idiosyncratic use of language, subservient to goals such as "reading a wide variety of materials, not just literature" (Authors, p. 107). This brings us to a significant problem with texts of this sort, namely, the levelling of language to a medium or a mean. Language is a powerful tool and, even when used for the most utilitarian functions, has the ability to denote and connote; to refer to, and to express the emotional framework surrounding the referent. But as literary discourse, that is, as personal and charged speech, language has the power to raise the linguistically facilitated paradigm of consciousness, and it is this aspect that is lost when "language" is reduced to an essentially neutral, largely cognitive, system of verbal techniques that are, in turn, reducible to strategies that transfer well. In the section called "Literature Circles", the editor/teacher of Authors writes

Although this article focuses on literature circles, we want to stress that children need to be involved in many extensive reading experiences [including] newspapers and magazines, to get them involved in reading widely. We wanted our students to be flexible readers who had strategies for reading a wide variety of materials, not just literature (p. 107).

The stress here is on generic skills, transferable across the curriculum. But if literature does not have anything particular to teach, then cannot journalism and communications courses do a more adequate job? Or, and I believe this is the case, literacy education must include not just the functional forms of language but the imaginative, emotive forms of language found in literature, and read and understood as cultural, symbolic forms of expression. The shift from language to literature—

while providing fresh insights—has also limited the educational uses of literature.

The curriculum must distinguish metaphoric discourse from other language forms.

The aesthetic must be valued so that literature, as a symbolic meaning system, can be taught for the meanings its forms and conventions allow.

The approaches discussed in this chapter are not without its benefits.

Sociologists, with their broad concern for language and communication, their attention to orality and the significance of conversation in the daily process of making meaning, and their assertion that dialects are to be valued as distinct expressions, challenged deeply entrenched views. The result of their work was an emphasis on the process of learning, and the creative significance of language.

Post-modern critics embrace these approaches. Sociological and linguistic assumptions underlie current feminist literary analysis, as seen in Changing Stories, where discernible attitudes and intentions are exposed. Part of the exposé includes the gender messages implicit in the tales, and the gender-specific and gender-appropriate behaviour the tales advocate. These critical approaches are beneficial to literary education, and when serving pre-established literary goals, are beneficial for students.

## CHAPTER SIX

## RESPONDING TO LITERATURE: ENTRAPMENT OR ENFRANCHISEMENT?

In this chapter I distinguish between two literary approaches: one whose priority is to uncover the ideologies literature perpetuates, and the other whose priority is aesthetic response to literature. The former stance asserts the importance of “reading” texts so that the “contradictions in what they say become apparent.” Post-modern theory such as deconstruction aims “to undo the very **author-ity** to which texts aspire” (Willinsky, 1992, p. 37). The second group contends that aesthetic response is the basis of literature studies. Personal response to literature leads to questions about the literary conventions which form the response, and questions about literary intent. One of the aims of the aesthetics group is to educate readers vis-à-vis the inner life of emotion and imagination, with personal growth the by-product of the insight and awareness literature provides. This is the kind of literature study which methodologies such as reader-response advocate.

## The Language End of the Continuum

It is exactly those features of literary discourse so valued by Abbs, Egan, Frye, O’Hear and others that raise the sceptical eyebrows of the post-modern deconstructionists. Far from appealing to the beauty (with its Keatsian connotation of truth) of literature, deconstructionism holds such beauty and its forms suspect. Rather than literature shocking its readers into **consciousness**, deconstructionism says that literature, especially through its emotive appeal, **lulls** readers into absorbing/accepting the conventions and cultural norms of a society.

Based on the works of such theorists as Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Lacan and Edward Said, and manifest in different cultural fields like architecture and advertising, deconstruction theory has been intelligently articulated for education by John Willinsky in his book The New Literacy (1990), and in his recent debate with Gutteridge in Our Schools, Our Selves (1992), about the role that post-modern and deconstructionist assumptions and procedures ought to play in English literature/language education.

While it might seem theoretically possible to uphold aesthetic values without diminishing the importance of addressing inequities of gender, class and race, recent deconstructive approaches to literature demand that we abandon our emotive, imaginative responses. This was recently demonstrated in Willinsky's (1992) assertion of the need for us to shed our naive notions about literature in order to determine the author's duplicitous intentions. His argument is neatly countered by Gutteridge's (1992) reply, in which he says that students' responses, however naive, are paramount in our pedagogical approach to literature, and that deconstruction and reader-response theory are inherently incompatible. This discussion parallels the dispute over the study of fairy tales. The loss of naiveté regarding the origins of the tales also means losing the chance to respond emotionally and imaginatively to them. It seems to me that reading literature in a prescribed critical context at the expense of the pleasures of the text involves a significant loss. I do not present either theory as a pedagogical base for the classroom but the discussion between the two scholars, between the two theories, raises important implications about aesthetic and non-aesthetic uses of language.

## Deconstruction Theory

Post-modernism, of which deconstruction theory is a scion, is a designation for art that is fundamentally self-reflexive, that is to say

art that is self-consciously art (or artifice), literature that is openly aware of the fact that it is written and read as part of a particular culture, having as much to do with the literary past as with the social present (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 1).

Deconstruction explicates and reveals literature's cultural embeddedness by raking a text's metaphoric associations for its denotative origins, and exposes them.

Deconstruction aims to examine all aspects of a text for their social implications, including our pleasure and the literary elements that give us pleasure. The emotional and imaginative elements of literature raise social, cultural and historical concerns.

Deconstruction asks, for example, the extent to which our conceptions and feelings of beauty or our desire for completion or fulfillment are socially mandated. Weddings that inevitably appear at the ends of tales are a good example. Do we read the marriages as social or as literary conventions? Is marriage a literary shorthand for closure, or a manipulative socializing tool? If we accept it as a convention of satisfactory closure, how many such occurrences until young readers begin to feel its normalizing weight? For deconstruction there can be no neutrality, no art for art's sake, no emotion or feeling without its cultural overtones. Certainly, it is impossible for any symbolic sense-making system to be free of its cultural context. For these reasons, connotative language (such as that in literature) is doubly problematic—as its aesthetic elements capture our hearts, its interpretive ones take on powerfully personal meanings. For deconstructionism art is just as suspect of manipulation as the commercial, industrial or political forces that determine our texts and our lives.

In The New Literacy Willinsky says that the texts that students read and study must be both personally and socially meaningful (p. 79). He interprets “personal meaning” as the reader’s right to choose books freely (p. 84) and “social meaning” as gender and class disenfranchisement. Although much could be said about “personal meaning” (its echo of Graves’ theme of student “ownership” of writing, for instance) I concentrate on “social meaning.” Willinsky says that social reading is one way in which literature’s role is supposed to “transform the world” (p. 86), that The New Literacy is itself a critique of meaning and authority in education. The program outlined in The New Literacy ensures that students are better prepared to “defend” the realms of meaning that they are interested in pursuing (p. 88). Students must read “their own way” into the “immediate culture” (p. 94) in which their lives occur.

### Reader-response Theory

There are a number of proponents of reading-response pedagogy, namely Rosenblatt (1978), Gutteridge (1983, 1990, 1991), Probst (1988), and Protherough (1983). Louise Rosenblatt, the theorist most often referred to by reading-response enthusiasts, says that reading is a delicate balance between reader and text, and it is the reader who decides, moment to moment, to attend to the text **efferently** or aesthetically (Gutteridge, 1992, p. 109). **Efferent** reading is reading for information—for instance, looking for social or gender constellations—or other non-aesthetic ways of interpreting. Aesthetic reading for pleasure in a moment-to-moment transaction with the story or poem and it includes culling images and pattern. Reader-response “trusts” that such pleasure will direct and instruct the “process” of our reading. Gutteridge (1990) has written extensively about aesthetic

reading and reading-response theory in the classroom, and has edited a series of Study-Guides to accompany novels for use in intermediate and senior classrooms.

Reader-response pedagogy stresses story-generated tasks, and invites students to assess, judge and use their own experience in their responses. It is based on developmentally-appropriate kinds of responses which build incrementally, so, for example, the initial narrative questions asked of a work give way over time to theme-based and interpretive questions. Social issues within the text are discussed, but within the context of the literature—it is how a writer talks about a particular issue, or how it is presented, which is important. Literary understanding must be in the context of its cohered form and content, or what Gutteridge calls a “whole-to-parts-to-whole experience.” He says that “aesthetic reading—even on a second, more reflective study-and-discussion—remains a whole-to-parts-to-whole experience” (1992, p. 103). In the study of literature

both teacher and student are bound by the same terms—questions and responses alike must be grounded in the text, must make sense of the text as existentially understood by students, and must be aimed at a further understanding of story (or poetic/dramatic presentation) **still within its aesthetic dimension**. Which means that any discussion of parts will still be governed by their relation to the whole, and external data (social, historical, cultural, ideological, literary-critical) must be used exclusively in the service of deep-reading the story (1992, p. 105).

Novels can be compared to other novels; they can be appreciated in their historical context, or they can be used as a basis of response for students' own aesthetic writing.

The three levels of response or three “readings” are described by Gutteridge (1990, p. 9). The first reading includes first impression prompts (either organizational or aesthetic) followed by rhetorical questions (second reading) and

oral-thematic questions (third reading). When reading a story we need first to become aware of its effects, and second, to begin to examine how the text creates its effects. How has the author used the conventions of suspense or irony (for example)? The reader might then look at the issues imaginatively embedded in the text. It is not just what is said but how it is said—one cannot be determined without the other. I examine this phenomena in detail in Chapter Seven which deals with The Golden Bird.

#### Willinsky/Gutteridge Debate

Gutteridge takes particular offense at Willinsky's "deconstructed" interpretation of Harper Lee's novel, To Kill A Mockingbird. Willinsky (1992, p. 39) offers an interpretation in terms that present it as obvious, uncontentious, and defensible that

. . . Harper Lee, writing in the late fifties during years of the desegregation fights, was putting together an eloquent apology for this earlier racism. . . was laying the scourge of racist behavior on the backs of what are pointedly referred to as 'white trash.' We might look at how, by writing this book, she was redeeming the virtues of a few liberal figures, principally Atticus Finch, great white father to a new breed of a noble but poor gentry made up of educated, professional southerners.

Gutteridge objects to such a narrowly prescribed interpretation on the grounds that grade 10 students would find it bizarre and would have to receive it from the teacher in a lecture format. The narrow focus of the interpretation prevents other pleasures of the story from being enjoyed. Subtleties such as irony, humour and character growth are literary conventions and experiential pleasures and insights worth examining in the book. It appears that Willinsky's agenda for the literature



classroom, and for the “thoroughly post-modern students of literacy” is that “the lessons must push on past the personal response to an understanding of how the text works the reader, the classroom, and the world” (Willinsky, 1992, p. 39). This worries Gutteridge. He says that besides showing the incompatibility of post-modern deconstructionist with reader-response theories, it delegitimizes students’ “responses to the aesthetic impulses of the text and the gentle nudging towards sharing and comparing” (Gutteridge, 1992, p. 98). However naive student responses are, they must not be supplanted by imposed interpretations, however sophisticated. The critical stance should not denigrate the emotional self. Gutteridge (p. 94) writes

So here is the impasse, the contradiction in practice, the breakdown of praxis. If **any** prior interpretation is signaled in **any** way by the teacher as being privileged or correct, bearing as it does that stamp of authority and its bullying legitimation, then subsequent calls for open response to characters and events in the novel (or the whole design of it later on) will result at best in distorted “personal” views and at worst bogus ones.

Further, if any interpretation **outside of** the students’ responses or **external to** the unfolding, mediated discussions in class is introduced at the end of a first or second reading, then its purpose must be other than to deconstruct the text as a means of de-sentimentalizing prior, freely-offered personal responses. If not, then such responses—entailing, as I have indicated, deep psychological and ethical attachments—will **a posteriori** be debased. For having been asked to offer up legitimate, uncontaminated (naive) responses, students are now invited to confess to naiveté and get on with the real work of discovering just how the novel—with its risky, manipulative, aesthetic, intertextual power—momentarily beguiled them.

Gutteridge argues that reader-response offers opportunity for students to re-assess their initial responses, and to broaden and contextualize literature historically and ideologically in combination with affective readings. However, says Gutteridge (p. 98), we must depend upon “the story itself and its initial aesthetic impact to provide both the motive and the agenda for students’ unmediated, expressive

commentary.” Some academics and educators would point out, myself among them, that there is no such thing as unmediated commentary—each word we speak carries personal bias. The society of the classroom, and the social act of sharing literature are cultural contexts which, in part, determine students’ responses. As well, our aesthetic responses—our emotions and imagination—are also “received” interpretations.

Both Willinsky and Gutteridge desire that students be enfranchised. What is required then is to explain the point and value of the route chosen to achieving this. As long as our educational task as teachers is to help students become more conscious as human beings, through gaining a broader understanding of what we know as we make finer and more contextually relevant distinctions, as we discriminate in subtle ways, becoming articulate in our dialogues, then we need to ask whether we will achieve this through imposing upon our students laudable, but nevertheless imposed interpretations on the literature they read, or whether a less prescribed approach should direct our inquiry. Gutteridge advocates, through a developmentally structured route, gaining knowledge and proficiency in the pleasures of literature. Teaching students about literary conventions and their effects helps them become more aware of literature’s (manipulative) strategies. Every act of reading a novel is submission to a sort of manipulation—we agree to enter the imaginative world of the story for the duration.

Willinsky’s route is to “push on past the personal response to an understanding of how the text works the reader, the classroom, and the world” (1992, p. 95). Willinsky (pp. 35-36) shows that the “text has become the central tool for understanding how the world is put together” in that “the word” lies at the heart of

the transmission culture of electronic technology. Post-modern thought has much to say “about the relationship between text and the world, about how the world, for us, is little more than text.” Willinsky suggests that our print-saturated culture, in using text in advertising, clothing, design and art, conveys our societal values and beliefs in what he calls the “textualization of our understanding” (p. 37). He says that our culture is itself an example of the self-reflexiveness of our post-modern experience and the ironic, seemingly detached, point of view suggest that “the search for truth about our lives” is, after all, “just writing.” In other words, language is just one more story about us.

But literature is not just more words—it is a specific use of language.

Literature, as I have shown, has something to say about human experience, and has forms to say it in. The constructed, artificial nature of human culture, which “cannot be grounded in some non-textual, extra-human sphere nor in some secure inner soul of human certainty” (Willinsky, p. 37) does not mean we cannot speak from our experience. Awareness of our subjectivity and the nature and limitations of our language does not restrict us to meaningless babble.

### A Context for Criticism

When criticism of the Grimms does not begin with a comprehensive or inclusive enough question, when critics circumscribe all the tales’ matter within the domain of gender, we do well to question the assertions of those critics. Frye (1990, p. 27), in speaking about literary criticism (“the theory of words and of verbal meaning”), says

Many critics today are still unwilling or unable to get past the

ideological state in dealing with literature, because they are less interested in literature than in the relation of literature to some primary ideological interest, religious, historical, radical, feminist or whatever. In such approaches literature is subordinated to something else which by definition is more important and urgent.

Perhaps the most important context of literary study is commitment to the text.

Gutteridge (p. 105) says

both teacher and student are bound by the same terms—questions and responses alike must be grounded in the text, must make sense of the text as existentially understood by students, and must be aimed at a further understanding of story (or poetic/dramatic presentation) still within its aesthetic dimension. Which means that any discussion of parts will still be governed by their relation to the whole, and external data (social, historical, cultural, ideological, literary-critical) must be used exclusively in the service of deep-reading the story.

Our opening questions must be inclusive enough to allow for literature's aesthetic and non-aesthetic features. Premature discrimination—a rigidly cognitive, intellectual approach, for instance—shuts out the possibility of an emotive response, a response of the body. Within arts education we need to learn from our own responses, comparing our subjective experiences with others. Education of the senses and of our shared collective understanding of human experience—what O'Hear calls a "shared subjectivity"—is possible through literature.

As Gutteridge says, students' responses to literature are not something to "get past" or "get over." Our feelings and thoughts about a story can lead to meaningful questions about its content and creation. So aesthetic response is valuable in gaining insight about the subjectivity of our responses, as well as valuable in directing our inquiries into the literature.

## Ideological and Sociological Issues Within Literature

Literature is amenable to demonstrating the constructedness of our experience by imposing its own shape and pattern on the chaos of our emotional and social existence. The social sciences are interested in literature's subjective and imaginative expression of human experience. A novel does not usually give just one point of view but several, showing one character being influenced in different ways or speaking in different voices, or giving the thoughts, feelings, actions of several characters, as I will show in the fairy tale The Golden Bird.

Current instruction offered by way of the "post-modern regard" of contentious issues of race and gender in literature, as we see in Willinsky's reading of To Kill a Mockingbird, is not very different from the sociological feast of the 60s when every story and poem was an invitation to debate hotly contested subjects such as the U.S. presence in southeast Asia, euthanasia, abortion, and the cold war. Education is not a pre-selected political struggle, though theorists and critics have a predilection to convert educational disciplines into ideological weapons. Today the topics, terminology and methods are somewhat different, but the intention is the same as twenty-five years ago. Literature as a vehicle for thought or as an obligation to political goals is neither what drives literature nor what should drive English classes (I discuss this in Chapter Six, about the tale Little Red Riding Hood). Neither is our main purpose in literature to know ourselves, nor to become better citizens, nor to learn about our history, but to understand the nature and form of the story impulse within the context of us as individual citizens in a certain historical, social setting.

## Playing the Game

Our awareness of the ideological embeddedness of our culture and its effects on us should make it all the more possible to enjoy literature. The process of education is one of becoming increasingly aware—and this consciousness (of a subject, of the manipulations of the advertising industry, of fairy tale conventions) can increase rather than decrease our pleasure. Thus we can see the mythic foundation of the soap opera: the appeal of being the hero, or of being loved perfectly. We can catch the narrative hints which forecast the outcome of a story. While we strive to become literate (conscious of symbolic sense-making systems) rather than remain naive, our emotional involvement in a story is an essential part of literary education, part of the education of the senses, of our subjective awareness which O’Hear talks about.

Rather than sending children into a story with their “dukes up” and arrayed in critical armour to protect them from the hazards of emotional involvement I would like children to be prepared to find their way in the world by building their feelings of confidence in themselves as readers, and relying on their intuition. In order to accomplish this, they need to distinguish among their feelings and emotions, and be able to check them against the experiences of others. This is possible partly through the study of literature which has at its heart the human predicament.

Literature offers us knowledge about ourselves and our place in the world. Part of this knowledge is that culture is a game, one that requires a great deal of consciousness in order that we not be manipulated or victimized. But in order to become fully human, we must also, in the usual manner of games, unselfconsciously and joyfully play. This can be intellectual play, but even intellectual achievement

resonates in the body, making it undesirable to separate intellectual or cognitive pleasure from physical pleasure. Literature can help us gain the necessary insight to protect ourselves from a manipulative world, while providing a form of play. The classroom is a much safer place to learn this rather than the commercial world “out there.”

Elements of post-modernism such as awareness of imbedded ideology and cultural contingency should be part of a high school student’s curriculum (and as Gutteridge points out, with some elements best taught in the subject of English, others in political science, sociology, history and media). When these elements become part of the English curriculum, however, it is literature’s inherent forms and intentions which should direct its study. Privileging the dialectic over the poetic (and thus emulating the world’s sense of literacy and the production of that literacy) is not the best use of literature nor the literature classroom. Gutteridge (1992, p. 105) advises that the deconstructed view be presented as a

received and singular interpretation, to be responded to (by choice, I hope) by students who have had. . . ample opportunity to formulate and test out their own “complete” interpretations. That is, students who have been protected and nurtured by a reader-response pedagogy whose cardinal intention is to implicate students as fully as possible in the pleasures and uses of literature.

