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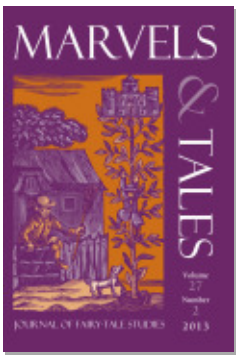
Karlyn Crowley, John Pennington



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KARLYN CROWLEY AND JOHN PENNINGTON

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> Make your once-upon-a-time dreams come true and dine in the one and only Cinderella Castle. Cinderella invites you into the glorious private dining hall of her castle for a storybook meal. Meet characters from Disney's Royal Family at the all-you-care-to-eat Once Upon a Time Breakfast or the customized prix fixe menu offered at the Fairytale Lunch.
>
> For the non-character side to this delicious dining experience, be sure to visit Cinderella's Royal Table.
>
> —"Cinderella's Royal Table"

"Cinderella" continues to be tempting fare. Now we can literally feast with the fairy-tale heroine at Disney's Magic Kingdom, maybe even drinking orange juice from a glass slipper during the Once Upon a Time Breakfast or savoring "oranges and citrons" (Perrault 452) at the Fairytale Lunch. Cinderella's table is certainly "royal." And, of course, we can consume the variety of popular culture adaptations of her story that provides lucrative royalties to the Walt Disney Corporation, which also satiates our desire for products connected to *faerie:* a Cinderella camera and scrapbook set, a Cinderella hair-styling play set, a Cinderella thermal henley, or a Cinderella snowglobe, just to mention a small selection. Cinderella has also been gracing the silver screen for many years, from the classic *Cinderella* (Disney 1950), the musical *Cinderella* (Rogers and Hammerstein 1964), to the live-action updated *A Cinderella Story* (2004). Disney, as one might expect, features the heroine prominently in its Disney Princess Series, most notably in *Cinderella II: Dreams Come True* and *Cinderella III: A Twist in Time*. Recently, Cinderella has spread her magic to the popular movie *Enchanted* (2007). *Entertainment Weekly* says of Princess Giselle, the movie's heroine, that "the resourceful heroine is soul sister to Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, and Snow White" (Schwarzbaum). Manohla Dargis, writing in a *New York Times* review of *Enchanted,* which received a *New York Times Critics'*

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Pick, admits that fairy-tale "movies like to promise girls and women a happily ever after, but it's unusual that one delivers an ending that makes you feel unsullied and uncompromised, that doesn't make you want to reach for your Simone de Beauvoir or a Taser" ("Someday").

The reference to Simone de Beauvoir is significant, for fairy tales have been connected with women's issues, it seems, since they were first written down and published. "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," writes Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (267). Cinderella's popularity could have led Beauvoir to modify her claim: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a princess." Maria Tatar suggests that Cinderella's character is so elastic that she "has been reinvented by so many different cultures that it is hardly surprising to find that she is sometimes cruel and vindictive, at other times compassionate and kind" and agrees, in spirit, with Jane Yolen's assessment that "the shrewd, resourceful heroine of folktales from earlier centuries has been supplanted by a 'passive princess' waiting for Prince Charming to rescue her" (Tatar 102). Cinderella's elasticity, however, has also led to more contemporary reinventions that rehabilitate her—that is, some have reinterpreted Cinderella as a strong, independent woman. Three recent and illustrative recastings of Cinderella include Barbara Walker's version in *Feminist Fairy Tales* (1996), Emma Donoghue's in *Kissing the Witch* (1997), and Francesca Lia Block's in *The Rose and the Beast* (2000). These versions attempt to counteract the image of Cinderella as a beautiful but passive, docile young woman that is often perpetuated in popular culture and, ironically, in the classic versions of the fairy tale that have been handed down through the ages, primarily those by Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm. Walker, Donoghue, and Block suggest that Cinderella was not born a passive woman, but rather became one. Indeed, she has been drawn that way throughout the ages and seems in need of gender refashioning. At what price, though, do we pay for such a liberation of Cinderella?