### Concept of Literacy

It is obvious that we need to rethink our conception of literacy, particularly literature’s function within literacy development. Is literacy achieved through acquisition of a wide range of transferable skills, or through immersing oneself in, and thereby gaining an understanding of, the literary mode of discourse? Because our

task as educators is not just to try to define it, but to explain the point and value of the directions chosen to obtain literacy, our questions must concern the elements of a literacy program, our vision of the ideally literate individual or society, and how these can be integrated effectively in a classroom situation.

The assumptions about literature underlying the documents dealt with in Chapter Four (Harste, Johnson, and Mellor) suggest a conceptual lack, a disregard for the expressive, aesthetic aspects of literature. The authors' failure to clearly articulate what is unique or distinctive about poetic or metaphoric language, with reference to such things as aesthetic intention and qualities in terms of style, diction, and the fittingness of form and content, exposes these elements to misinterpretation with the subsequent devaluation of literature. If the concept of literacy, as stated in Authors, is to understand and participate in the "meaning maintenance and meaning generation potentials of the various communication systems" which "support and motivate learning" (p. 37), then it seems clear we need to ask whether this preoccupation with immediate utility is an appropriate educational objective, or whether our vision of educated students is based upon more comprehensive grounds. Oakeshott (1989, p. 71) presents learning as an adventure in human understanding, set apart from the functional necessities of the day to day:

Education is not learning to do this or that more proficiently; it is acquiring in some measure an understanding of a human condition in which the "fact of life" is continuously illuminated by a "quality of life." It is learning how to be at once an autonomous and civilized subscriber to human life.

While Authors stresses the importance of our being exposed to a wide variety of communication systems, it is more valuable, in light of rapidly changing technologies, to educate students to be able to adapt in meaningful ways to the changing realities of



commerce and industry. What constitutes a viable method of production today will not tomorrow; the skills applicable to today's market will be obsolete tomorrow. An education concerned with providing for basic human needs, which are constant—and which include such things as the transmission and expression of our culture—should be embraced as a constant in any projected change.

When the experience of literature is limited to textual analysis and ideological concerns, however, then linguistics and sociology will better serve these purposes than literary approaches. When writing is valued mostly as a communicative tool, and as a record and expression of realistic, rational purposes, and when the classroom is structured to model “communications systems”, then journalism or technology studies might serve the students just as well. But if literary language is to be distinguished from functional language, then its intentions, forms and conventions must be differentiated from the pragmatic communication of information. If educated students are to be distinguished from those who are merely technologically or functionally adept, then we must turn to another educational model, or reconceptualize the current one.

What does this mean for the classroom, for the community of readers and writers? It means that, rather than transposing an external community model—such as that of the bureaucratic production room—our school literary community should emanate from the inherent structures and nature of literature itself, as outlined above. I have tried to show that language itself is not generative, nor are communication systems “meaning generation potentials” (Authors, p. 37) in the way that literature is, where one text

reminds us of another text; our conversations with others about texts

lead us to see connections with still other texts, and with conversations about texts, with aspects of our lives and our knowledge of lives of others throughout history. In these ways, all literature and all experience of literature is tied together, a network of ideas and stories, images, and emotions. Every time we read a text or discuss our response to a text with someone else, we become part of that network, learn more about it, and, in our own response and conversation, add something to it. All readers and all people who discuss their reading are in the process of making literature, of making it meaningful to themselves and to others (Nodelman, 1992, p. 13).

A literary model for the English class should emphasize the nature of reading as a creative force that brings people together to compare, discuss, dramatize, write about or film our experiences. It is generative to the extent that it invites comparison with other texts, with aspects of our lives and the lives of others before us. These creative relationships promote the development of an ever more sophisticated, more self-reflexive consciousness and, as Nodelman points out, we add or contribute to our culture through our responses to it.

As we have seen, responses within the poetic mode are different from responses within other language modes, in that fantasy and reality co-exist, and “ordinary consciousness is only one of many possible psychic elements” (Frye, 1990, p. 22) which comprise our responses. Thus, stories depend “on a half-voluntary, half-involuntary, integration of the conscious will with other factors in the psyche, factors connected with fantasy, dreaming, let’s pretend, and the like” (Frye, 1990, p. 99). The very act of reading a story is participating in its fantasy; we assume its conditions to be true for the duration of the story. How can we extend our participation with imaginative literature into imaginative responses, and of what educational worth is this?

## Stories as Original Models for the Active, Unrestricted Examination of an Idea

While Authors is structured to emulate “the way writers write”, Paley offers quite a different “authoring” model, even though “authoring” is not her stated intention. Her interest is in understanding how children use fantasy play to comprehend and make sense of the world. As with learning to talk and walk without formal instruction, children intuitively act out, and give shape and pattern to their fantasies.

Children are born knowing how to put every thought and feeling into story form. If they worry about being lost, they become the parents who search; if angry, they find a hot hippopotamus to impose his will upon the world. Even happiness has its plot and characters: “Pretend I’m the baby and you only love me and you don’t talk on the telephone.” It is play, of course, but it is also story in action, just as storytelling is play put into narrative form (1990, p. 4).

The shape which fantasy and thought take, according to Paley (1990, p. 6), is story, be it dramatized through play or story-telling, writing or acting. In fact, without a dramatizing element, thoughts and fantasies are but disconnected and fleeting dreams.

But when a concept is dramatized,

the child finds the natural method for concentration and continuity and satisfies the intuitive belief in hidden meanings. This is why play feels so good. Discovering and using the essence of any part of ourselves is the most euphoric experience of all. It opens the blocked passages and establishes new routes. Any approach to language and thought that eliminates dramatic play, and its underlying themes of friendship and safety, lost and found, ignores the greatest incentive to the creative process.

Egan (1986) also argues for utilizing the dramatic element in teaching with young children, especially the use of binary opposites (such as good/evil, aloneness/community, lost/found) to highlight what is potentially “human”, and therefore engaging, in any lesson. Paley shows that literary creativity does not mean twenty

minutes set aside each day for drumming up journal entries about going to the dentist, or losing a tooth (though both are valid topics) but rather that creativity occurs in a classroom where fantasy and play, in many forms and contexts, builds communicative bridges among all the participants. For Paley, the purpose of imaginative play is not the cultivation of literary talent, but fostering students' growth in terms of emotional, imaginative and cognitive capacities. Creativity is not a matter of shaping brainstormed ideas into verse (or worse) but rather of establishing a relationship and an ethos which will promote experiment, talk, enjoyment, inquiry, concentration, seriousness, collaboration, and a clearer and more adequate self knowledge. While Paley's (1990, p. 5) particular classroom model is based on children ages three to six, her notions about the constituents of a vibrant classroom are concerned with accessing a wider collective imagination:

Once we push deeply into the collective imagination, it is easier to establish connections and build mythologies. The classroom that does not create its own legends has not traveled beneath the surface to where the living takes place. The fantasies of any group form the basis of its culture; this is where we search for common ground.

In this thesis I argue that we can and should allow and encourage fantasy play to inform children's writing and other educational ventures in all grades. Some curriculum manuals, while purporting to encourage imaginative engagement, promote instead a kind of pseudo-literary model, in which literary examination is restricted to either real-world concerns manifest in a story or questions that hinge on the story frame—or, in the case of creative writing, questions which encourage realistic replication of day-to-day events. Two aspects of the language arts curriculum, reading and writing, when taught in this way, are but veiled vestiges of “reading for content” and “traditional comprehension questions” usually disparagingly linked with

notions of traditional education.

In Paley's classrooms, storytelling and acting are social phenomena "intended to flow through all other activities and provide the widest opportunity for a communal response", where "the individual imagination plays host to all the stimulation in the environment and causes ripples of ideas to encircle the listeners" (Paley, 1990, p. 21). Paley recounts a situation in which a preschool child begins to dictate her stories to the teacher. Lilly's first story, a single sentence, "The daddy turned off the television" is elaborated the next day:

'Lilly didn't want to take off her pajama shirt. That's what I want to say.' After a week, a babysitter enters her story.

'Mashie. There was Mashie. She has black hair. And Mommy and Daddy. And Lilly.'

The next story sounds almost the same, with one urgent addition.

'There was Mashie. And there was Mommy and Daddy. And there was Lilly. And the mommy stays.'

By the end of the month, the effects of society and magic can be seen.

'There was a monster. He's not bad. And Katie is the mother. We need a baby. We need a daddy too. That's Edward. And he weared a tie. I'm the little girl with a cape. And she goed somewhere.'

Lilly's stories have a new purpose: to leave behind the other real world and invent disguises that promise more control. Her stories will now resemble play. . . the patterns and incentives arise from within (1990, p. 9).

There is a subtext of abuse in this story which makes us prick up our ears. How teachers respond to this issue forms a separate discussion. It must be made clear that writing classes are intended to provide children with language with which to articulate their needs, wishes and desires and not to make children give up their secrets. The "society and magic" to which Paley refers are, in effect, the literacy education of this little girl. Lilly's personal urgency (the spontaneous, internal nudges of elusive experience) give shape to her literary environment of stories and play. In turn, the literary environment supplies the forms for her expression. Lilly's work is charged

with emotion, which provides the impetus and motivation for the artistic struggle. What starts as the stark and unadorned creation of one character called “daddy”, slowly evolves into a cast of characters whose desires and intentions create a plot. When Lilly says “We need a baby”, for example, she is responding to the demands of plot. As well, protagonist and antagonist are emerging. At this point the likely candidate for antagonist, the monster, is quickly qualified as “not bad”, as if Lilly or the story cannot yet entertain or support “badness.” Likewise, the likely protagonist, “the little girl with the cape”, does not just replicate LRRH’s costume<sup>1</sup>, rather Lilly is empowered through association with the fairy tale character, and so is moved to act. We read “She goed somewhere.” The implication is that, in the story at least, this little girl isn’t going to sit down and take “it.” This illustrates art’s ability to offer alternative visions of self and situations. One suspects that if Lilly continues to probe her inner drama through her response to literature, then Lilly will be more fully empowered to choose to become “the little girl with a cape” that “goed somewhere”, or to choose another costume, another persona. Lilly has embarked upon the writing process and her progression through literary conventions and intentions demonstrate the same progression that results in finished literary works of art.

Literature within Paley’s classroom is not used to create authors, however, but to provide the forms, motifs and themes by which urgent and elusive impulses can be articulated. Such urgencies are inextricably connected to the creative process. As Abbs (1982, p. 41) points out, “the release of impulse, then, forms the first phase of

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<sup>1</sup> While conceivable that Lilly does not intend a literary allusion to LRRH, the context of Paley’s classroom supports my interpretation. Fairy tale characters, as well as other story and media heroes and heroines, inform the casts and structures of much of the Paley’s students’ play.

the creative process. There is a stirring of the psyche which through expression desires clarification and integration.” The impulsive life, based in the perceptual and cognitive processes through which we make sense of our experience, has an “inherent creativity and a kind of ‘natural’ art”, says Abbs, “a symbolic life within our biological nature” (1982, p. 35). The creation of art depends upon the dialectic between this emergent process and the inherited forms of culture. Abbs counters the progressivist notion of self expression (giving voice to our impulses, however imaginative they may be) as an end goal of literary education, because, without representative embodiment, the creative impulses tend to be limited and opaquely private. “Paradoxically, it is partly through the active recreation of symbolic forms that the individual comes to find his own voice”, says Abbs (1982, p. 5). The second phase of the artistic process, then, is the ordering of our internal experience into culturally meaningful symbolic expression, which, as we saw in Lilly’s story, is also the refinement of it. If there is no traditional knowledge, there can be no furtherance of its forms and genres, nor can there be good models with which to work. The creative process needs for its development both a bed of inherited culture and a critically alert and responsive audience<sup>2</sup>.

Lilly’s imaginative response recorded here, the “half-voluntary, half-involuntary, integration of the conscious will” (Frye, 1990, p. 99) with the organizing framework of drama, and the opportunity for communal response and literary input are ways of looking at the growth of individual consciousness, sensual and cognitive

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<sup>2</sup> Conversely, tradition unconnected to the informing impulse of emotion is potentially sterile. At another point in literary evolution, I might have argued for progressive notions that counter a concept of English as elevated culture and inaccessible canons. The fluctuating emphases among the informing traditions perpetuate lively discussion.

dexterity, and how a community of writers and readers is created.

### A Role for Fairy Tales

The fairy tales have been used as models of story patterns, as word puzzles, and a means by which to consider authorial and societal intention and design. As well, we have seen how a fairy tale image (LRRH) is used to distinguish and empower a character in a little girl's story. These critical and creative uses become meaningful when they form part of a balanced literacy program. It is not my intention here to provide a comprehensive evaluation of distinguishing features of fairy tales but merely to offer some comments regarding the way fairy tales are meaningful within the concepts presented above.

We want children to define their own relationships, to explore alternate versions of self, to pose and strut and imagine the best possible scenario for their lives. Like the editors of Authors, we want children to "author" their own stories. To that end, literature distinguishes what human beings actually care about from what they merely belong to by birth or by circumstances. Fairy tales, with their optimism and happy endings, show us the world we want and the kind of people we want to be. They are, however, also unsettling and provocative, and while these features are part of their artistic merit, they have also ensured the continuation of our troubled but fascinating relationship with their written forms for well over a hundred years. Pedagogically important is the fact they do not strand their readers. Besides happy endings, fairy tales provide the motifs, themes, and structures for dealing with the potentially troublesome issues they raise. Happy endings, not exclusive to fairy tales, but definitive of them, makes this genre a safe place for children like Lilly to explore



their fears and anxieties. This is important for all of us, including feminist critics, because it shows what is genuinely feminist writing: children using the old tales to shape their own stories. When impulse is curbed to suit a particular ideology, a restricted text will most likely result. Good literature, rather than good ideology, is essential in eliciting student response, feminist or otherwise.

The discernible story frame of the tales, as we saw in Literacy, provides a schema by which to anticipate and examine other stories. The binary opposites are used dramatically to enable children to make sense of the tales, and to explore aspects of their own moral lives. The mystery of fairy tales (that perfect balance of detail and suppressed detail) make them into landscape in which children can explore their best versions of themselves. "What if others knew how beautiful I really am? What if others knew how brave I can be?" Paley and Egan have shown that in dramatizing a concept (and writing is a form of dramatic play) children imbue a task with significance. They "make it their own" as current jargon has it. They are motivated to concentrate, to find continuities and to search for meanings of which they were previously unaware. Of equal importance to the release of anxious impulse, as Abbs has shown, is the crafting of the initial impulse into artistic response. The outpouring of emotion is therapeutic. Using the outburst as impetus to inform and shape a response, is art. The good literature (and oral stories, songs, and other genres) of our various traditions compels response. A rich, inclusive literary heritage is intricately connected to the progressive need for expression. The educational goal for this dialectic between impulse and informing traditions is neither therapeutic nor artistic; both are byproducts of the greater goal to create a community of students whose thoughts and lives are enriched, and whose ability to say what they mean is increased

through emotional, imaginative and cognitive participation with literature, and with others in a literary context.

### The Need for Standards

A tidy conclusion would state that when a curriculum aims to educate for, and by means of, the rich study of human life offered through English and language arts programs, where, among other modes, literary discourse is valued for its ability to teach children to be increasingly discriminating and perceptive, and thus knowledgeable about self and world, then students would emerge imaginative and literate. Conversely, when the model of instruction is utilitarian and pragmatic, when imaginative texts are employed for unimaginative means, then students would in turn perpetuate those lower-order values. But if we value imaginative responses, how do we go about producing a curriculum in which they are valued and understood? Egan (1988, p. 151) asks

how can we design a curriculum and teaching methods that will ensure that the early engagement with disciplined knowledge will be of a kind that fuses knowledge with the individual's imaginative life and serves to further stimulate and develop the imagination?

It is not my intention to outline Egan's comprehensive suggests at this time, nor to offer a specific or comprehensive curriculum in which the notions of literature as discussed here may be satisfactorily and practically implemented. It seems apparent, however, that the onus is on literacy educators to show what purposes, skills, media, knowledge, and qualities of imagination are deemed important in order that one become literate, and how such factors relate to the progressive development of capacities for the expression and critical appreciation of ideas and feelings in literary

forms. Educators must also account for the importance and use of our literary traditions, and for the distinctiveness of the literary mode of discourse compared to other, more functional uses of language.

The elementary school programs discussed here approach literacy from different perspectives and favour particular language uses and critical modes. Authors and Literacy, to varying degrees, characterize language acquisition as facility in a broad range of language uses, many of which serve functional roles. Within these books, critical analysis of literature involves discerning inherent patterns, which, while providing a framework in which to anticipate new material, also teaches basic analytical skills. Both manuals stress the integration of meaningful, holistic activity and the acquisition of skills and useful strategies. Their failure to clearly articulate the role of literature, and the form and purposes of literary discourse, however, renders their respective conceptions of literacy incomplete, and open to misinterpretation.

The progressivist and socio-linguistic notions which have been instrumental in forming these teaching manuals must be set into the larger framework of conceptions of literature and literacy and educational goals. For example, the notion of children as “authors” is open to misinterpretation unless it is grounded in an understanding of our educational purposes, be that genuine encounters with others, the fostering of students’ growth in terms of articulation, or the refinement of their ability to make moral and emotional distinctions. To this end, curricula and accompanying documents need to be balanced with the need for standards (our attitudes toward children revealed in the literature we deem appropriate for them), the need for the critical evaluative skills of literary comparison and analysis, the need to observe

literary continuity through mythic themes and images, and the need to appreciate literature as a distinct mode of discourse which engages our imaginations and emotions, and by which we are motivated and guided in our response.

Willinsky's goal to read stories for their inherent ideologies is undeniably a valuable exercise. But while deconstruction helps us discern what we read, it cannot set the standard for our literary experience. The representation of gender and race relations (two aspects of the ideological project) within texts are two aspects of interest and importance for us. Also, does the achievement of feminist goals of social and political emancipation begin with providing children with a politically correct language and format, or with imaginative literature which teaches them to make distinctions, to recognize and name, and to conjoin their own imaginings with those of the story? I do not mean to diminish the seriousness of feminist claims regarding the tales, but I do question their methods and their underlying assumptions about how children can best be educated to become literature individuals.

Deconstruction theory reveals the emotional and imaginative elements which are configured socio-historically. Willinsky's theory recommends that students move beyond aesthetic response to critical analysis. This, I believe, limits the use of literature to its value as a reflection of power struggles in the **real** world, rather than understanding the text as the site of that struggle. Reader-response theory says that understanding the struggles inherent in literature and exposing its manipulative strategies is what literary studies ideally lead to. But awareness of cultural embeddedness does not mean that we must teach only deconstructive approaches to literature, or even teach them first. Reader-response theory teaches that engagement with the issues contained in a work of art "almost always serve to reinforce the

emotional ties and affective understandings of the literary text itself” (Willinsky, p. 92) and any discussion of parts will still be governed by the whole. It is possible to be a conscientious person and still enjoy literature. I will next look at the ways that the Grimms’ tale Little Red Riding Hood can be enjoyed, adapted and criticized.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

REAL "WOLVES IN THOSE BUSHES": LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD  
AS ANTI-SEXIST LITERATURE OR "JUST PLAIN" LITERATURE

In this chapter the discussion focuses on how social concerns are imaginatively embedded within literature. Through close analysis of one of the fairy tales, Little Red Riding Hood (LRRH) I examine the underlying assumptions about children and learning in two adaptations of the tale<sup>1</sup>. Asserting that fairy tales should be valued as imaginative stories, this thesis concedes that they are also problematic. Feminist critics' solutions have been to censor, rewrite, or to write new tales. I examine and discuss the implications for readers, and thus for students, of a traditional telling of LRRH, a realistic feminist adaptation of the tale, and a contemporary poem which depends upon traditional imagery and motifs. Underlying this chapter, and indeed, the entire thesis, is a concern about maintaining a feminist perspective toward literature without sacrificing aesthetic enjoyment and enrichment.

In this chapter I make three claims. First, open texts which invite multiple responses and different interpretations provide the richest reading experience that literature has to offer. Second, the feminist adaptation by the Merseyside writers of the Grimms' tale LRRH<sup>2</sup> renders interpretation to the literal. Third, the Broumas poem encourages readers' emotional and imaginative involvement, and interpretation. I examine the traditional tale by the Grimm brothers, asking whether feminist critics

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<sup>1</sup> Broumas' poem, LRRH, is not, strictly speaking, an adaptation. Rather, it is an artistic re-creation or re-visioning of the themes of the tale.

<sup>2</sup> (Little Red Cap, which for simplicity's sake I call Little Red Riding Hood, abbreviated as LRRH).

are correct in assuming it offers one, closed meaning (which is counterproductive because it is ideologically incorrect and thus “false”). Are there ways in which the Grimms’ tale can be read openly, and if so, how?

### Fairy Tales: Myth or Ideology

For well over a century the tales have been valued within education for their literary merit. Frye (1989) and Yolen (1981) say the tales’ motifs and themes provide literary and cultural continuity. Other claims have been made for the fairy tales. In the last chapter, we saw that the tale LRRH provided a student with imaginative options, and enabled her to assimilate her experience. If fairy tales fill important educational roles, their inclusion in the curriculum should follow. Not all agree. Some critics call for removal or rewriting of the tales. They stress that fairy tales are historical statements which reflect the culture that produced them (Zipes, 1983b, p. 11). As such they may be read with historical interest as texts which represent values no longer applicable to our current cultural needs and goals. Moreover, they argue, children do not read them in the detached way of historical texts.

Instead, they “learn behavioral and associational patterns, value systems, and how to predict the consequences of specific acts or circumstances” (Lieberman, p. 384). Females especially internalize the tales and produce some of their deepest and long-lasting dreams from these stories. In this way, fairy tales provide an inaccurate portrayal of the female, thus of the relationships possible between the sexes. According to Zipes (1986, p. xii) children of four and five assimilate fairy tales, which as “key agents of socialisation”, enable them “to discover. . . [their] place in

the world and to test hypotheses about the world.” Zipes further contends:

In the history of the literary fairy tale one can trace the development of a debate and possible dialogue about sex roles and domination which corresponds to the actual practice of child rearing and value systems which have come to be established in England and America (p. xiii).

Ruth Bottigheimer concurs. In speaking of the Grimms' tales, she says that “children reared in a society that expresses the values outlined in this and other chapters of this study [Grimms' Bad Girls and Bold Boys] will undoubtedly incorporate them into their developing sense of themselves as individuals” (1987, p. 94). Fairy tales clearly reflect the values and mores of the society of their origin.

These different authors work from different assumptions. Frye argues for repertoire: students need to know the archetypal patterns on which literature is founded, because literature assumes such knowledge. He also argues that mythic and ideological content are separable. Bettelheim, on the other hand, claims the literary merit of the tales derives from their ability to speak directly to deep-seated psycho-sexual needs. His assumption is of an inherent connection rather than a learned one. Yolen seems to conjoin the two, as her argument for the collective and unconscious experience of the tales is applicable to children's developing imaginative lives as well as to their need of a foundational literary knowledge.

The debate seems to be about myth and ideology. Is the merit which Bettelheim, Frye and Yolen see in the tales a particular content which is in some way essential to the human or Western psyche? And is it that same content which causes problems for Zipes and Lieberman? Do traditional fairy tales represent values no longer applicable to our current cultural needs and goals? While each critical perspective contributes to the on-going discussion about fairy tales, our task as



educators is to discern among the competing voices for the interpretation, the translation, the particular use which can best satisfy our educational purposes. How do we make such a decision? Currently, the strongest critical voice is a feminist one. Do we comply with prevailing views and implement the recommendations? Do we seek external justification, such as the therapeutic value of the tales? Do we ask whether or not the imaginative literary elements of the tales outweigh their potentially harmful messages? As we have seen, reasons for censorship lie deeper than the social and theoretical concerns recorded in most modern criticism, and harken back to Plato's censoring of the poets.

In education, where our intention is to educate children to live fruitful lives in a world realistically conceptualized and understood, censorship is important. If, as some critics suggest, the fairy tales distort reality by presenting biased images of gender, race, and class relations; if, by encouraging obedience, humility and subordination, they perpetuate the controlling mechanisms of a patriarchal and hierarchical society, then they give a distorted sense of the relationships possible between genders, and must not be used.

Central to this discussion is what it means to provide students with adequate literary images in the context of literary discourse—most often distinguished by its metaphoric language and construction. The fairy tales are not just social, cultural or historical documents—they are fantastic stories whose emotional and imaginative elements are part of the stories' meaning and which largely determine readers' response. To limit discussion of the tales to their distortions is to define their value solely in terms of social documents, criteria outside the proper study of literature and its effects.

While social implication is an important aspect of literary criticism, it is not the only one.

Criticism which refers only to external realities (such as power structures, conceptions of gender) cannot adequately represent literature's artistic purposes and intentions. The conventions and meanings of a particular work of art—and the broader purposes and intentions of literature as a cultural, symbolic means of expression—are central to literature.

This is not to say that fairy tales are unsullied documents of a purer, more natural people.

Rather, they are social constructions reflecting the desires and conditions of their times and authors. According to Aitken (1987/1988, p. 11) "literature is more than a thwarted investigator; it is also an incorrigible perpetrator of the problem of sexuality: literature **prescribes** thought and action according to the dictates of certain ideologies just as surely as it **describes** them." "While our consciousness is shaped, to varying degrees, by the literature we read, the literature itself is shaped by current, popular thoughts and attitudes. As educators, we should be concerned about literature's prescriptiveness. At the same time, literature must be understood and examined within the literary, historical and social contexts within which it occurs.

For example, feminists who criticize the fairy tale posture of the female— seated at the window, within the home—and who suggest that women should be adventuring out of the castle and down the road with the males, would do well to consider that within literature, postures and gestures and even social conventions such as marriage, operate not simply in direct correspondence to their social equivalents in the real world (though they can be read this way), but have literary significance. Marriage, or more accurately, the wedding, indicates a successful resolution to the

binary tensions of the tale, on many levels. It can be seen as the heroine's emergence from an unaccommodating domestic space into an acknowledged public one. It can also indicate the successful maturation of the heroine into psychic wholeness—a balance of the female and male principles. Marriage as a literary convention signals closure, and satisfies that psychological need<sup>3</sup>.

In education, traditional fairy tales are historically important. On social and literary levels they provide readers with the opportunity of examining the posture/position of the female in other cultures, at different eras, providing contrast with current conceptions and morés. Which posture—the contemplative or the physically active—the myth asks, is truly adventurous? Which posture leads to understanding—the contemplative attitude toward life (embodied in the window-seated posture) or the thrusting, adventuring posture? While literature can be examined in direct correspondence to social realities, limiting literature to this role robs it of its power, and robs education of literature's potential usefulness in teaching. Literary, historical and social contexts are helpful, however, in preventing us from being overly insensitive or naive about the limitations and foibles of our own points of view.

Munro illustrates this in the title story of her collection, Friend of My Youth (1990, pp. 22-23),

the odd thing is that my mother's ideas were in line with some progressive notions of her times, and mine echoed the notions that were favoured in my time. This in spite of the fact that we both believed ourselves independent, and lived in backwaters that did not register such changes. It's as if tendencies that seem most deeply rooted in our minds, most private and singular, have come in as spores on the

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<sup>3</sup> However, it can be argued that marriage as a convention acts as a potentially socializing function. Marriage may thus sanction similar conclusions for young women. Even if the tale does not parallel real life, it can be argued that marriage as a literary convention still contains a potentially damaging prescription of conformity and social acceptance.

prevailing wind, looking for any likely place to land, any welcome.

The “prevailing wind” is an important consideration when we look at the Grimms’ tales with their obvious prejudices, but also when we examine current tellings of the tales, with their/our not-so-obvious prejudices. The versions of the tales we value often tell more about us, their readers, than about the tales themselves. Likewise, what we as adults think important for children, may not be thought important by the children.

#### Deconstructive and Regenerative Possibilities

How then should we value literature? Without diminishing the importance of addressing inequities of gender, class and race, the tales continue to provide important social understanding. The fact that they have not been forgotten, nor has their power to unsettle and fascinate diminished (fairy tale images and themes continue to appear in both popular and serious culture) speaks for their historical and their aesthetic value. What is needed is a balance between the ideological and aesthetic, between the deconstructive and regenerative possibilities that fairy tales provide. As I have discussed elsewhere, Willinsky (1992) contends that such a balance is possible, while Gutteridge (1992) maintains that aesthetic response (within reader-response pedagogy) is irreconcilably at odds with post-modern deconstruction.

Expanding upon Gutteridge’s notions that critical response can and is part of reader-response pedagogy, in this chapter I show that aesthetic response to the Grimms’ tales does not just mean compliance with its cultural values. Quite the opposite. Broumas’ response shows critical and creative awareness of the mythic content of LRRH. She adds her voice to the literary conversation started by the

Grimms. Using the tale in this way shows that its importance lies not in any final and absolute meaning, but along a continuum represented at one end by their problematic aspects and on the other by their literary value. Literature, as Barthes says, need not be destroyed, but neither should it be protected.

Aesthetic response to LRRH is the correct emphasis of literary studies within education. To illustrate, I consider the Grimms' tale LRRH for teaching primary children. Then I offer Zipes' criticism of LRRH. In light of both the tale's pleasures and problems, I consider two versions of the tale: a realistic story written by a British feminist collective and a poem written by an American poet. The Merseyside story illustrates writing for feminist purposes. Broumas' poem illustrates an engagement that depends upon her emotional, imaginative involvement and struggle with the mythic themes of Grimms' LRRH.

When writers respond aesthetically, critically, and creatively they revise the cultural myths, making the work obtain in their particular cultural circumstances. Initially this occurs as their own artistic struggle with the inherited forms and contents, but can extend to a level where cultural change is possible. Such a position implies that we trust writers to "register" in their responses, stories and poems "such changes" as the best feminist political thought and action has produced. The plethora of current fairy tales, stories, and poems amply demonstrate that writers are getting on with telling "liberated" stories, but it also is the case that within schools texts are increasingly censored. The current curriculum is in danger of being as authorial and dogmatic. Sexism in any form is undesirable, but I disagree with banning or censoring art on the basis of a single criterion, and without seriously considering the losses incurred in the process. Rewriting fairy tales according to feminist politics

dismisses the literary value of their themes, forms and motifs as the material and means of new and fresh responses. Before I examine the criticism and adaptations of the tale, I would like to articulate what Nodelman (1992) calls the “pleasures” of literature.

### The Pleasures of Fairy Tales

The “pleasures” of literature are important considerations for instruction for two reasons. First, teachers need to be aware that their own responses to literature can provide valuable direction for their lesson planning. Reader-response pedagogy promotes awareness of the pleasures of the text and the conventions which create those pleasures. Second, when the stories and poems are a pleasure to read, children will be motivated to keep reading.

I use a number of versions of LRRH suitable to different age levels. Because Paley’s account of primary students’ responses is important to discussion of the tales, I focus on that age group. The Merseyside version of LRRH is suited to intermediate students, and the Broumas telling of the tale is suited to senior students. The issues raised and addressed at each age level, as well as through the different genres, are consistent, however. While reasons for censoring the tales at age five are different from censorship at intermediate levels (younger children may be frightened by the violence in the tale, while older students may be offended by the sexist elements of the tales) these differences highlight the need for understanding the forms and uses of literature in a general way.

The tales are also useful in different ways at different times. In the younger grades the tales may be part of a classroom’s story-telling repertoire, while in the

older grades, critical examination of the tales may be more appropriate. Or critical and creative responses may be elicited at every grade level, focusing on the issues and themes important to each particular group. I argue for the importance of including the traditional alongside contemporary tales in the classroom.

### Pleasure as a Pedagogical Focus

Some maintain reading is best encouraged by following a defined set of “how-tos” that assist learners to achieve the fundamental skill of reading. Meek (1990, p. 3) points out that mastery of any skill is achieved through practice and persistence. A third attribute which she defines as necessary to the development of skill and expertise is pleasure. Students must be motivated by enjoyment if they are to learn.

Bettelheim (1989, p. 53) says that “like all great art, fairy tales both delight and instruct; their special genius is that they do so in terms which speak directly to children.” Nodelman (1992, p. 11) bases his support for the fairy tales on the pleasure and enjoyment of reading them. “Anyone who likes to read knows that we do so primarily because we enjoy it, not because it is good for us.”

Our consideration of literature begins not as educators, but as readers. The pleasures we discover in LRRH can shape our thoughts about how to use this story in a classroom setting. Good literature is at the core of the development of reading abilities. Teachers can recognize their own literary pleasure and bring that awareness into the classroom through the teaching strategies they choose. Effective teachers articulate and express the enjoyment they feel in reading and in teaching to their students.

## The Pleasure of Pattern

LRRH offers the security of a familiar plot pattern. By the time young readers enter school, it is safe to assume that they have heard LRRH in some form. Meek points out that beginning readers may stop reading if they do not have a sense of the story line: "Those who know that authors help them to make sense of the story are more patient with the beginnings of books than those who expect to recognize straight away what they have to understand" (1990, p. 31). Children soon recognize that "once upon a time" ensures a happy ending, that this type of story is composed of good and bad characters, problems for the good characters which must be overcome, and that everything will be put right again. Meek says that children will continue to read material with familiar patterns until they are ready to move on to something more difficult.

The move "from more of the same" to "I might try something different" is a clear step. So is the growing tolerance of ambiguity, the notion that things are not quite what they seem, even in a fairly straightforward tale (p. 30).

Meek says that when the rules of how the story goes are quickly and familiarly settled between author and reader, children read comfortably. This point cannot be underestimated. Nothing encourages a beginner more than feeling comfortable reading, and for reading to feel easy. The fairy tale is one of the most basic story patterns, and children quickly understand its rules.

Mastering a story means getting it, just as we get a joke. When LRRH questions the grandmother about her strange appearance, the reader has the pleasure of realizing before LRRH does that the creature in bed is indeed not the grandmother but the wolf. The suspense mounts with the formulaic questions, which, through



repetition, are a predictable, suspenseful, and enjoyable chant:

Oh Grandmother, what big ears you have!  
 The better to hear you with.  
 Oh Grandmother, what big eyes you have!  
 The better to see you with.  
 Oh Grandmother, what big hands you have!  
 The better to grab you with.  
 Oh Grandmother, what terrible big mouth you have!  
 The better to eat you with.

Patterned text offers developing readers a strategy for word and sentence decoding too, for readers can rely on the repetition to predict the words. Students can make predictions about the plot—that elder fairy tale sons will not be successful adventurers, for example. Students can fill in the gaps in the story, bringing their knowledge of the world and of fairy tales to flesh out its implications. To give an obvious example, readers would know from prior experience of stories and television that the wolf in LRRH is probably the “bad guy.”

Much of the drama of the Grimm tale lies in the wolf’s dialogue with LRRH, where its duplicitous intentions are revealed to the knowing readers.

Listen, Little Red Cap, he said, have you seen the pretty flowers which are in the woods? Why don’t you look around? I believe that you haven’t even noticed how lovely the birds are singing. You march along as if you were going straight to school in the village, and it is so delightful out here in the woods.

Knowing the wolf’s duplicitous intentions adds to the suspense of the story, and the feeling of mastery.

### The Pleasure of Point of View

Nodelman speaks of the pleasure of story-telling, where response is shaped by the writer’s emphasis of particular elements or points of view (1992, p. 12). The

Grimms' version is written in third person omniscient, a point of view which allows the reader access to one or more character's thoughts. Children can also read versions written from different points of view. In Della Rowland's Little Red Riding Hood/The Wolf's Tale, for instance, the wolf begs for understanding. Students learn that Grimms is only one of several different versions, some which are less frightening. From this they learn, as Paley's students do, that texts can be changed without losing their value. Students can make changes as they envision them, according to their needs.

#### The Pleasure of Learning about Ourselves and about the World

Meek (1990, pp. 28-29) says that reading must be a comfortable experience so readers get beyond the mechanics and enter into a dialogue with the story.

When the structure of the story is familiar, readers are free to look at other possible lessons to be learned from events they may never encounter and kinds of people who may never cross their path. Now the reader is to ask: What would I do if I found myself in that situation? Do I or do I not care for people like that? Is there a part of me that understands them?

The familiarity of the structure provides opportunity for children to explore any of the story's issues. Children raise issues which do not occur to the teacher, and this, says Paley, is exactly what needs to happen—children need to be free to express their fears and their desire for new challenges.

Fairy tales encourage readers to place themselves in the situation of the story. By so doing they try out "different kinds of companionship, perhaps of those whose lives seem to involve them in more risk-taking than their own" (Meek, p. 29). Within the context of the story they are free to explore without fear for their

emotional or physical safety. Grimms' version, with its sweet young maiden who is loved by all, appeals to readers who wish, at some level, to be so loved. They readily identify with this "alter-ego" image of themselves. Once bonding with LRRH occurs, readers will follow all her actions—talking to the wolf, lingering in the forest, disobeying her mother, and suffering the eventual consequences. Nodelman (1992, p. 12) describes these experiences as the pleasures of identifying with fictional characters, stepping outside ourselves and experiencing the lives and thought of others. The pleasure is not just vicarious, as anybody who has been "caught up" in a good story will tell.

Fairy tales are exciting and emotionally charged, features which guarantee, says Paley (1990, p. 160), "to excite the sort of extensive disclosure that enriches discussions, story-telling, and play itself." But the cost of this "enrich(ed) discussion" can be anxiety. The story of Goldilocks encourages readers to identify with Goldilocks, then repays that trust with the frightening "experience" of waking up to three bears looming over the bed. Paley, writing about presenting the story of The Three Little Pigs to her class of three to four-year-old students, explains that even at a young age worthwhile (but not always comfortable) discussions about fairy tales are quite possible:

These days I'm ambivalent about fairy tales for young children. Even when I use my own words and modify the danger potential, the children seem worried. . . . Even so, the discussions afterwards tend to be quite remarkable. By the time most children are four they can identify and debate many of the issues hidden in these age old plots (p. 133).

If children are asked to consider a controversial aspect of a story, they will need to think carefully about the story, about the values represented by the characters, and

they will need to make judgments. Meek points out that adults should not sweepingly condemn the fairy tales. Rather, “adults need to take time to help children talk about what they read so that they learn to express their judgments, however tentatively at first” (p. 30). Disturbing aspects such as LRRH’s involvement in bringing about the deaths of the two wolves can become “things to talk about.” The issue of frightening content cannot be resolved once-and-for-all—long before the tales were criticized for reasons of their inaccurate portrayal of women, they were criticized for their violence. Paley’s considered answer is to weigh the children’s need for reassurance with their need for growth.