Fairy tales have always been in a state of reincarnation. Our article title refers to Charles Dickens's famous essay "Frauds on the Fairies" that appeared in *Household Words* (October 1, 1853), an essay that attacks George Cruikshank, who began retelling fairy tales to teach moral lessons. In the essay Dickens bemoans the fact that fairy tales—those "nurseries of fancy" (435)—are tampered with. He laments that writers like Cruikshank manipulate the tales to make didactic social commentaries at the expense of aesthetics. In "Frauds" Dickens lampoons Cruikshank's retelling of "Hop-o-My-Thumb" as a temperance tract—a tale about the virtues of teetotalism—by satirizing another classic tale, "Cinderella." In Dickens's parody, Cinderella is a moral crusader who joins the Juvenile Board of Hope, wins Total Abstinence Medals, and lives happily ever after because her subjects must agree with her every wish and whim. Dickens states in his essay that fairy tales must be maintained for their "useful-

ness" by being "preserved in their simplicity, and purity, and innocent extravagance, as if they were actual fact" (435). Dickens, of course, was naïve about fairy tales. They are not pure, innocent texts that have one canonical version. They are continually in flux. And they are continually revised to teach moral lessons, as attested to by the Brothers Grimm's various revisions of their fairy tales. Furthermore, Dickens ignores a central problem in many of these classic fairy tales—gender construction.

Fairy tales are social documents, as Jack Zipes has argued in numerous studies on the genre. For some time feminist critics have been concerned with the way fairy tales define women and analyze gender, particularly in the classic fairy tales by Perrault and the Brothers Grimm. Lewis Seifert, in *Fairy Tales, Sexuality, and Gender in France, 1690–1715,* argues that women writers during Perrault's time were interested in gender construction in fairy tales. These conteuses, as they were called, helped create the fairy-tale tradition particularly because "it was at once a genre that women could appropriate without threatening male literary figures and a form that enabled them to defend and perpetuate their own *locus* of cultural authority" (9). This cultural authority has been at the heart of feminist retellings and drives current versions. Karen Rowe, in her influential article "Feminism and Fairy Tales," demonstrates how feminists use fairy tales as foundational texts when discussing gender. In *Twice Upon a Time: Women Writers and the History of the Fairy Tale,* Elizabeth Wanning Harries analyzes how women writers have appropriated these tales to explore possibilities of liberating women from the passiveness of many classical tales from Perrault, to the Brothers Grimm, to Hans Christian Andersen. We are familiar with numerous fairy-tale retellings and reappropriations, some of which have themselves become classics: Anne Sexton's poetic reimaginings in *Transformations,* Angela Carter's self-described "moral pornography" in *The Bloody Chamber,* Margaret Atwood in *Bluebeard's Egg* and *The Robber Bride,* and A. S. Byatt in *Possession, The Djinn and the Nightingale,* and *The Children's Book.* One should not forget the important anthologies that collect fairy tales by women writers, particularly Jack Zipes's *Don't Bet on the Prince* and *The Trial and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood.*

Zipes argues that the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s infused fairy-tale scholarship with feminism, which also led writers to reinvent the old tales anew. In *Don't Bet on the Prince,* Zipes writes: "Created out of dissatisfaction with the dominant male discourse of traditional fairy tales . . . the feminist fairy tale conceives a different view of the world and speaks in a voice that has been customarily silenced" (xi). "That is," states Zipes, "feminist tales themselves have emerged from the struggles of the women's movement and are being used to elaborate social choices and alternatives for both females and males. As indicators of social, psychological, and political change, they are also agents of a new socialization" (xii). But what form did the new feminist

retellings take? Harries uses the terms "compact" and "complex" to describe competing models that arose from the fairy-tale tradition. "Compact" tales are those represented by Perrault and the Brothers Grimm; they are "foundational or original" and "do not seem to depend on other stories but come to us as unmediated expressions of the folk and its desires." "Complex tales," on the other hand, "work to reveal the stories behind other stories, the unvoiced possibilities that tell a different tale" (18). To Harries, the complex tale provides feminist writers with an outlet for expressing concerns about gender in their fairy tales, particularly contemporary writers who use the compact tales of Perrault and Grimm as foundational tales that become critiqued. In turn, Cristina Bacchilega, in *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies,* argues that contemporary feminist retellings must involve "substantive though diverse questioning of both narrative construction and assumptions about gender. . . . Postmodern revision is often two-fold, seeking to expose, make visible, the fairy tale's complicity with 'exhausted' narrative and gender ideologies, and, by working from the fairy tales' multiple versions, seeking to expose, bring out, what the institutionalization of such tales for children has forgotten or left unexploited" (24).

Clearly, feminist retellings need to do more than simply replicate structures of the compact tales by Perrault and the Grimms. Amy Shuman contends that any retelling of a classic text must "negotiate between the world the authority describes and the world we describe" (80). The key, for Shuman, is that contemporary fairy-tale writers must analyze "the ways in which boundaries [in our case, that of gender] are maintained, reproduced, transgressed, or shifted" (72). In particular, she posits, "for feminist studies concerned with the concepts of tradition and change," a critic needs to ask questions concerning "what constitutes a rupture in the status or proposed fixed meanings" and whether "new interpretations . . . stand alongside the old ones . . . [or whether] they disturb the status of the fixed meanings" (80). More recently, Hilary Crew examines Donna Jo Napoli's retellings and presents a template for "defining and discussing feminist retellings of traditional tales," which includes the following questions:

- What narrative strategies and conventions are employed in telling the story? How do these subvert or change power relations encoded in the traditional tale . . . ?
- How are male and female characters differently represented in regard to issues of gender and power than in traditional tales?
- To what extent are values and ideologies encoded into discursive formations constructing stories that challenge and resist ideologies encoded into traditional tales . . . ?

- To what extent are feminist themes encoded thematically into the text that are validated as concepts, ideas, and values found in feminist theories, writing, and literary criticism? (92)

Crew's important questions, however, might have given Dickens a headache. He would be wary lest these questions become prescriptions for fairy-tale use akin to Cruikshank's teetotaling revisions. The question, then, is whether, like Dickens, readers ever reach a point when they might be troubled by a feminist emancipation of classic fairy tale.

Our essay explores three recent feminist retellings of "Cinderella" by contemporary female writers: Barbara Walker, Emma Donoghue, and Francesca Lia Block.[1] We draw on Dickens's discussion in "Frauds of the Fairies" to ask: Can feminist revisions commit a fraud on the fairies by transforming tales into didactic tracts? Yet we take Dickens a step further in highlighting how the historical and sociocultural feminist contexts of fairy-tale creation inform the work of these three writers. By also drawing on Crew's questions—do fairy tales "subvert or change power relations" and "challenge and resist ideologies"?—we suggest that feminist retellings that are incapable of doing either may reinscribe gender norms even as they seek to be liberated from them (92). Barbara Walker boldly titles her work *Feminist Fairy Tales,* implying that her retellings speak for a single rather than plural feminist audience. However, we argue, her versions of classic tales play such a fraud on the fairies; her overt didacticism not only relies on essentialist ideas of womanhood but also destroys the artistic integrity of the tales, creating tales that tend to commit the same crime that she believes the originals do. Walker's popular feminist notions of a pagan and prelapsarian goddess world appeal to her audience longing for a unified notion of "woman" and the "feminine"; however, these ideas ultimately fail to transform ideas of gender.

By contrast, two other retellings of "Cinderella," by Emma Donoghue and Francesca Lia Block, suggest how gender is not simply a recipe that merely should "add women and stir"; rather, gender should transform the tale paradigmatically. The often queer, multiplicitous gender sensibilities of these tales barely contain the originals they transform. This is not to say there is necessarily a teleological progress from gendered fairy tales that are "essentialist" to "constructionist." Yet this feminist debate over essentialism and constructionism that has been so central in the last few decades has yet to be articulated fully in feminist fairy-tale studies. We argue that these feminist fairy tales are simultaneously operating in a tradition of fairy-tale *retelling* while also *telling* the story of the specific gender debates of our recent feminist historical moment.

Before analyzing the work by Walker, Donoghue, and Block, we think it productive to spend a little more time discussing the Dickens-Cruikshank bat-