Learning to take risks is fundamental to our experience of literature. It is about risky situations in which characters find (or place) themselves, about difficult decisions, about places and events that, even while they are different from our own experiences, are nevertheless recognizable to us. But literature doesn’t abandon us—it also provides resolution to its own (and the reader’s) dilemma.

Monica Hughes, the Albertan children’s author, tells about the fear she felt during a car trip through the Rocky Mountains. Scared to death of slipping through the safety rail and over the edge of the cliff, Hughes said she was aware of watching herself in fear. Such self awareness is demonstrated by children who like to frighten themselves with “scary bits” from LRRH. Traditional fairy tales are full of wonder and dread—but interesting, fascinating stories are essential to productive, self-motivated reading practice. If Larkin is right about the seriousness with which humans approach life, it follows that children want to read stories which appeal not just to superficial pleasures, but to their profoundest sense of themselves and the world. Central to this is the safety of literary experience and the safety of the

classroom. We experience the feelings, but not the danger. Children, like us all, need to feel safe before they can read and speak freely.

Literature is a means of helping children to express their ideas. But literature's value is not limited to being a vehicle for good thoughts; it is the embodiment of those thoughts. Reading can be described as a reader's conversation with a text. Meek's questions, "What would I do if I found myself in that situation? Do I or do I not care for people like that? Is there a part of me that understands them?" are questions that draw us back to closer examination of the characters and events.

In this way literature correlates with life. What distinguishes this correlation from one the socio-linguist makes is that literature presents the complexity of a situation, and shows the reconciling steps. It shows how it thinks about its own dilemma, resolving itself step by step. Good literature is identified by its interpretability, and its capacity to engage and hold up complex thoughts for the reader's consideration. Its language and metaphors are suggestive, appealing to different readers in different ways.

The wolf in LRRH is a good example of the complexity and suggestiveness possible in characterization. The wolf is both death and life. He is a deadly threat to the heroine, but he also shows her the forest's natural beauty, which in her "obedience" she has missed. The story upholds bourgeois values as Zipes says, but it also subverts those values. Eagerness to read the story within a rigid critical framework can often distort. Was Wilhelm Grimm aware of the complexity of this life-in-the-midst-of-death (or vice versa) theme? Frye says that a work's myth provides continuity and endurance. Frye (1990, p. 60) says that there are two centres

of reference in literature,

one contemporary with the writer and the other with us. The principle involved is that there is a flexibility in the story that its ideological reference does not permit. We should trust no writer's beliefs or attitudes, but concentrate on his myth, which is infinitely wiser than he is, and is the only element that can survive when the ideology attached to it fades.

To Frye, myth is not simply an effect of a historical process, but "a social vision that looks toward a transcending of history, which explains how it is able to hold two periods together, the author's and ours, in direct communication." Mythic themes are the good questions that human beings enjoy thinking about—the puzzles of our existence. Children should be helped to find quality literature which encourages them to risk difficult thoughts and questions.

#### Feminist Responses to the Tales

Ruth MacDonald (1982, p. 18) characterizes three ways feminist criticism has responded to the tales:

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, de-emphasizing 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.

Following MacDonald's assessment of feminist response, I discuss the Grimms' LRRH with its potential for damage to a "young girl's career expectations", then examine an adaptation written by the Merseyside Fairy Story Collective in Liverpool in 1972 (Red Riding Hood, in Zipes, 1983, pp. 239-244) which, while "de-emphasizing physical beauty" and other conventional attitudes, also imposes its "own

language and bias on the narrative.” In addition, I examine American poet, Olga Broumas’ use of “folklore motifs with less conventional” meanings in her poem LRRH.

Although both the Merseyside and Broumas adaptations can be called “feminist” in that they register dissatisfaction with the traditional tales, they are different genres intended for different audiences. The former is prose and intended for children, the latter, poetry intended for older students and adults. These distinctions, however, are not as significant for my purposes as the way in which different versions demonstrate particular understanding of literature, and how children learn. The Merseyside version of LRRH is written as an anti-sexist document, while Broumas’ version is “revisionist”, a term used by Ostricker (1982, p. 72).<sup>4</sup> It is the way the feminist problems are perceived and addressed through literature which I want to address.

How do these two feminist adaptations respond to the traditional tale—and to what effect? Each version relies on the imagery and form of the traditional story, using its themes as the imaginative fodder to create different stories. Feminist goals can be served using traditional fairy tales which, through their use of wonder and magic, their indirect depiction of human behaviour, and their symbolic representation of emotions, allow children (including young girls) to imaginatively express their hopes, fears and desires. Surely such empowerment is our common agenda.

My intent is not to demonstrate which of the two adaptations is superior, the

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<sup>4</sup> Naturally, all literature is “revisionist” in that it ‘re-visions’ both the conventions and themes of the established genres. Ostricker’s particular use of the term focuses on stories what are female constructions of experience (rather than male fantasies of female experience) and which represent what women find divine and demonic in themselves (Ostricker, 1982, p. 73).

right model or approach. Rather, I want to show that as educators committed to both literary and feminist concerns, we need to understand and appreciate their sometimes disparate intentions, claims, and points of view. We need to be clear about the significance and the limitations of feminist politics as it applies in literary— and more broadly speaking—artistic work, distinguishing between feminist criticism as it pertains to politics and to art.

### Grimms' Little Red Riding Hood

The Grimms' version of LRRH (1886/1963) has not been Disneyized like Cinderella and Snow White, so its features have not been prettified and its ending sweetened. It is the story of a little girl, identified by a red hood, who is “much beloved by everybody.” Her mother tells her to take cakes and wine to the sick grandmother who lives in the woods, warning her to “walk properly and nicely, and don't run.” She does, only to meet up with the wolf anyway, who, “as she did not know what a bad sort of animal he was”, did not frighten her. Nor is the wolf frightening to the reader—instead, the wolf tells LRRH to “look at the pretty flowers that are growing all around you.” While she lingers to pick flowers, the wolf dashes to grandmother's house, swallows her up, and gets into bed. The well-known litany “O grandmother, what large ears you have” is repeated until the climactic “The better to devour you!” The wolf swallows LRRH but the process is undone by the huntsman, and Grimms' happy ending gives LRRH another chance at life, and obedience.

Jack Zipes (1983, p. 15) says it is “generally known” that the Grimms' version of the story is based on Perrault's account (published a century earlier, in



1697). Marie Hassenpflug, one of the Grimm informants, had a French Huguenot background and would likely have known Perrault's version of the story. The basic change is the happy ending, a motif borrowed from the fairy story, "The Wolf and the Seven Kids." In this, a hunter saves a granny, who fills the wolf's belly with stones and sews it up, causing its death. Another change is the warnings LRRH receives from her mother, to which she responds "promis(ing) her mother to be very obedient." LRRH's failure to heed her mother's instructions gets her into trouble.

Nodelman (1992, p. 162) says with reference to Grimms' LRRH that,

unlike Perrault's mother, this mother believes her daughter is too innocent to look after herself. And she's right; the child does not heed the warnings and is eaten by the wolf. But since the problem was her disobedience rather than her lack of knowledge, she is allowed a second chance; a hunter comes along and rescues her, and she herself makes the significance of her adventure clear to young readers: 'She said to herself, Never again will I leave the path and run off into the wood when my mother tells me not to.'

The innate innocence of children, the tale suggests, is revealed in LRRH's lack of instinctual fear of the wolf. Children should be protected from evil. The stress is on the reciprocal need of adults to give, and for children to receive, protection. But the tale, says Zipes (1983, pp. 57, 55) is more than a tale of warning to children—particularly girls—of the dangers of disobedience. For him the tale is a reflection of

men's fear of women's sexuality—and of their own as well. The curbing and regulation of sexual drives is fully portrayed in this bourgeois literary fairy tale on the basis of deprived male needs. Red Riding Hood is to blame for her own rape. The wolf is not really a male but symbolizes natural urges and social nonconformity. The real hero of the tale, the hunter-gamekeeper, is male governance. If the tale has enjoyed such a widespread friendly reception in the Perrault and Grimm forms, then this can only be attributed to a general acceptance of the cultural notions of sexuality, sex roles, and domination embedded in it.

Zipes' is a radical interpretation of the tale. He suggests that the Grimms' account

demonstrates the culturally acceptable norm (cf. the expulsion from the Garden of Eden) that female sensuality and curiosity is to blame for socially disruptive male conduct. The answer that the Grimms offer, and that appears to satisfy everybody, Zipes says, is the hunter-gamekeeper (“male governance”) who rescues LRRH and her grandmother. In making LRRH responsible for the wolf’s attack (it never could have happened had she listened to her mother), Zipes says that the Grimms justify males’ unruly or “wolfish” sexual urges, and make females somehow responsible. Thus, while the huntsman protects—indeed, rescues—the female characters, the larger implication of the story is female complicity. According to Zipes, the tale teaches young girls to curb their own sensuality and sexuality—they are “compelled to become eminently rational in (their) anti-climactic adventure” (Zipes, 1983, p. 16).

These troublesome patterns of justification and blame are perpetuated by the Grimms, and are the reason (Zipes says) the stories are unacceptable. Zipes (1983, p. 16) then makes the circular argument that the enormous staying power of the Perrault and Grimms versions of the tales are based on society’s willingness to accept (his) “Freudian” notions of “sexuality, sex roles, and domination.”

Whether confirmation of cultural codes and patterns define a successful work of art is debatable. Surely the aesthetic pleasure or beauty of the work, our fascination with particular themes, and, as Frye says, literature’s ability to project our anxieties regarding the fulfillment of our desires, also account for our continued enjoyment of established as well as new literature?

#### Merseyside’s Little Red Riding Hood

If Zipes’ (1983, p. 9) dictum regarding the “continual impulse of later writers

to make free with the fate of LRRH" is true, then the Merseyside Collective's Red Riding Hood will demonstrate at least some liberation from the moral and cultural codes imparted upon LRRH's nineteenth century sister. Their story, four times as long as Grimms', presents the child as an individual and not a type. LRRH's real name, we are told, is Nadia. The story demonstrates how Nadia overcomes her fear "of going up to bed by herself. . . of dogs and thunder and. . . of people she did not know" and most importantly, of the forest. The day when Nadia must walk to her grandmother's house alone is a troubling one. "All day at school she could think about nothing but whether she dared to walk through the forest alone. At dinnertime she did not want to eat because she felt sick." She doesn't meet the wolf on the way, but senses it "moving toward great-grandmother's cottage" and fear for the old woman strengthens the girl's resolve and impels her toward the cottage. Together the females outsmart the wolf and kill it.

In this story, female lineage is emphasized; the child's red cloak once belonged to Nadia's great grandmother who, in her youth, had been attacked by a wolf. Her story of bravery, and the story itself, act as conduits between the generations. Children's fears are presented as real and valid experiences, and empathic concern is shown to lead to acts of bravery and victory over one's fear. Although Nadia is an active heroine, the story marks her growth from a fearful girl to one who is enabled to reach out into her community and lend her cloak to others. Like her, they "will grow brave."

Part of the awareness gained through reading this adaptation includes the gender-specific messages implicit in traditional tales, such as the gender-appropriate behaviour the tales advocate. The Merseyside version enables readers to envisage

another sort of LRRH, one who learns to conquer her wolf, is able to overcome her fear, to grow from her experiences. Just as Nadia looked to her grandmother for continuity and leadership, so readers, girls especially, can adopt Nadia as a role model and learn that their strength lies in their own capacities rather than in blind obedience to an objective authority. But, as MacDonald (1982, p. 18) says, it is the story's "own language and bias on the narrative" which is of interest.

There is neither magic nor humour in the story—rationality saves the day. Even the wicked wolf is turned into the protective lining of Nadia's coat. The attitude implies that, given the correct role models (heroic female ancestors), time and understanding, children will rationally come to model brave and loving behaviour. Relatives and friends, rather than magical acts or helpers, will assist children's growth and development. The realistic tale is biased toward a rational, adult point of view, making it different from versions where there is a close correlation between fairy tale conventions and children's imagination (Bettelheim, 1989, p. 53, McGlathery, 1991, p. 56). The Merseyside LRRH does not compensate for its lack of the fantasy features which make the Grimms' tale attractive. Its suspense is forced, and the rhythm of the story obstructed by the need to account realistically for the story events. Perhaps most jarring is the "climax" of the tale— grandmother behind the kitchen door all along, with a great burning torch in her hand.

#### Broumas' Little Red Riding Hood

The intimacy of an overheard conversation is suggested in this confessional piece, written by a woman to her mother about the conflicting needs to both establish and sever the patriarchal bonds. Birth is a physical separation; easily executed in

comparison to the more difficult task of mental and spiritual separation from the mother. As the speaker recreates in images her difficult birth, Broumas addresses her real subject—patriarchy's subjugation of women. The mother cramps her baby with a patriarchal legacy of rules: "Stick to the road and forget the flowers, there's/ wolves in those bushes, mind/ where you got to go, mind/ you get there." The mother's response to life—avoid its dangers and risks, "play it safe", stick to the tried and the given—she passes on to her daughter.

The speaker, both as a baby and as a woman, resists her mother and the midwife. Dressed in her "mantle of blood", and later in her "red hood, howling", the baby avoids the constraining, shaping forceps, as well as the "doctor", who, as possessor of scientific and technological knowledge, represents seeing and hearing in patriarchal terms. Although as a daughter she responds dutifully (Broumas says "mind" three times), the speaker as adult subverts the image of the "red hood." While it is still something by which the female is identified—it is not identifiable "en masse" by villagers or wolf. Instead, Broumas' "hood" refers to women's common experience of their bodies; how their sexuality and creativity focuses in the same place, that temple of being which most contemporary cultures encourage women to repress or distort. Broumas is lesbian, but her insight is not limited to that community. Thematically, the poem pivots around the afflictions and demands upon private conscience, and women's attempts to survive the structures and processes of civilization.

For Broumas the horrible contradiction of the male is his threatening presence (for females, males rather than wolves are truly dangerous) while being the necessary connection for (even) maternal lineage. Broumas voices the acute and chronic pain of

her childless/daughterless existence. The speaker unsuccessfully tries to reach the grandmother “alone in (her) house and waiting, across this improbable forest/peopled with wolves”, realizing that, because the female lineage is severed, she is not able to deliver her “basket of love.” The fallout of the damaged relationship between the sexes, alienation, is felt within this female community, and is developed dramatically at the end of the poem when Broumas concedes that there are “wolves in those bushes” that “feed on” the “lost, flower-gathering sisters.” Sisters who haven’t learned, Broumas suggests, to keep their “hoods” and selves secret, and thus safe, from men. The poem ends in sad acknowledgment of the powerful, destructive forces of an abusive patriarchy.

Broumas uses traditional fairy tale imagery to talk about alienation, fear and subjugation in a female context. The red hood that identifies LRRH as a nice polite young girl signifies sexuality and sexual identity, which in the traditional story is consumed by the wolf, or is at least threatened in this way. In the poem sexuality is equated not with consumption but with sharing. Broumas subverts the howling wolf as a howling daughter, capable of equal noise. In her image of a forest “peopled with wolves” Broumas also makes a literary connection to Perrault’s (1697/1969, p. 29) warning:

Little girls, this seems to say,  
 Never stop upon your way.  
 Never trust a stranger-friend:  
 No one knows how it will end.  
 As you’re pretty, so be wise;  
 Wolves may lurk in every guise.

While Perrault’s “moralité” is a reference to the “wolfishness” of men’s predatory natures, Broumas’ complex image depends on associating the “bad” wolf of fairy tale

with the processes and people who devalue, abuse and otherwise destroy women. Moreover, the titillation of the animal lover, of sex with a hint of the animal in it, is not a possibility. Men are a deadly threat to women—there can be no compromise. In subverting patriarchy's "stick to the road" advice and by establishing her own path, even as she calculates the risks, Broumas creates a world where innocence is as deadly as it is for Perrault's LRRH. She deconstructs the myth of female identification with the protective male, Grimms' hunter, and she constructs a female community that defies the constructs of a repressive society and the impositions of convention. Broumas is painfully aware of the cost of such action.

#### How Readers Read and Children Learn

In her article, "Some Day My Prince Will Come", Walkerdine (1984) discusses current approaches to sexism in literature. Recent feminist literature, she says, suggests that offering a wide array of views and conceptions of female roles will counter the stereotypical images of traditional, sexist literature. If females are shown only working in the home, children will not be aware of the potential roles and vocations available to females outside the home. The feminist solution has been to create literature that presents females in more broadly conceived ways of being and acting. The response of the Merseyside group (feminist writers Audrey Ackroyd, Marge Ben-Tovim, Catherine Meredith and Anne Neville) to the distorted, offensive, stereotypical images in LRRH has been to provide a "better" story and role model for girls.

This approach, however, assumes that children will recognize these non-sexist images as "true" ones. The desired response is for children to adopt these role

models and engage in similar acts suitable to their ages. Nadia's story is told in the hope that children will recognize its truth and absorb its content. But Broumas wants her images to affect the reader. What then is the difference? The key is the text's openness to interpretation. Although both stories are variously interpretable, the Merseyside version presents an ideal, realistically conceived. The story's realism allows little interpretation about that ideal, and (falsely) assumes a direct correspondence between story conventions and the conventions of life (Frye, 1963a, p. 51). Broumas, on the other hand, uses poetry's conventions, presenting images and metaphors which convey her emotional conviction and which are expansive enough for individual contemplation and interpretation. Her poem does not make strict realistic sense—understanding it requires the reader's imaginative participation. The poem makes sense, but not just one sense, or a once-and-for-all sense<sup>5</sup>.

The concern with fantasy (the fairy tales) presenting a false view of reality voiced by Plato and others is relevant here. C.S. Lewis, we noted earlier, said that stories which are possible but highly improbable are likely to raise false expectations. The Merseyside story raises such false expectations. Although Nadia's bravery and altruism is laudable, I do not think children overcome their fears as readily as Nadia did.

Broumas also finds the traditional tale unacceptable, but rather than replacing it (with an ideal story), she plays with it. The huntsman saves the little girl? she asks. Think again! Literary language is connotative—it suggests new possibilities—

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<sup>5</sup> Neither does my interpretation of the poem assert a once-and-for-all-time certainty. It is neither unilateral nor permanent, but is my most accurate and rewarding reading at this time. A reading—I add—that has been negotiated through my changing feelings over many readings of the poem, through the conversations with other readers, and with readers of this thesis.



the readers' responsibility is not just to understand old stories within their patriarchal contexts, but to retell them, and to make their mythic content meaningful for our viewpoint and time. Paley's student Lilly demonstrated this in Chapter Four, when she used a LRRH motif to tell her own story.

Stories, and the interpretation of stories, make assumptions about how children learn. The Merseyside group seems to assume that children are passive learners, or, rather, rationalist ones, "who will change as a result of receiving the correct information about how things really are." Walkerdine makes two points in response to this position. The first deals with

the central importance of cultural practices in producing forms of thought and positions for women, the second deals with the inscription in those positions, of desire—that is, how we come to want what we want. Recent work in the field of cultural practices has stressed the importance of the way in which texts, such as books, films, advertisements and so forth, operate in terms of systems of signification. Thus the text has to be actively read in order to engage with the way in which images and other signs, verbal and non-verbal, are constructed. . . . In this sense then, we can say that texts do not simply distort or bias a reality that exists only outside the pages of books—in the 'real world'—but rather that those practices are real, and in their construction of meanings create places for identification, construct subject-positions in the text itself. So we need not point to some untainted reality outside the text, but to examine instead how those practices within the text itself have relational effects that define who and what we are.

Walkerdine says that texts, and the characters within them, are embodiments of forces that vie for power and position. This may emulate such activity as it occurs in the "real" world, but literature's role is not limited to revealing the social and cultural forces that shape us. The text itself is a struggle to make its position felt and known. This is usually a very complex process, because inherent in literature is the desire to explore experience from many points of view, explore all the possibilities, and

through metaphoric construction, to leave “space” for the readers’ imaginative contemplation and contribution. Stories need readers, to say the obvious, but some stories offer more imaginative space in which readers can engage.

### Literature as Imaginative Engagement

The seemingly effortless movement between the realistic and otherworldly planes of existence, and the simplicity of style and language, which allows/invites multiple readings make fairy tales well suited for imaginative activity. They are also suitable because the stories’ binary-positioned characters leave little doubt “whose side” the readers will want to be on. The assured positive resolutions also act as a safety net for children, leaving them free to imaginatively explore the tales’ often troublesome themes. Bettelheim stresses the suitability of the tales’ organizing frames for children’s chaotic emotional experience of the world. Development occurs, he says, when children project their affective conflicts onto the settings of stories. Built as they are upon oppositions, the stories enable children to understand reality in a way which is appropriate to their experience. Egan (1988, pp. 118-120) speaks of this too, emphasizing the pedagogical importance of narrative in that it resolves incongruities offered by the text in the same mediating way that children do. Ted Hughes (1988, p. 32) says the story is a “unit of imagination” which creates the space needed to reconcile disparate contents. Take, for example, a story that engages both the earth and the underworld.

It contains not merely the space and in some form or other the contents of those two places; it reconciles their contradictions in a workable fashion and holds open the way between them. The child can re-enter the story at will, look around him, find all those things and consider them at his leisure.

Hughes says that the importance of stories is that, through living and growing in our heads, they help shape our consciousness.

The characters who embody the main binary opposition in LRRH—the girl and the wolf—illustrate the tale’s theme of an innocent girl’s exposure to danger. Innocence and its dark opposite is a theme that has intrigued many writers. In the Grimms’ tale, the wolf alerts an oblivious LRRH to bird song and beautiful flowers, which gives her the idea to pick a bouquet. Thus, the wolf extends LRRH’s life—he “takes her into life” as it were. A reader might be curious about the wolf who points “seductively to the freedom of the colorful and musical woods” (Zipes, 1983, p. 17) as well as apprehensive (this is, after all, a wolf). The theme is the human need for safety and for risking extending oneself. The symbolic representation of fear and pleasure, is an imaginative means by which children can be helped to explore, and perhaps acknowledge or express, their fears and desires<sup>6</sup>. While acknowledging the above dichotomy Zipes interprets this as Grimms’ “justification of law and order and against individual autonomy and imagination” from which “LRRH might some day break out, become a Bohemian, and live in the woods with the wolf” (1983a, p. 18, 20).

To Zipes the story is an ideological assertion, one that must be countered or broken by another, better story. To him the tensions it embodies cannot be seen as forces vying for power, nor as the imaginative means by which children can make sense of their experience. Ostricker (1982, p. 72) takes the opposite position, saying that it is the seemingly problematic (mythic) aspects of the story which are necessary

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<sup>6</sup> Paley, as we shall see (chapter 8), uses such powerful themes for educational purposes where suitable and possible.

in creating new stories.

Whenever a poet employs a figure or story previously accepted and defined by a culture, the poet is using myth, and the potential is always present that the use will be revisionist: that is, the figure or tale will be appropriated for altered ends, the old vessel filled with new wine, initially satisfying the thirst of the individual poet but ultimately making cultural change possible.

The continuity stopped short by the Merseyside adaptation is furthered through Broumas.

### Literary Continuity, Conversation, and Change

Myth is not just the codified tales of the religious, literary, and educational authorities, but “the stuff of dream life, forbidden desire, inexplicable motivation—everything in the psyche that to rational consciousness is unreal, crazed, or abominable<sup>7</sup>” (Ostricker, 1982, p. 72). Because the tales are ideologically vibrant, as the classical myths no longer are, and as the Bible or other religious texts are not permitted to be, we should continue using them in education. What other sources do we have?

Mythic elements provide opportunity for emotional and imaginative responses, which are central, says Ostricker, in “satisfying the thirst” of the poet, or reader engaged with the text. “Thirst” is a strong noun/verb to describe such a relationship but not overly strong, and certainly helpful in making some final distinctions between the two versions of LRRH. In the Merseyside story the mythic struggle is lost, indeed, it hasn’t been engaged. The wolf as the embodiment of fear is eliminated by Nadia’s conquest of it. It is, after all, irrational (her parents laugh at her fear of the

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<sup>7</sup> Perhaps Plato was right to worry.

forest and the sound of wolves) and is at the end of the tale transformed into altruistic acts. Nadia is admonished by the grandmother to remember “whenever you meet another child who is shy and timid, lend that child the cloak to wear. . . and then, they (sic) will grow brave.” To be moved to appropriate action, all Nadia needs do is “remember” her grandmother’s words. However the route to the “truth” is conceived, it is already in place; an external reality needing only (rational) recollection at the right moment. Interestingly, this is similar to Grimms’ 1857 story warning children to obey the authority of their parents and community who “know better” than they do. Surely this calls into question the liberating potential of this anti-sexist tale. Is it possible that in misguided attempts to protect children (the desire to protect children is not misguided) we are as ideologically prescriptive as the Grimms?

Broumas also conceives of fear differently from the Grimms. By imaginatively exploring, through images, the psychic conflicts the traditional tale embodies, she does more than replace a faulty conception. Of greatest urgency is the ability to recognize that which is **truly** dangerous. The very institutions and figures which society perpetuates as “safe” (homes, for example) are, for women, potentially the most dangerous. The underlying message is about awareness and reliance on one’s instincts, something Broumas’ “flower-gathering” sisters do not possess. The poem’s images of danger and fear are infused with the power of the same life-in-death (or death-in-life) myth, differently envisioned. In the Grimms’ tale the wolf takes and gives life. The wolf takes LRRH’s life and takes her into life (of beauty in the forest). Broumas’ patriarchal men rob and create life. They take female lives, and partake in creating new life. Broumas also asks who controls “all the better to see

with, to hear, and to eat?" From whose/which authority does our society's vision of itself emanate? To whom should we listen, she asks, and why, and how? She questions the basis (and, importantly, shows, through her images and form, **how** she questions) of the organizing binaries of the original tale, and also our collective assumptions about "innocence" and protection. Reconsider, she says, whether women can afford to be innocent, engage with their "natural urges" for beauty, as Zipes speaks about (is a simple walk at night alone possible?) further their "non-conformist" characteristics, or risk extending themselves. Or does any and all association with patriarchy spell death? The poet's questions do not ensure cultural change, but there is possibility of readers' emotional involvement (there are, after all, "real" wolves in her bushes) and intellectual participation as readers make the connections among Broumas', Grimms' and their own concepts. When her questions are taken seriously, the literary conversation is furthered rather than halted, and culture advances. By satisfying her "thirst", Broumas makes "cultural change possible."

The Merseyside writers, on the other hand, through their rational prescriptions and attitude toward **fear**, and their lack of new, expansive images for readers to consider, halt the conversation. These writers have taken fear out of its existence and expression in myth, and put it in the rational world where fears can be named and dismissed. They suggest children, like "tabula rasa", absorb truth more than they use symbolic means to negotiate it. They show little confidence in writers. For good or ill, writing must be left to writers, trusting that the best of feminist thought will "come in as spores on the prevailing wind, looking for any likely place to land, any welcome."

The educational uses of LRRH are determined by their pleasures as identified

by students, teachers and critics. The problems inherent in the tales can be incorporated into teaching in ways that do not shut down students' aesthetic responses to the tales, as we see in reader-response theory, in Lilly's story, and in this chapter. Emotional and imaginative involvement in the fairy tales are the opportunities of critical examination and creative response. Through these means connections can be made between the fairy tales and the available approaches and teaching strategies. But making these connections means trusting ourselves as readers, and challenging ourselves to become better readers. I believe that when we read carefully and lovingly, stories and poems suggest what is to be taught, and how it is to be taught<sup>8</sup>.

A feminist agenda cannot be an end goal for literature studies, nor for education, and substituting the biased images of the tales with anti-sexist literature does not satisfactorily answer the question of what we can do with these motifs, how we can make them ours. Critical discernment and creative response are not exclusive. This is not to say that many versions of a story are not desirable, or that we should not use the Merseyside version, or that one imaginatively told story will suffice. Rather, children are creative, thinking individuals who will select images and themes suitable to their purposes. The educational task is to teach fairy tales not only or even primarily in terms of critical terminology or social issues, but to enhance children's ability to carry on an imaginative dialogue with the tales. Grappling with images for their meanings (emotional, imaginative and intellectual) provides both a continuity with prior texts, and contributes to the ongoing, human conversation which literature embodies. Imagination is the appropriate place for "real" wolves to come

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<sup>8</sup> So, for instance, responding to the joke in a tale can be the basis or beginning idea of what is teachable in that tale. The Fisherman and His Wife and Hans in Luck are two examples of extended jokes in fairy tales.

of the bushes.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

HERO "WALKS" HIS "TALK": NARRATIVE AS LOVING CONVERSATION  
IN GRIMMS' THE GOLDEN BIRD

In chapter six we saw how Broumas' aesthetic reworking of the themes in LRRH results in a work which satisfies aesthetic and feminist demands of literature. Within that chapter the value of the traditional Grimms' tale, however, lies in its use as a stimulus or springboard for other work. In previous chapters we have seen the tales used to teach story structure and to make literary comparisons. Are the tales valuable in themselves? What do the traditional fairy tales offer today's students? We have seen that the importance of the traditional tales includes their aesthetically crafted prose and their powerful mythic content. Also important are their forms. Literary forms of discourse such as the resolution of binary oppositions and the conversational format of the tales facilitate the complexity of diverse viewpoints rather than a single one. As educators we are reminded that our concern lies in the intimate connections between formal structures and the contents they express. In this chapter I examine the moral nature of the tales' conversational form, and the reading experience the tales offer.

## Mediating Binary Oppositions in Fairy Tales

Jack Zipes (1979/80, pp. 22, 20) criticizes the Grimms' tales on grounds of their representation (and thus "legitimization") of élite bourgeois interests and values. The tales' function as a bourgeois socialization "process" is closely tied to their function as highly effective stories. "Wherever possible, they (the Grimms) sought to

link the beliefs and behavior of characters in the folk tales to the development of bourgeois norms (1979/80, p. 6)". Children especially are attracted to the folk tale heroes and heroines, because "there is hardly one (fairy tale) that does not announce who the protagonist is, and he or she commands our identification almost immediately by being the youngest, most oppressed, the wronged, the smallest, the most naive, the weakest, the most innocent" (1979-80, p. 18). These affective features ensure the reader's emotional and imaginative allegiance. Bettelheim (1989, p. 74) concurs, adding that the story form emulates the child's manner of bringing order into his or her world, achieved

by dividing everything into opposites. Since he cannot comprehend intermediate stages of degree and intensity, things are either all light or all darkness. One is either all courage or all fear; the happiest or the most miserable; the most beautiful or the ugliest; the smartest or the dumbest; one either loves or hates, never anything in between.

Writing about the importance of utilizing the ways children best make sense of experience, Egan (1990, pp. 93, 106) says learning most readily occurs when children have an affective grasp on a subject. This can be achieved by placing the content within a story structure that uses binary opposites that are both profoundly abstract and affectively engaging, such as good and bad, brave and cowardly, security and fear. However, "while the binary opposites provide access to a topic, and provide the basic coordinates of understanding, it is the mediation that makes our grasp on the topic more sophisticated and secure." This mediation process can be traced in Cinderella as the good thwarted by the evil stepmother. Cinderella's request to attend the ball sets up a dialectical process in which frustration is countered by advancement of the "good", including a pivotal point when it seems all is lost, at which time the forces of "good" rally to aid the defenceless girl, and eventually ensure her complete

victory.

This simplistic account illustrates the (often complex) mediation process that provides much interest in the tales. Because the characters are clearly delineated, subtle exploration of the moral implications of the tales is possible. These moral readings, says Zipes (1979/80, p. 19), are enhanced through the readers' identification with the heroes<sup>1</sup> who act as emotional guides through the binary oppositions (the plot or patterns of the tale). Children "follow a social path, learn role orientation, and acquire norms and values. The pattern for most Grimms' fairy tales involves a struggle for power and autonomy." Zipes is correct in acknowledging the power of stories to influence readers. But if the hero sets out a prescribed "social path" we need to ask about the nature of that path. What is the relationship between the content and the conveyance of the story's normative claims?

In fairy tales, the characters embody the basic binary oppositions; they contain the subject and are what happens. Readers engage with the protagonist whose desire and attitude inform and determine the plot. In the fairy tale The Golden Bird the hero does not thrust unthinkingly ahead, but wanders through the story. This wandering might mean an open-ended or exploratory approach to life, or it might mean confusion and lack of purpose. To learn what it means in this story, readers need to fuse the hero's wandering with his qualities of character such as curiosity, humour, self-motivation and kindness. This fusion allows us to see his non-linear course as an interesting and valuable way of experiencing the world. The hero is receptive but discriminating about the advice he is given, and he weighs and considers all things.

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<sup>1</sup> Because The Golden Bird concerns a hero, and for reasons cited earlier, I use the conventional term hero to include, where appropriate, female heroes.

Although he makes mistakes, he doesn't give up. These connections between form and content can be described as the hero "walking his talk." There is a continuity between who hero is and what he does. The hero acts his imagery, so to speak. Gaining the kingdom in this fairy tale is not, as Zipes says, the hero's "struggle for power" over his father's golden toys. The hero's ownership of them, or his rule over the kingdom, is qualitatively different. The way hero accumulates his treasures identifies or qualifies them as much as what they represent in a cultural—either the story's or society's—context. So, for example, we note that the circuitous route of the plot is created in large by the hero's attitude toward the events that transpire and the animals and people he meets. Similarly, the "body" of the text exists in relation to the "head" or the content of the story. Both the "how" and the "what" of the story comprise its meaning.

Zipes is correct in saying that the story posits certain values and comes to agreement about what is "good." As Murdoch (1989, pp. 87-88) says,

art is not a diversion or a side-issue, it is the most educational of all human activities and a place in which the nature of morality can be seen.

The "good", however, is not obedience or unthinking allegiance to an external standard, be it political or cultural, nor is it a view of the world which favours the rational at the expense of the seemingly irrational. Nor is it—as romantic readings of the tales have it—that being good and obedient guarantees the good results of wealth and status. Goodness, in the context of The Golden Bird is a "process" which shows how we as characters can experience life "by experiencing it." It is the quality of our experience that identifies us as characters and as people. The Golden Bird asks us to respond to midnight visitors, golden birds, rigid fathers, airborne foxes and weeping

princesses. Conversely, unwillingness to consider life's offerings (often characterized by inattentiveness) results in being possessed by our experience rather than being in possession of it. This is demonstrated by the older siblings of this and other fairy tales. Furthermore, as optimistic comedies, the tales say that good behaviour achieves a good ending, and shows the characters moving toward poetic justice and the satisfying ending. The ending, however, is not the moral point of the story. Zipes' notion that the tales are about the accumulation of power and wealth is true only in a very narrow sense. The morality of the tale lies in hero's attentiveness to all he meets in the various and unpredictable circumstances of his life, and in his kindness to the seemingly invaluable characters or experiences. Even sitting down on a rock and giving up, crying and waiting for help to arrive, is a normative claim.

What needs to be asked, then, is not whether fairy tales make normative claims which affect children—we can be reasonably sure they do, even though we do not completely understand how this happens, or what children learn. The question is not even whether fairy tales, particularly The Golden Bird, are rigid patterns of legitimization of stratified social patterns, as Zipes says, or are loving conversations about self-understanding and about learning to be at home in the world. Either way, the tales make normative claims. Our first concern should be **how** we read and interpret the tales. For instance, is bringing certain ideological frameworks to bear upon the content of the tale adequate, or, conversely, must literary work be understood in the context of its coherent form and content—keeping in mind that **what** is said is as important as **how** it is said. While we can agree that the tales are human constructions reflecting personal and cultural desires and anxieties, we need to tie our claims as closely as possible to the text.

## Literature as Patterns of Reconciliation

The Grimms' fairy tales are about the struggle to make sense of the world. They have something to say about what it means to be human, to live in the world, and especially what it means for vulnerable people (such as children) to learn to be at home in a frightening and sometimes dangerous world. The fairy tales exist in the moral domain. In contrast to philosophy's moral agents who must choose among external, fixed possibilities, literature's characters are distinguished by their struggle to make sense of things. The hero's task is not just to choose among opposing values, but to learn *how* to choose. And the only way to learn, the tales suggest, is to play "it by ear", to improvise, to be attentive to all that comes along, dismissing nothing, considering everything. This moral attentiveness is achieved through loving attention to a variety of experiences, and is the way, the tale suggests, to become discriminating, attentive characters. This is most simply demonstrated by the hero talking with otherworldly creatures, and by the unblinking maneuvers between the worldly and otherworldly planes of existence.

Zipes says the tales' heroes are good, kind, and above all obedient, and the tale's conclusions mere affirmations of the "status quo." The antagonist is the opposite—devious, cruel and selfish. A view of the tales which posits the idea that goodness (in other words, obedience) will be rewarded, presupposes an external criterion for behaviour which some fairy tale characters (usually the youngest) exhibit and some (usually the elder) don't. Following this line of thought, the tales socialize children to apprehend the codes of decency and kindness and to exhibit such behaviour. Zipes (1979, p. 7), for example, says the tales were fashioned for the middle classes by the Grimms, who "saw a mission in the tales and were bourgeois

missionaries.” But is advocacy what the tales are about? Is a bourgeois middle classness the only position they advocate? Is Zipe’s critique broad enough to include the complexities of form and movement in the tales? Do not many fairy tale plots work subversively upon morality narrowly construed, and cast doubt on reductive theories? On Grimms’ own theories and moral codes? On the similarly reductive theorizing of also this thesis? I believe the tales are much more sophisticated than the closed reading such as Zipes offers, and do something very different.

Rather than one right code, be it romantic or bourgeois, with a corresponding code of conduct the hero must follow, or dichotomous codes the hero must choose between, there are subtle distinctions in the tales which create patterns. In their attempt to express what is of fundamental importance the stories move between the binary oppositions. This dialectical process of mediation can be expressed in the idea of conversation, which unlike imperative speech, suggests balance. We incorporate a friend’s thoughts and insights with our own, thereby gaining another view of the world. This is also true of stories. Following the story’s characters as they react to different circumstances and as they make choices, readers learn about different possibilities. And so I would like to explore the voices of the conversation of The Golden Bird, and the way our knowledge deepens with the shifting rhythms.

The hero in this tale is not an autonomous figure, but part of a society constructed of voices or values. Meaning is created conversationally—through social interaction, collaboration, and negotiation. Moral awareness is achieved not through the hero’s alignment with a romantic or utilitarian view but through his kindness and love, and his availability to various kinds of experience.

In The Golden Bird, contrasting values are presented in terms of rule-governed

and perception-governed codes, patriarchal and feminine kingdoms, past and future, among which the hero must find his way. The tale exemplifies the process of learning to live within discrete and opposing forces. (But the tale also is the process. Stories, like life, are comprised of competing forces that vie for position.) The reader of The Golden Bird is asked to alternate between assuming several perspectives, including that of the hero, his father the king, the fox, but also between assuming the hero's original perspective and his new way of feeling and seeing at the end of the tale.

#### Love as a Means of Knowledge

The Golden Bird explores love's code, and shows love as the appropriate way of knowing the world, and the intellectual, perceptive and emotional gains made through loving acts. Loving activity, it suggests, leads to accurate perception of reality, and thus to what Nussbaum (1990) identifies as true rationality, or psychic wholeness. In particular, the story says that loving enables one to go beyond a strictly rational, instrumental, attitude towards life. In this tale the hero can only gain his father's kingdom by overcoming his inheritance (his father's view of the world) through knowledge inherent in acts of love. In his friendship with the fox, the king's son learns his own capacity for love. In learning to trust the fox, he learns to trust himself. The tale not only describes trusting and learning to love, it also engages the readers in its activity. We suspend our scepticism, enter the tale's conventions, follow the hero's leading, and learn how we might live in the world. I will sketch the



outline of the plot, and then comment on a number of passages<sup>2</sup>.

A tree in the king's garden bears golden apples. When it is discovered that an apple is missing, the king sends his two elder sons to watch during the night. It is the youngest son, however, who resolves to keep awake, and thus witnesses the theft by a golden bird. Demanding the "whole bird" the king sends off his two elder sons (one at a time) to find it. Failing to recognize the fox's good advice, the elder brothers get stuck in the merry inn and discontinue their quest. Begrudging his youngest son a chance because "if any misfortune were to happen to him he would not know how to help himself; his wits are none of the best", the king finally concedes and lets his youngest son go. Through a series of events involving (partially) heeding the fox's advice, thefts, appearances before judges and tribunals, and eventual recovery of not only the golden bird, but also the golden horse and the princess, the youngest son returns to the village where his older brothers had stayed. Failing to obey the fox's final instructions, the youngest son is dispossessed of his goods and cast into the brook, while his brothers return home victoriously. The fox saves the son again, and advises him to disguise himself in order to avoid the sentinels the older brothers have posted. Upon the son's return home in beggar's clothes, the "bird began to chirp, and the horse began to feed, and the beautiful princess" who "ceased weeping" recognizes her rightful bridegroom. The elder brothers are put to death and the youngest son succeeds "to the inheritance of his father." Long afterward, the youngest son fulfils the fox's request to chop off its head and feet. This action changes the fox into none other than the brother of the princess, whose appearance

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<sup>2</sup>All quotes from The Golden Bird in Grimm & Grimm, 1963, translated by L. Crane.

completes the harmony and happiness of the group.

A temptation is to see the fairy tales as conduits by which social values are imparted, and to see their heroes as romantic ideals—the young men or women who embody the “good” and whose conduct harkens back to a simpler time we have since lost. A historical or personal past—when we as a society or as children—felt a kinship with nature. Within this concept, the hero of The Golden Bird is a kind-hearted lad who communes with nature, and who, through obedience, disobedience and luck, perseveres and wins gold, beast, princess and glory. The criticism often following such portrayals is that, beyond sentimental appeal, they hold little value for today’s children. The following attempts to overturn such simplistic notions of the tales.

The tale begins “In times gone by there was a king who had at the back of his castle a beautiful pleasure-garden, in which stood a tree that bore golden apples.” As the apples ripened they were counted, but one morning one was missing.” The diction, “king” and “castle” propel us into the fairy tale conventions of extremes and abstractions. Like the particulars of a hero or heroine’s beauty, the idealized life of the court is never stated directly, but left to the reader’s imagination. The garden, however, is described by the adjective “pleasure”, which coincides with general notions of gardens in literature. Located at the back of the castle, and containing the aesthetically golden apples, the garden might have been a place of refreshment and repose, the secret, hidden life supporting the king’s daily life of ruling his kingdom. At the present point in its history—the occasion of this narrative—this is not a garden where the king communes with his gods, nor is it a garden of love (there is no queen). The activity that takes place in this garden is not courting but counting. The

king's response to golden apples is one of measurement and possession, and, consequently, he calls for the aggressive protection of guards. When not appreciated beautiful apples are merely owned and signify a mundane existence.

This need to control is passed on from father to son, and as is so often the case in fairy tales, the two elder truly are their father's sons. But their attempts to control fail. The golden bird eludes the sleeping sons, and at the end of the story, the sentinel they set up to catch and kill their younger brother fails. The youngest son disguises himself and enters his father's kingdom in broad daylight, under the guards' noses. The reasoned response of guns and guards proves inadequate defense against the elusive irrational workings of the night and of the imagination. Fairy tale conventions dictate that the youngest son be isolated from the rest of the family, and so the king expresses his doubts about the boy's ability (we read the king had "less trust" in him). But the boy resolves to uncover the mystery and so he is awake rather than asleep. He "senses" something "rushing through the air" before he sees the bird. The story's rhythm shifts from the midnight reverie in the garden to the palace and daytime consciousness. The king articulates his values in his declaration that "such a feather is worth more than the whole kingdom, and then his demand that one is not enough for me; I **must** and **will** have the whole bird (emphasis mine)." If there was any doubt previously, it is now entirely clear this voice is fixed in its formulations. If such amazing events and signs as a night visitor cannot break through the king's habitual response and concern with numbers it seems unlikely anything can. The king is right—the bird is worth more than the whole kingdom. But its value is not that of the king's, nor of his kingdom as presently constituted. The king's words will come back, not to haunt him (the tales are comic, not tragic)

but to echo with renewed significance. The king's reliance on a precise, measured knowledge, and his demanding insistence, alienates him from knowing the true value of the bird. Neither do we readers know, but we do know that the king and the youngest son have very different attitudes toward it. It is not so much the king's cost-benefit analysis of the bird which the tale resists, or his unfeelingness towards it, but that his habitual mode obscures his vulnerability, and moreover, distorts his perception. For the king the story stops. His limited options depleted, he will not learn more about the bird, and therefore, not more about himself, as we expect the hero will do. The tale does not just promote the hero's gentle attitude toward life, but insists that **unless** one is available to seemingly irrational, unexpected and surprising experiences, and pays attention to them, one is unable to be truly rational. In the king's case, rationality delimits, and is a false view of reality. The king's rational proceedings—assessing worth and applying a strategy for the bird's capture—is not just doomed to failure but conceals from the king the particulars of his need (a queen, perhaps)?

This cost-benefit analysis of the heart—the only comparative assessment of which intellect, by itself, is capable—is bound to miss differences in depth. Not only to miss them, but to impede their recognition. Cost-benefit analysis is a way of comforting oneself, of putting oneself in control by pretending that all losses can be made up by sufficient quantities of something else. This stratagem opposes the recognition of love—and indeed, love itself (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 264).

Sole interest in taking-care-of-business leads the king into complacency, deterring him from richer or fuller inquiry, and renders him impotent to the prompting of his heart. Vulnerability, openness to experience, are not just alternative modes of existence, rather, they are the ways and means of an accurate view of reality.

The king firmly entrenched, the two elder sons enact the consequences of their

father's position. Within fairy tale convention the elder children can never succeed, as the tale invariably belongs to the youngest, least-likely sibling. For good reason, Bettelheim (1989, p. 103) says.

A small child, bright though he may be, feels himself stupid and inadequate when confronted with the complexity of the world which surrounds him. Everybody else seems to know so much more than he, and to be so much more capable. This is why many fairy tales begin with the hero being depreciated and considered stupid. These are the child's feelings about himself<sup>3</sup>.

Like his father, the eldest son is immovable. He knows the source of good counsel, and it is not from foxes. Relying on habit and the inherited code, he thrusts his gun, a rather disproportionate gesture, to the imploring fox at the edge of the woods. Like his father, the eldest son misses differences in depth. The appropriate response to something or someone depends upon gaining particular knowledge, available only through close attention to the other. The basis of rational thought is accurate perception, perception gained, says Nussbaum (1990, p. 234) by "trusting the guidance of a friend and allowing one's feelings to be engaged with that other person's life and choices." In this way "one learns to see aspects of the world that one had previously missed." The pat, unthinking response—the opposite of attentiveness—fails the situation. "How can a silly beast give one any **rational** advice?" (emphasis mine) the eldest son asks, shooting at the fox. (Again, a lovely ironic twist, in that the son's inability to comprehend the significance of the fox will lead to his death, whereas the fox's advice will lead not to death, but to life abundant, and will be shown to be infinitely rational.)

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<sup>2</sup> This humility, however, posited in many tales and western stories, is worth considering in light of Christian virtues. To what extent is this experience culturally imposed?

Josephine Evetts-Secker (1989, p. 31) says that the fox, living on the fringes of consciousness, is sly as it needs to be, knowing what its fate would be nearer to the castle.

With typical lack of subtlety, the first son confronts the enigmatic beast who lives on the edge of the wood, at the threshold of development. He points his gun at it with phallic invasiveness, will and mind dominating the meeting. Not an entirely successful encounter with his own feeling side! The fox simply sits, is not easily scared, and despite the lack of delicacy, offers help. In exchange for its life it offers 'good counsel', which doesn't make any sense at a rational level, here the only valued mode. It retreats to the woods, where it waits, ready and oddly willing to reappear at need. The fox never fails.

The second son follows his elder brother to the tavern where, without the necessary reflection, he falls into the thoughtless life of easy pleasure. While posturing as pleasure, living "in clover" ultimately robs pleasure because it robs the sons of options. The story says that the second brother "hearing the sounds of merriment. . . **could not resist** (emphasis mine) them." The brothers forget the bird and their father, and all good counsel. Robbed of options, they get stuck in sensuality and conviviality, and are deadened to all but the gratification of the body. Having no recourse to imaginative options is deadening, as children whom our educational system has failed prove.

The fox, like intuitive life, waits for its opportunity. The golden bird must not be forgotten. Despite his father's misgivings, the mindful youngest son eventually sets out in search of the golden bird. Like his brothers, the hero meets the fox at the edge of the wood, but as we might expect his response is radically different from his brothers. "Be easy, little fox, I will do you no harm" he says. This is love at work. The hero attends. He hears or intuits (in the fox's anxiety, perhaps) his brothers' abuses of it. Kindness doesn't just lead to knowledge, it is knowledge. Kindness is

not something you apply—it is what you are. But you cannot act kindly without knowledge of particulars. The hero takes the fox's advice regarding the night's lodging, and the fox facilitates his journey, saying, "and that you may get there all the sooner, get up and sit on my tail." The image of the boy on the fox's tail, "running as one over stock and stone, so that the wind whistled in their hair" is imagery at its best. The concrete image of the beast and boy flying over the fields, somewhat like Aladdin on his carpet, is evocatively visual. The mingled hair—the head and tail hair, man and beast hair—suggests organic unity and cooperation (Evetts-Secker, p. 32). The physical impossibility of the boy sitting on a fox's tail suggests its supernatural or magical dimension. The complexity of this image is indicative of the way the hero will fulfil his quest, and its importance is demonstrated in its formulaic repetition throughout the tale. It is also a fine example of aesthetic complexity and the rich interpretability of metaphoric language.

There are some obvious incremental patterns, such as the triad of tasks put before the hero. A synopsis of the hero's success and failure in completing the three tasks is as follows:

1. Gets past the sleeping guards, finds the golden bird, replaces wooden with golden cage, is caught, sentenced, and given the conditional promise of his life and golden bird in exchange for the golden horse.
2. Gets past the sleeping grooms, finds the golden horse, replaces wooden with golden saddle, is caught, sentenced, and given the conditional promise of his life and golden horse in exchange for the beautiful princess of the golden palace<sup>4</sup>.
3. Gets into the bath house, finds the princess, kisses her and lets her bid goodbye to her parents, is caught, sentenced, and given the

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<sup>3</sup> We again see the Christian emphasis on the plain rather than the glittering, the wooden rather than the golden.

conditional promise of his life and princess in exchange for levelling the mountain.

Although the hero makes the same kind of error with each task, there is increasingly more at stake. As he progresses from winning apple, to bird, to horse and finally to princess, he ascends the hierarchical scale of vegetative, animal, and human.

Another important incremental repetition in this tale lies in the escalating amount of hero's trouble in the central tasks of the tale. His life becomes more conditional and complex (and thus more valuable?) with each task. This serves as dramatic backdrop for the ethics the tale explores in this section. I said at the outset that the hero needed to learn to trust the fox as a way of learning to trust himself. How does this happen?

It has to do with the rhythms in the tales that express "clock" time and "human" time. Clock time is what the apple counters and gun thrusters of this story rely on. Time is experienced as either random (the king is angry, the elder sons proceed with their guns pointed, guards are called) or as sameness (the unconscious life of the tavern). Although action punctuates the continuum, there is little sense of connectedness. Actions do not proceed from feeling or reflection, and the actions are of the same quality. There is no differentiation among actions, rather, there is just action—or reaction. Human time, however, is complex. It is illustrated when the hero, having resolved not to sleep in anticipation of the feathered thief in the king's garden, sleeps soundly in the mean tavern. Different situations call for different responses and the distinguishing perception of human time.

Another illustration of human time is the hero's friendship with the fox. When the hero becomes despondent after rescuing the golden bird, the fox is loyal and



encouraging. Despair often is the fairy tale signal that help will arrive. "Be of good courage", the fox says, "I will bring you through." The hero is happy enough to be helped. For seven days he has shovelled the king's mountain with little progress. The hero "fell into a great sadness, and gave up all hope." It is when humans concede the impossibility of their task that the supernatural can intervene. Fairy tales push this to dramatic extremes. The fox tells the hero to go to sleep and "I will do the work for you." The problem solved during sleep! The hero demonstrates his complete faith in the fox, yet a little later is unable to trust the fox's order to cut off its head and feet. Only late in the tale will he be able to trust his friend to that extent.

The fox's tempo is speed and direct routes. (The golden horse is also "swifter than the wind.") The fox tells the hero to "pass through" the sleeping soldiers and to "go forward into the castle."<sup>5</sup> There is a directness and simplicity, about which Evetts-Secker (1989, p. 32) says:

Once the attitude and feeling are right, the path should be direct and uncomplicated; he simply has to "pass through", "go forward into." But this is rather naive, pointing to the danger of relying on foxes! He doesn't pass through so easily, things are more complicated than the fox allows for. In the process however, he gains more. If he had followed the fox's advice to the letter, he would have returned with the bird and another tale would still need to be told.

The fluctuating pattern of obedience and disobedience forms an interesting development in this tale. The fairy tales have been vigorously criticized for promoting bourgeois ideals through the hero's compliance and obedience to the

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<sup>4</sup> The king and brothers are straightforward as well, in a very different way. Is the tale saying something about straightforwardness, then, that in its exclusiveness it misses significance? That straightforwardness can be both rigid intrusiveness and a naivety, and that both, while not wrong in themselves, tend to exclude rather than incorporate experience?

“status quo”, so notable here is the hero’s **disobedience**. On ten occasions the fox tells or asks the hero to perform certain tasks. Of those, the hero obeys the first instruction to get up on its tail; the second to spend the night at the dark, mean-looking tavern; the fifth and sixth (which concern recovery of the lost goods); and the last request to slay the fox. The seventh request, in which the fox asks the hero to kill it, is considered and refused by the hero. The second, third and fourth instructions, concerning the tasks outlined above, he obeys partially. To his great peril the eighth injunction is entirely ignored. Disobedience this late in the tale contradicts reading this tale as a romantic “lesson” in which hero learns (marked by cumulative or incremental growth) that certain moral codes lead to a satisfactory conclusion. If this were a didactic work of socialization, the sophisticated Grimms would not have “allowed” the hero to commit a blunder that undermines their ideological position. It may, therefore, be worthwhile to study the context and the effect of the disobedience.

The hero disobeys most dramatically near the end of the tale when he returns to the village near his father’s castle where his brothers had remained. Although the story does not explain, it is obvious something has changed between the fox and the hero (perhaps the proximity to the father’s kingdom?) and their conversation is for the first time unfriendly. In fact, hero’s satirical “That is a wonderful animal, with most singular ideas. How should any one buy gallows-meat? And I am sure I have no particular fancy for sitting by a brookside”, echoes his elder sibling’s: “How can a silly beast give one any rational advice?” What accounts for this sudden shift in the tale?

This is not the first time the hero is disobedient. When he arrives at the castle

to fetch the various golden treasures, he follows the fox's instructions until the moment he confronts the treasures. In each case he hesitates, weighing the matters of wooden versus golden cages, leather versus golden saddles, saying to himself, for example, "Such a beautiful animal would be disgraced were I not to put on him the good saddle, which becomes him so well." In the bath house, the fox's explicit instructions are countered by the princess' plea on bent knees. In sympathy, hero relents and lets her say goodbye to her parents.

What we see, as we follow the hero through instances of obedience, hesitation, straightforward action, through conversations, and through deliberations and disobedience, is a conversational attitude. If the fairy tale's intention is to posit a romantic view of the world, it needs to show the hero learning to fully trust the intuitive beast. Instead, it shows the hero learning to see (remember the brothers couldn't see the fox for what it was) and to **listen** discriminately to the fox's advice. It is in his **disobedience** that the hero shows discretion; he weighs, considers and tempers the fox's influence. His uneasiness with the fox's helpful but sometimes simplistic instructions demonstrates a respect for the complexity of life. Sole reliance on either intuition or rationality distorts.

The hero arrogantly fails to heed the fox's injunction against gallows meat and sitting by a brookside. So close to home, his treasures in hand, the hero is closer to losing everything (including his life) than during his previous adventures.

Interpretations spring to mind. Viewed as the story of the development of the male psyche, the hero regresses temporarily while making the necessary adjustments to being back on the father's territory. Or, complacency is one's worst enemy. The passage can also be quite plainly read to say that human development is not entirely

cumulative, nor is love's knowledge—once achieved—infallible. Human life is comprised of gain and loss, success and failure, advance and retreat. Furthermore, absolute reliance on intuition is unrealistic, and the fairy tale does not suggest the intuitive life is the best life, rather, that it is a part of life. Emotions are as susceptible to falsity as is rationality. Still, the hero has to learn to trust his emotional experience because that part of his “education” is not modeled at home (there is no female)? Through loving attention to detail and to others, valuing the multidimensionality of existence, and community with others, the hero learns from all the major forces in his life. He learns from his paternal heritage, from the intuitive, luminous fox, and from his own emotional and aesthetic sense, which, after all, made him resolve to stay awake and to agitate for permission to search for the bird. And so the hero comes to inherit the kingdom—not by assuming some external code (be it instrumental or romantic), but by attentively working his way through the complexity of life; valuing a linear rationality, but not above emotion and imagination.

The fairy tale works toward personal reconciliation for the hero, but works at the level of community as a story of many characters needing reconciliation. Back at the court, the king, noticing that “the bird began to chirp, and the horse began to feed, and the beautiful princess ceased weeping, asks ‘What does this mean?’” This is the question that the hero asked about the golden apple at the beginning of the story but that the king failed to ask. The princess says she does not (cognitively) know, but tells the king “I was sad, and now I am joyful; it is to me as if my rightful bridegroom had returned.” Her emotions provide the needed knowledge. In this passage Grimm explores the relationship between perceptions and rule. The king is bound by duty and rules, but that does not mean he cannot or does not love, but

that it takes something exceptional to astonish the king into (loving) perception. (Is the return of the female to the court coincidental to the king's new perception?) The king is being asked to be something more, not something other. A change in the princesses' emotional state suggests an (unconfirmed) change in the external, physical world. The king recognizes her emotions, but asks for clarification. He does not make a judgment based upon the princess' perceptions, which could be wrong—mere fantasy. He orders (action consistent with his character) every person in the castle to be brought before him, including his unrecognizable youngest son, although the emphasis is no longer on the son, as he too must return to the community of which he is a part.

Next occurs a wonderful dialogue between rule and perception, the particular binary opposites embodied respectively in the king and the princess. Through imagination and love they recognize and complement each other. In terms of the larger structure of this story, the king's (daytime) court and the watery, nighttime kingdom of the princess—at the extremes of the hero's journey—signify physical (and narrative) distance, as well as contrasting values. Hero journeys from his father's to the princess' kingdom, and back to his father's realm. The entire narrative, precipitated by the nighttime world (imaged in the bird) impinging upon the daytime world of the court, collaborates in the mediation of these two poles. The call of the dark, feminine world is only heard and understood by the hero, who, in following the bird, forms the connecting links between kingdoms. The king is finally also able to respond to this call, and the dialogue shifts from perception (the princess tells how she feels) to rule (the king orders a gathering) to perception (the princess perceives her bridegroom, intuited through his disguise) to rule (the wicked brothers are put to

death) to marriage and inheritance. Not only the king benefits, but also the princess, as the king's orderliness enables her to verify her perception. But perception is prior; uniting with the feminine (marriage) is prior to "succeeding to the inheritance of his father." Marriage is the shared picture of the couple's, but also the community's, mutual involvement.

The king has had to feel the mystery of the particular, leave off his antecedent ordering and counting, see what the princess is about, in order to know what to do, how to respond. The dialogue between his rules and the princess' perceptions is "motivated and sustained by a love that is itself in the sphere of perception, that antecedes any moral agreement" (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 160). When rules are appropriately situated within perception (and vice versa), correct judgment is possible. The king knows what to do, corrects his initially false judgment of his youngest son (as well as of his older sons, whom he judged to be capable) and recognizes his younger son as the rightful inheritor. As the old system no longer has currency, he orders the death of the sons who represent those values.

The fairy tales are relentless about the theme of death making way for newness and growth. It appears once more in the tale. The hero (now presumably the king) is walking in the woods (contrasting the earlier unenjoyed garden at the back of the castle) when he meets up with the fox who again requests he chop off his head and feet. Earlier in the story, when the fox asks this, the son says "That were a strange sign of gratitude. . . and I could not possibly do such a thing." Nussbaum (1990, p. 134) talks about the need to depart from one's own moral code in order to be lovingly committed to the world.

Beginning to live is beginning to see that meaningful commitment to a

love in the world can require the sacrifice of one's own moral purity. Love, unlike the ideal of the Tristanic lover, must live on cunning and treachery; it requires the breaking of moral rules and a departure from the comfortable garden.

"Departure from the comfortable garden" is here enacted in killing the fox, prepared for by hero's many moments of vulnerability (climbing on the fox's tail, for example) and through transgressing the inherited code. Knowledge is more than an intellectual, quantitative grasp on life. In fact, the need for such control results in lack of control. Life's complexity includes an emotional response that contributes to a true sense of reality. Facilitated by our emotional response to the hero, our interest in The Golden Bird becomes cognitive, and we learn what is possible.

#### Stories as Embodied Talk

The cinematic nature of the staged tale with its props and characters, with its hero making his way from castle to castle and back, as well as his journey through the different modes of discourse, helps readers visualize and respond emotionally. While Zipes (1979/80, p. 4) acknowledges the tales' emotional significance, in fact, he depends upon it for his argument regarding the tales' dangers in creating "a false consciousness", Zipes fails to follow the emotional ties into the story, and into hero's playful and imaginative construction of his own plot. Zipes' account of the tales seems limited to a somewhat fearful regard for the stern and admonishing father figure, without recognizing that hero subverts the established codes in order to talk and walk his way into his own, more balanced sense of the world.

Zipes (1979/80, pp. 16-17) is correct, however, when he says that the purposes of such art can lie in perpetuating external values and norms.

We tend to forget the sociohistorical frameworks of control when we talk about reading and especially the reading of fairy tales. Both socialization and reading reflect and are informed by power struggles and ideology in a given society or culture. The Grimms' fairy tales were products not only of the struggles of the common people to make themselves heard in oral folk tales—symbolically representing their needs and wishes—but they also became literary products of the German bourgeois quest for identity and power. To this extent, the norms and value system which the Grimms cultivated within the tales point to an objectified, standard way of living which was intended and came to legitimate the general bourgeois standard of living and work not only in Germany but throughout the western world.

This thesis confirms the socializing intention of story-telling, and thus of reading.

Understanding “story”, however, means not just attaching external codes to its content or subjects, but seeing a story’s subject as embodied talk. Stories are not just so much talk, they are talk-in-action. They are what “head talk” becomes when it is joined to the body, or what ideas become when they are fused to lived experience.

Literature, including fairy tales, does not just reflect external values; they are comprised of values and viewpoints which struggle for position within their contexts.

Otherwise almost any reading is possible, including Zipes’ assertion of the tales as cultivating “an objectified, standard way of living which was intended and came to legitimate the general bourgeois standard of living and work (1979/80, p. 17).” In

The Golden Bird at least, I have shown this to be otherwise. Hero participates in bourgeois standards, but the tale does not affirm them (and certainly not with “missionary zeal”) as the ultimate expression of being at home in the world. Rather, the tale explores their place within a balanced life and society. The commodification of values, the tale suggests, needs to be balanced by other forms of knowing, achieved only by responding to life as fully and deeply as possible.

The tales say something about the kinds of response possible in life, and the



value of a response grounded in emotion and feeling, and balanced by intellectual judgment. There will always be instrumental, emotional, intuitive responses to situations in life; the fairy tale says a good response lies in utilizing different modes in order to obtain an accurate and realistic view of the world. And the pleasure of the cinematic tale is that, participating with the hero, we talk his talk and walk his walk, learning, with him, to attend to fathers and foxes as they help us define ourselves and our place in the world.

## CHAPTER NINE

GOLDBLOCKS AND THE THREE BEARS THE "REAL" WAY: THE FATE OF THE VULNERABLE CHILD SURROUNDED BY UNCERTAINTY AND DANGER

This chapter aims to establish empirical grounds for using fairy tales in the classroom in an educationally productive way. It focuses on bringing to the fore the pedagogical value of aesthetic uses of the tales in a primary setting where stories and play are the means of learning for young children. The fairy tales have obvious connections to children's play—their themes of abandonment and danger are relevant to children when they enter school.

Each fall children aged three, four, and five leave home. Without parents or siblings, without their familiar surroundings and its sounds, smells, its good food and comfortable chairs. They enter a closed room with other children and strange adults. They enter a dark forest.

With each telling of Goldilocks and The Three Bears, Goldilocks enters the forest. She enters the bears' house in the middle of the woods, tastes a stranger's food, sits in uncomfortable furniture and sleeps in a stranger's bed. She wakes up to three staring bears, and runs as fast as she can out of the house and out of the woods to her own home. And her mother.

## Establishing Connections and Building Mythologies

Helping children feel at home in their school environment requires establishing a common ground. There are many approaches to such a task. Some teachers work at challenging the pre/misconceptions children bring to the classroom. Others hope to

establish an empathetic spirit by celebrating cultural or racial similarities, or differences. They might read different versions of a story—an African Little Red Riding Hood alongside the Grimms' tale, for example. Some set aside special days in which to celebrate individual cultures, or assign collaborative projects. And some, of course, depend upon rules.

Vivian Gussin Paley helps me think about the ways we create communities, and about literature's role in this. Over the course of a long career, Paley, an educator at the University of Chicago's lab school, has transcribed and reflected upon the conversations and stories of her many preschool and kindergarten classes. She writes down the stories the children tell her, and records their conversations. Later, transcribing the talk, she listens again—both to what the children say, and to her replies and questions. This research, recorded in her (1990) book, The Boy Who Would Be A Helicopter,<sup>1</sup> takes children's abilities seriously. It has led Paley to articulate the relevance of children's play, and how story-telling and story acting provide opportunities for each child to comfortably, purposefully and meaningfully become part of the community of the classroom. Paley helps me better understand community and its role in how children learn, and in becoming literate. Moreover, she helps me understand the usefulness of fairy tales in an educational setting.

Paley says that a group's common ground lies in its shared fantasies. It is in fantasy play that children can push deeply into the collective imagination and explore the themes important to preschool children: friendship and safety. While these themes may be universal, their signifiers within literature and within communities are

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<sup>1</sup> The Boy Who Would Be A Helicopter is the second most recent of at least seven books.

always culture-bound. The image of the forest, for example, signifies either the unknown or the known (think of the forest-dweller, for whom the city is the nightmare). It is helpful to acknowledge the culture-specific references in fairy tales and in my work. Nevertheless, within Paley's classroom "forest" seems to speak cross-culturally, as it has within literature for centuries.

Although most often unarticulated, feelings and the fantasies they suggest are a basis of community. Paley (p. 34) identifies three levels or ways for children to achieve community. Friendship and fantasy play can provide private links between children, but for school to make sense requires belonging to the larger group.

Play is not enough; there must be a format that captures the essence of play while attaching to it a greater degree of objectivity. Storytelling and story acting can perform the task. Story and stage provide a laboratory for every sort of child: those who are sociable but not articulate and those who speak better than they play; those who are trapped in a single theme and those who scurry quickly along the edges of too many (themes).

Community is achieved when its common emotions and feelings are expressed through consensually agreed-upon signs and symbols. My specific interest in this chapter is the role of fairy tales in supplying the images and themes, as well as the forms of fantasy play (I include story-telling and story acting), and ultimately the role of fairy tales in helping children articulate their thoughts and feelings in words and actions. Paley (pp. 155, 157, 160) bears out my assertion of the tales' importance as lively and compelling stories, brilliantly told. However, my ultimate goal (as a woman, parent, poet and educator) is not the preservation of the Grimms' tales, but identifying the ways the traditional tales can help us in learning to articulate our own experience, tell our own stories. Learning that we can use literature as a symbolic and cultural means of expression is part of what it means to become literate. Stories--

those given to us and, importantly, our own—help us recognize and name our fears in wonderfully complex, oblique and subconscious ways.

### Shaping Thoughts and Feelings into Stories

Children are natural story-tellers,<sup>2</sup> and telling stories—those easy, borderless crossings between reality and fantasy—facilitate their explorations. Most adults lose access to the easy fluctuations between imaginary and realistic worlds, and society dictates a narrow rationality, so it is no wonder that children’s methods of understanding the world confuse, or go unnoticed by, the majority of adults.

“Pretend” often confuses the adult. . . it is the child’s real and serious world, the stage upon which any identity is possible and secret thoughts can be safely revealed. Children, newly arrived in school, drift and worry until someone shares a fantasy and there are roles to play. Then there comes a sense of place and person, and the words flow with purpose and pleasure (Paley, 1990, p. 7).

Children who do not know where to hang their coats, or when they are allowed to eat the rice krispie square their father packed, **do** know how to be Michelangelo, Ninja Turtle Hero, or a comforting mother in the doll corner. In play, the children assert that they can **do**, **be** and **know**. Their play is dictated by the collaborative rules of the game. “Pretend you are the sister who goes to work.” “Pretend I have the key to the bridge and you try to find the secret place.” Their conversations are sensible, and a way of overcoming feelings of fear and loneliness. Friends are people who will play your game. “You play in my game, and I will play in yours. You listen to my idea and I’ll listen to yours.” Doesn’t that sound familiar? Isn’t that also the basis of

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<sup>2</sup> Paley (1990, pp. 4, 17) says that “children are born knowing how to put every thought and feeling into story form. They do not pretend to be storytellers; they are storytellers. It is their intuitive approach for all occasions. It is the way they think.”

adult friendships?

Teachers know that when people are comfortable, learning can take place. But to Paley, it is not just a matter of comfort, or of getting over fears so that real learning can begin. Rather, understanding fear and loneliness is a primary aspect of education, and fantasy is key. Fantasy allows children to mediate or transform unsettling thoughts into controllable images, or forms. Paley says that children have the ability to transform an unwanted image into a more acceptable form, or a new, more acceptable story.

#### Beneath the Surface to Where the Living Takes Place

So stories and play fulfil important pedagogical functions in that they are the means of learning for young children. Fantasy play generates thought and images, helping children deal with their fears about being at school. It also suggests new satisfactions, explanations, and eventually new ways of being and behaving. Let me give an example. Paley (p. 158) recounts a discussion about Goldilocks and The Three Bears. Here is the end of the discussion.

- Teacher: Was she wise to eat it (porridge)?  
 Everyone: No! No!  
 Teacher: I suppose she was hungry.  
 Arlene: She should of just seed what was in there and said, well, when I get home I'll ask my mom to make me some porridge.  
 Katie: No, she doesn't tell her mom 'cause her mom said don't go.  
 Lilly: She wanted to go for a nap. That's why she came in.  
 Teacher: Oh, she was tired.  
 Edward: Let her sleep on the floor.  
 Simon: On the grass she should.  
 Katie: Grass is too cold.  
 Arlene: I got a sleeping bag. It's very soft for that.

The children<sup>3</sup> are obviously displeased with Goldilocks who enters a stranger's house, eats a stranger's food, and sleeps in a stranger's bed. They offer the alternatives of sleeping on the floor or on the grass. Goldilocks' safety is of major concern for the children when they hear and when they tell their own version of the story. Samantha (p. 159), writes "Goldilocks saw the bears' house and she ran home. Then her mother played with her all day and she doesn't go to work." This version of Goldilocks makes good emotional sense to Samantha; if her mother would only stay and play there wouldn't be these kinds of temptations. And she's right.

Edward's story (p. 161), deals with the two primary issues: danger and a friendship that overcomes danger. His story reads: "Once upon a time it was Edward in a big dark forest. Then a bear came. Joseph and Katie and Simon came. A bad bear." Paley (p. 161), says,

He (Edward) objects when I return the story to the pile after we act it out. "I didn't finish. I need more people to come in the forest with me."

Paley wonders whether Edward would even be "in the forest" without such tales as The Three Bears. Images such as the fairy tale forest are good settings in which to explore feelings of being alone and afraid, but they are not the only places. There are cultural differences, but individual ones as well. I am sure you can think of the dangerous places of your childhood. (Under the stairs, in the house at the end of the street where the old woman peers through her lace curtains at children on their way to school. Hansel and Gretel's witch, I knew!)

My friend tells the story of the Coast Salish basket. It sat high on the shelf

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<sup>3</sup> The children named here: Arlene, Samantha, Edward, Joseph and others, are the children mentioned in Paley, 1990.

and was a goblin's home. "Shhh, children", his mother said, pointing to the basket, "If you're noisy, you'll scare away the goblin who lives there." Peter tells of the day he and sister Suzanne decided to investigate this goblin, to open the lid. But that made the goblin move out into the hollow of the tree in the back yard. "You frightened the goblin", said Peter's mother. My thoughts are that children cannot afford to find the basket empty. We need to have a home or an embodiment (image) for our fear. That is why children need fairy tales, and fairy tale talk. Paley (p. 161) says:

Didn't our discussion also help Edward deal with feelings of loneliness? He could picture Goldilocks in a cozy sleeping bag. And perhaps, if she has a bad dream about the bears, she can crawl into mommy's bed. All of these ideas are now Edward's to use in play and storytelling but, most important, to reflect upon each time he hears "The Three Bears."

And so being alone and afraid are good things to imagine, or fictionalize, within the context of the classroom. It is there that we, as a community, can provide for ourselves and each other the images of reassurance and assistance that we all need when we enter our particular "forest." Fantasy play and stories are the child-proven ways of proceeding. Children don't get stuck in bad images. Using their own, or other children's ideas, unwanted fairy tale ideas "are quickly transformed into controllable forms. Unlike the rest of us, children invent new stories instantly to dispel unwelcome images" (p. 160). And so Edward, one of her students, is enabled to enter the forest of his loneliness armed with images supplied by his classmates: a cosy sleeping bag for Goldilocks, and her mother waiting in her own house with a bowl of porridge.

The fairy tales' themes of abandonment and danger are relevant to children when they enter school, and their easy crossings between fantasy and reality is similar



to children's play. Even in the doll corner with its domestic themes leaps of fantasy occur. In the stories themselves there is space for the reader's imagination and interpretation, space for many, rather than one **right** reading of the tales. When Goldilocks' tastes the "just right" porridge, we understand in personal ways what it feels like (rather than merely tastes like) to eat "just right" food.

#### Advice for a Fearful Heroine

Like the Grimms' tales, Goldilocks (not strictly a fairy tale), has undergone similar "revisions" since published by Miss Eleanor Mure in 1831 and then by Robert Southey in 1837. Originally it was a Scottish cautionary tale where the intruder is a she-wolf which the bears eat. Later revisions saw the protagonist change from an old woman to a golden haired girl. Bettelheim points out that the bears obtained the names Papa, Mama and Baby Bear. Bettelheim (1989, p. 215) also says that the story "lacks some of the most important features of true fairy tales: at its end there is neither recovery nor consolation; there is no resolution of conflict, and thus no happy ending." Typical of fairy tales, however, its lacunae offer space for the readers'/hearers' imagination. And the story is popular with children. Paley uses it in her classroom because telling the story (and Paley always **tells** rather than **reads** fairy tales) enables her to make adjustments for the emotional needs of her audience. Depending on her listeners, she can stress Goldilocks' role as curious intruder, emphasizing the "rites of passage" theme of the tale, or she can tell the story from the point of view of Baby Bear, whose property is trespassed by the girl he finds in his bed. This latter telling plays upon the children's sense of rivalry with their sibling(s) or other children in the class. This ambiguity aligns the tale with other cautionary fairy tales such as Rapunzel and Little Red Riding

Hood<sup>4</sup>.

Fairy tales provide powerful, potent images that provoke strong feelings and discussion, but they also suggest ways of resolving the uncomfortable situations they generate. With a teacher's guidance the students can be fortified against the scary bits of many fairy tales they will encounter on television and in books, but also be fortified for the "scary bits" of life. By imagining frightening scenarios within the tales in less frightening ways, children learn that they have some control of their feelings and emotions. They learn that the stories they tell themselves can make them feel differently. "Here, Goldilocks, is a sleeping bag to protect you while you are in the forest." Or "Listen, Goldilocks, go home to your mother. She will play with you. She will cook a bowl of porridge of your own." Envisioning stories in which to place their confusion can mean envisioning changes for their fictional characters and for themselves. "Pretend I'm the baby and you love only me and you don't talk on the telephone" (p. 4). Before we can change situations in our lives, we usually need to be able to imagine the changes. And when we do have an idea, we need to hear our friends' responses, and add their good suggestions to our own. Overcoming fear is not a tidy once-and-for-all lesson, but a means of becoming "at home" in the world. Even though adult ways of playing take different forms from childlike ones, the process of learning to be at home in the world in the kindergarten class is also the adult process. Through playing, talking, listening, reading and writing—within the

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<sup>4</sup> An important difference between Goldilocks and The Three Bears and other tales such as Little Red Riding Hood, however, is that the reader does not know why Goldilocks is in the woods. On one level, Little Red Riding Hood is in the woods to meet the wolf, and strays from the path to disobey her mother's instructions. Readers, along with Little Red Riding Hood, learn the consequences of disobedience. Goldilocks' adventures, however, occur without an apparent context of a fictional society and history. While this feature might remove it from the fairy tale canon (which I think is most usefully described as stories in which magical and everyday events coexist), its enigma (and absurdity) is close to the heart of orality and fairy tales.

context of our communities—we learn to re-imagine ourselves and give expression to that to that reimagined self<sup>5</sup>.

### Safe Passage: From Private Fear to Public Symbol

Literature is a particular conversation with the world, and it uses a discourse that has particular intentions. In many cultures, story-telling is the cultural means of conveying a society's beliefs and values. Western society has tried to take its transmission of values out of the arts (as well as the home) and put it into the social sciences, as I have argued elsewhere. Art and science addresses the world in different ways: the arts use metaphoric language to explore experience obliquely, while the sciences use descriptive language to try to obtain as close a correlation between the words on the page and the experience described. The former approaches experience obliquely and the latter approaches it directly<sup>6</sup>. "Scientific discourse" would approach fear by saying "Let's talk about your fears about being in kindergarten, children." "Science" asks children for more self-knowledge than we can reasonably expect them to have, and it asks them to respond to the abstract concept of fear. A difficult task for many adults, never mind first-time students. Stories, on the other hand, say "What does Goldilocks (read: you, the reader) feel entering a strange house, waking up to the three bears?" Young readers who identify

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<sup>5</sup> There are, of course, other articulations than verbal ones. We can dance and paint our meaning. We can grow tulips or visit the elderly. Or as my mother does, climb Christmas Hill.

<sup>6</sup> A good example, but outside the scope of this paper, is sex education within the schools. Our young people need the facts, we are told, and the facts are delivered. Stories about intimate relationships are anathema to the enterprise: they can only distort, and lead to false perceptions, we are told. But I wonder whether stories about what we value in sexual relationships might not bring about the changes that we so desperately seek, but do not achieve, in our clinical approaches.

with the heroine of the story will be emotionally committed to her, thus to the story. However, the events of The Three Bears do not have the consequences of real day-to-day experience in the readers' lives<sup>7</sup>. This distancing makes it safe to explore the concept of fear, and provides the imaginative spaces around stories which make them such important experiences. As Emily Dickinson says, "Tell all the Truth, but tell it slant" (1960, p. 506).

I am impressed by the difference between Paley's students' critique and much scholarly criticism of the tales. The children want to know about the fairy tale in terms of the feelings they evoke. What does it feel like to enter the bears' house? Or to wake up to huge figures looming over your bed? Bettelheim, on the other hand, says Goldilocks and the Three Bears is meaningful because "it deals symbolically with some of the most important growing-up problems of the child: the struggle with the oedipal predicaments; the search for identity; and sibling rivalry" (1989, p. 215). Both approaches are suited to their contexts, but literary theorizing often proceeds without the experiential aspect Paley's child-critics bring to the tale.

Paley's concepts (as I interpret them) of literacy are different from definitions which refer to decoding skills or exposure to a wide assortment of print or text. For her and for me, literature generates meaningful images and story ideas by which community members can know themselves and others. Not one literature for all, nor a limited canon, nor prescribed images. As we saw in Paley's classroom, Goldilocks and the Three Bears, among other things, helped shape the childrens' inarticulate

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<sup>7</sup> Once again—reading is not just vicarious experience; it is experience. We can feel deep emotions when we read, but the framework of our experience is different. It is contrived. When we start reading, we knowingly accept the conditions of this artificial construct. We do not have to face the consequences of our adventures. This makes reading pleasurable—and safe. This is what Paley's children are learning, and need to learn in becoming literate.

feelings of fear and isolation into shared images and meanings. Paley (p. 162) says,

Fantasy, of course, is the first line of defense against every sort of fear, and, in fantasy play, the children discover the value of peer support as they dare to put the beanstalk and forest to the test. Gradually their private protective symbols blend with communal rituals to build semblances of safe retreats in the outside world.

What starts as private feelings or impulse must be mediated in culturally significant symbols if they are to be understood by others in our communities. The impulses of our bodies are usually inarticulate, at least, verbally inarticulate. We might shout, make loud noises, or a sudden effervescence might make us skip or dance. Attempts to verbalize such experiences are often awkward and obtuse. We search for the words that can embody our meaning—not an easy task. In Paley’s classroom, Jason demonstrates this process over the year. At first he flies around the classroom in his “helicopter”, breaking its blades and crashing whenever he is confronted in any way. Paley marks Jason’s growth by his ability to envision other possibilities for his helicopter, and to conjoin his private images with other children’s imaginings, as well as by his ability to incorporate other children’s images (such as “squirrel” or “mother”) into his own repertoire.

Literacy is in part about the movement from private feelings and meanings, to public, mutually intelligible symbols (Abbs, 1982). In ways similar to artists who channel their inarticulate impulses into culturally mediated and meaningful symbols so that their art will be comprehensible to others, so do child-story-tellers move from their dark feelings to the dark “forest.” In this way, children’s private protective symbols are given “semblances of safe retreats in the outside world.” Shakespeare writes (MN Dream, V.I.xvii) that we give our dreams a shape and a name—a

habitable space.

And as imagination bodies forth  
 the forms of things unknown, the poet's pen  
 turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing  
 a local habitation and a name.

Once fear has been named or externalized in this way other changes are possible.

Story-tellers can people the forest and confront the wild beasts of bedroom closets and bad feelings. They can enter the forest armed with sleeping bags or with mothers who are waiting at home with supper that is still warm. Fiction, especially fairy tales, names and shapes our inarticulate fears in profoundly important ways.

Within education, thinking about ways of addressing fear but also pedagogically, as an opportunity for learning—is revolutionary. We agree that education is about thinking new thoughts, considering new possibilities, looking for all the options. About seeing ourselves in new ways. I believe we do not adequately understand, however, the connections between our powerful feelings and emotions and education. Allowing students to acknowledge their fears about the classroom may seem logical, it is a surprisingly difficult thing to do within the present system<sup>8</sup>. The teachers I know are sensitive to students' fear, and take great care in creating non-threatening environments for children, especially those first entering school, as well as for those students entering high school. However, my reading of Paley and my knowledge of literature makes me want to push further the connections between our imaginative and emotional lives and literature. Fear is a difficult concept to welcome into the classroom, especially in an educational setting in which a teacher wants to

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<sup>8</sup> Obviously the home and parents play an important role in this discussion. There are significant home/school connections beyond the scope of this thesis.

maintain rigid control. Fear is not particularly controllable. You can't make lesson plans to teach it, and once you invite it in, you can't anticipate the words and shapes it will take. Fear, like emotion and feeling generally, is risky, as the Globe and Mail again tells us<sup>9</sup>. Yet it seems that in Paley's class fear is allowed to exist—on the students and the teacher's terms (p. 155).

If given enough time, the children will take all my questions, good and bad, to the same place: the fate of a vulnerable child surrounded by uncertainty and danger. They caution me about fairy tales, but there is an avalanche of excited responses whenever we discuss them—as if the children have been waiting for someone to unlock the gates to their dreams. It must be that the reality of every magical tale includes their own hidden anxieties and extended images.

The tales can frighten children, and we must use them as judiciously and wisely as we conduct all our teaching. But Paley says that children's explanations and versions of the tales are full of terrible events which do not come from her or from the stories. While the children feel uncertain about hearing the tales, their own suggestions show that they feel the more frightening version of the story is the "real" one (p. 162). If children entertain dark thoughts as Paley says, should we not provide them with **safe** fictional forests to walk in? Should such projection be encouraged? Banning the traditional fairy tales protects whom and from what?

Reading the story of Goldilocks and The Three Bears names the dark moments children and adults experience: "forest." Even though our experiences differ, "forest" is the common and adequate expression of fear. Literature gives us this image. We enter the story, the forest of the story, and look around us. We feel

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<sup>9</sup> Snow White was banned in Jacksonville, Florida, for children in kindergarten through grade two on grounds of violence. ("Restriction on fairy tale under fire". The Toronto Globe and Mail, April 14, 1993).

Goldilocks' fear, feel our fear increase incrementally with each repetition. As readers of fairy tales we know that Goldilocks will be okay, and that makes the story and our fear bearable. But when the story is over and we talk about it, we decide Goldilocks needs fortifications for the next time she enters the forest. We decide on a sleeping bag and listening to her mother's advice. We share ideas. We talk. We know that Goldilocks will find her way home, but for the moment we are in the dark forest. It is scary, and we feel alone, but we begin to see that we share the dark with others. There are others in the forest, and that makes all the difference.



## CHAPTER TEN

WHO'S SLEEPING IN "MY" BED?:  
AN AESTHETIC FOR THE POST-MODERN TALE

In this thesis I have used the Grimms' tales to examine the form and function of literary language, and its actual and possible roles in literacy education. Purely critical/ideological response to narrative, which is essentially a literal reading of aesthetic text, has been an on-going problem since Plato. Underlying the devaluation of the aesthetic features of a work often exists a mistrust of fantasy. We have seen that factors which support literal readings include literature's placement in the curriculum alongside social science and use of social science methods of inquiry. Such critical approaches have most recently and most dominantly found expression in feminist and post-modern literary criticism of the tales.

Literature is an art form, and as such, its meaning is dependent upon the combined effect of its form and content. We have seen that emphasis on one aspect to the exclusion of the other results in distorted readings of texts. I demonstrated that an accurate reading of The Golden Bird depended upon a concern with both the "what" and the "how" of the tale. I showed that the morality of the tale—attentiveness to the disparate and various experiences of life—depended upon an such an integrated reading.

Valuing literature as aesthetic discourse is the proper theoretical framework for the study of literature. It provides students with a "language" which facilitates the symbolic expression of their subjective lives. I have shown that the imaginative literary elements of the tales can outweigh their potentially harmful messages in that

aesthetic involvement can lead to closer examination of those literary features.

Feminist and deconstructionist (social-science) approaches can distort the texts. Also, I have shown that feminist goals are actually facilitated by aesthetic readings of the tales. It remains for us to examine how post-modern and feminist theory can be incorporated into an aesthetic framework. Can feminist and deconstruction theory, when incorporated into an educational matrix, be used in support of educational goals?

The following analysis also draws to a satisfying (albeit temporal) conclusion the literary conversation started by the Grimms. Each cultural community (over time and place) must revitalize the myths of its inherited traditions. The mythic power of fairy tales has survived centuries of squeezing into censored, didactic or ideological shoes that do not fit. But the mythic continuity has also been nourished by good stories, stories that are “just right.” The story-telling impulse started before the Grimms, but it is highlighted in their tales which mark the transition from oral to literary stories. I believe the oral features of the tales can be reconstructed in imaginative ways in current literature.

#### The Creative Identity of the Post-Modern Reader

Ten in a Bed<sup>1</sup> (Ahlberg & Amstutz, 1990) is securely placed within its literary tradition. It plunders the traditional fairy tales for their rich motifs and themes, and also plays freely within that tradition. The centrality of the story-teller provides a sense of orality—in this story shown in a kind of chattiness. In the following section

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<sup>1</sup> I have chosen this story also because it follows nicely from the traditional version of Goldilocks and the Three Bears of the previous chapter.

Dinah Price, the protagonist, finds three bears in her bed—an intentional play on the well known phrase “Who’s sleeping in my bed?” The bears promise to leave if she tells them a story—which she does. Dinah’s story is as follows:

So the bears opened the door and went in. They went down the hall and into the kitchen. There on the table was a delicious bowl of, er . . . pineapple jelly, which Goldilocks was saving for her tea. So the first huge bear tasted it, but it was too sweet for him. Then the middle-sized bear tasted it, but it was too . . . wobbly. ‘I like it wobbly’, said the mother bear. ‘Then the little, small, wee bear tasted the jelly and for him it was neither too sweet nor too wobbly, but just right. So he ate it all up.’ ‘Lovely!’ The baby bear clapped his little paws. ‘I want a drink of water.’ ‘No, you don’t’, said the father bear. ‘You have just had all that jelly.’ ‘And never even gave your poor old mother a lick of the spoon’, the mother bear said.

The oral elements of traditional tales include repetition, idiosyncratic detail, and rhymed or unrhymed verses. In Ten in a Bed the orality is created in part by the “in media res” quality of the narrator’s stammer. Here parody and irony of the traditional tale engage the story with its past and with its audience. This self-conscious or meta-sensibility marks it as a post-modern story. **Hearing** the story (as it were) as well as reading it creates a sense of immediacy<sup>2</sup>. The story is created by the characters’ passions and desires, just as Cinderella is the enactment of the girl’s desire to be restored to her rightful position. In Ten in a Bed, however, the narrative conventions are obvious rather than implicit—they are a source of the pleasure and playfulness of this book.

Ten in a Bed uses fantasy, a factor which encourages children to “play” the

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<sup>2</sup> This sense of orality is seen in Wendy Wickwire’s transcriptions of Harry Robinson’s stories in their (1989) book, Write It On Your Heart: The Epic World of an Okanagan Storyteller. More recently, I think of Thomas King’s (1992) Green Grass, Running Water.

story, that is, participate actively. This distinguishes it from the guarded response advocated by the deconstruction theory discussed in Chapter Five. Grimms' fairy tales are most often distinguished by their ability to leap from the realistic setting of home to the other-worldly plane of the forest, the castle or the magical helper.

Ahlberg's awareness of that convention allows him to use it in a current context. He infuses the deconstruction process with fantasy, and the narrative planes are collapsed.

The story of Dinah (as a subject) is juxtaposed with the story she tells.

'Then the little, small, wee bear tasted the jelly and for him it was neither too sweet nor too wobbly, but just right. So he ate it all up.'

'Lovely!' The baby bear clapped his little paws. 'I want a drink of water.'

'No, you don't', said the father bear. 'You have just had all that jelly.'

The "fictional jelly" of Dinah's narrative of The Three Bears transits effortlessly into the "actual jelly" of the main narrative about the character Dinah. This "leaping", a feature of the traditional tale, has been energized and made to "leap" the new distance between narratives, and helps readers become playfully aware of the constructedness of art forms.

Feminism is in part responsible for the proliferation of active, imaginative heroines. The literary Dinah has come a long way since her nineteenth century sisters, Goldilocks and Little Red Riding Hood. LRRH was sent out with her basket of goodies to grandmother's house, and admonished to mind her manners. In Ten in a Bed Dinah reminds her characters to behave, and she tells her own tale. Ahlberg's character moves within the story frame with confidence, deciding her own cultural images (pineapple jelly instead of porridge—who wouldn't?) But Dinah's characters in this nested story-within-a-story-within-a-story express their desires and opinions too. The mother bear likes jelly "wobbly." The father bear's response to baby bear,

“You have just had all that jelly” confounds the narrative levels. Within a single text, the fictional levels interpenetrate. Traditional conventions and boundaries are distorted.

### Continuity and Renewal through Literary Conversation

Both Paley’s (the traditional Goldilocks) and Ahlberg’s stories offer children rich learning experiences. Ten in a Bed is the more “catchy” story, but few teachers would ignore Paley’s good use of the traditional tale. Its unadorned language and plot facilitate important classroom discussion—the kind of discussion art facilitates. The children’s focus is Goldilocks—her safety is their concern. This aesthetic feature offers much in terms of cognitive, emotional and imaginative development. Readers’ identification with the heroine forms their emotional and imaginative allegiance with the story. Readers ask questions, consult the text to verify their impressions, and incorporate their ideas about ways of helping Goldilocks. She becomes their problem for the duration of the story, just as Dinah does in Ten in a Bed. Stories are much more than good topics. They are much more than role models of behaviour.

Paley’s use of the tale also provides children with a communal symbolism to apply to Ten in a Bed. The new story is read in the con/sub/text of the traditional tale. Intertextuality—literature as conversation between past and present, among art and books, and among people—is yet another dimension of literary enjoyment. Each retelling adds another voice to the conversation and adjusts our ideas about what stories can say and how they are told.

I am glad that the fairy tales have come down to us. “Down” in terms of their cultural transmission, and “down” in terms of a levelling from essentialist

stories to cultural artifacts. I believe the tales are most interesting when viewed in terms of their intention and desire. In spite of the seemingly stark contrast between the degrees of authorial intervention, both stories examined here reflect particular cultural values. While Ahlberg's story openly admits its fictional stance, it is different, not better, for its awareness, and both stories make sense of the world (both past and present) in specifically literary ways.

### Learning to be at Home in the World

I began this thesis suggesting that if Atwood found the tales important to her writerly development, then educators ought to consider them for education. Ahlberg has taken his directional cues, his images and themes, from the Grimms, using the traditional tale as the landscape for his fantasy play. And if Broumas did not have the Grimms' tale, with its mythic import and significance, could she have written her dynamic poem? By extension, if children do not have access to the traditional tales, and an educational context in which their aesthetic responses are valued, will they be able to write their own stories?

Educational activities must be considered in the light of literature's nature and intentions, its particular understanding of the world, and the questions it addresses. Only then can we make judgments about which versions and uses of the tales are educationally useful. Deconstruction can help us see the constructedness of literature and (ultimately) of culture. This does not mean we automatically approach all texts from that critical viewpoint—critical antennae extended. Rather, it means that we see the relation between deconstruction theory and our educational goals. The educational “default” ensures that we do not forfeit aesthetic elements of the tales. When fused

with fantasy, a deconstructionist approach can result in powerful literature.

Literature, as aesthetic discourse, embraces the extreme goals of creating community and autonomy. The “virtual experience” of literature enables readers to enter into a story and resolve its binary positions. Readers can also posit themselves so that subversion and criticism are possible. The educational balance between the individual and society is characterized in literary studies where resolution occurs at the level of metaphor, of story and of community, but where ironic detachment is also valued. Literature incorporates other dualisms as well. Literature is a physical as well as a mental activity, providing sensual as well as intellectual pleasure, balancing the desiring activity of the mind with that of the body. A concept of literature with connections to the expressive arts as well as to the social sciences has implications for an educated person who is critical but also playful. Play is a serious and educational endeavour.

Reading, talking and dramatizing the tales enable students to fictionalize their fears and fantasies and tell their own stories about them. Stories informed by emotion and imagination are stories that last. **Because** the Grimms believed so strongly in the stories they wrote, including their bourgeois values, their stories are brilliantly told and continue to be thematically significant. They were as politically correct in their time as some ask writers to be in our time. The difference is that the Grimms, especially Wilhelm, were gifted writers. Learning the craft—as writers and critics—is still the best use of literature.

Playfulness is possible in an atmosphere of trust. When silliness and fear, two among many imaginative and emotional responses, are equally valued along with intellectual acumen, a particular kind of literary community is created. Literacy

means (in part) educating people to understand themselves and their relationship to the world, and for them to have an accurate conception of reality. That reality, we learn, is fragile, and the constructs of time and place tenuous. Only confident, relaxed people can fully appreciate the constructed nature of experience, accept its limitations, and yet play. Murdoch says that art, the supreme challenge, is to make meaning in the face of meaninglessness, and wherever possible, to do so joyfully. This is true of the characters in Grimms' fairy tales, who, in learning to be at home in their narrative world, help their readers become at home in both the fictional and actual worlds.



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