tle, for their debate on fairy tales may help us understand more contemporary issues on fairy-tale revision. Harry Stone argues that Dickens "was convinced that the literature he read as a child had been crucial to his imagination" (3) and that fairy tales were central to the nurturing of "the imagination" (3) by providing "incarnations of imaginative truth" (4). Stone boldly states that to Dickens, "all fairy stories stood for the saving grace of childhood imagination and childhood escape, and in a larger perspective, for the saving power of all imagination and art, a power that Dickens held to be sacred and inviolable" (10). Dickens blends his personal views with the social effects of the fairy tale—to entertain and instruct without being morally didactic. Robert L. Patton suggests that Dickens was aware that fairy tales were not static, monolithic structures: "From his first writings, Dickens had altered, inverted, parodied, patched, and recombined childhood reading" for his own artistic purposes, but Patton contends, "what Dickens was objecting to was the use of fairy tales to teach specific didactic lessons" (338). Dickens suggests, then, that the *way* we retell a fairy tale is of utmost importance, for the tale represents a personal, aesthetic, and social view of the world. If Patton is correct in his assessment that Dickens and Cruikshank disagreed over "art as propaganda" (340), then it is reasonable to conclude that a major issue about fairy-tale retellings may be related to the ability of a writer to aesthetically recast a tale to mirror a personal belief. A feminist retelling, then, would need to carefully consider the tension between the aesthetic and the thematic. Patton argues that Cruikshank found himself in a similar predicament, torn between his ability as illustrator and writer: "Oddly enough, his art was often rich enough to retain some of the ambivalence and counter themes, while, as he struggled to express himself in words, he struck out every ambiguity he could find" (341). Cruikshank responded publicly to Dickens's "Frauds," and in 1864, in an introductory note to his versions of "Puss in Boots," Cruikshank asked: "And I would here ask in fairness, what harm can possibly be done to Fairy literature by such rewriting or editing as this?" (qtd. in Stone 16).

We take Cruikshank's question seriously: what interpretive "harm" can be done to "Fairy literature"? We argue that a feminist fraud on the fairies is *prescriptive,* one that imagines gender as singular, essential, and purely identity-based and is also reflected aesthetically versus a feminist retelling that is *descriptive,* one that imagines gender and genre as complex, intersectional, and multifaceted. Naturally, there is a constitutive relationship between ideology and form; we argue that frauds on the fairies commit sins of weak imagination in both areas—gender and genre. We claim that to the extent that Walker is *prescriptive*—she insists on a singular interpretation of the tale that is inorganic and dogmatic—Donoghue and Block are *descriptive,* for they allow for multi-

ple interpretations that illuminate and expand on the tales rather than repeat a one-to-one didactic correspondence.[2]

While this dichotomous notion of the static or fixed versus the fluid is problematic, this dichotomy hints at the distinctions between gender essentialism and constructionism, or what is innate and what is cultural, and may illuminate those tales that are *prescriptive* or *descriptive*. These long-contested terms apply both to aesthetic issues within fairy-tale studies as well as to gender. Does one preserve the "essential" nature and form of a tale? Or transform and *construct* something altogether new? Likewise, is a feminist fairy tale one that imagines gender as an extra category to the essence of a tale? Or as something that reimagines the tale altogether? Is a fraud on the fairies always already a tale that has maintained the original in some way because to add gender is an impossible project doomed to fail? Jack Zipes, in *Why Fairy Tales Stick,* suggests that "the only way we can do justice to traditional tales and storytelling, in my opinion, is to problematize the value of these tales and to question the purpose of tradition and the role of the storyteller" (226). By examining three retellings of "Cinderella" we explore this theoretical tightrope between what is prescriptive and descriptive.

Barbara Walker, Emma Donoghue, and Francesca Lia Block all retell the fairy tale "Cinderella," a classic tale that has stuck with us through the Perrault and Grimms versions. Most of us have the Cinderella story etched into our collective memory, though the Perrault and Grimms versions do have differences. In Perrault's tale Cinderella is manipulated by her stepmother and stepsisters to clean and care for them, soot and all. A fairy godmother takes Cinderella to the ball twice, and she loses her glass slipper the second time because she must leave the ball before midnight. The Prince, smitten with Cinderella's beauty, travels the countryside to find the dame with the dainty, small feet who can fit into the slipper. Cinderella places the slipper on her foot, will become the Prince's bride and eventual queen; the stepsisters, realizing their horrible behavior, ask Cinderella for forgiveness. Cinderella, of course, forgives her stepsisters and even invites them to live with her and the Prince at the court. Perrault tacks two morals onto the tale:

> Woman's beauty is a treasure
> That we never cease to admire,
> But a sweet disposition exceeds all measure
> And is more dear than a precious gem's fire . . .
> Beautiful ladies, it's kindness more than dress
> That can win a man's heart, with greater success.

In short, if you want to be blessed,
The real fairy gift is graciousness. (453–54)

The second moral is a bit more mundane: be thankful for your godmothers and godfathers. The Grimms' version ends violently: when the Prince brings the slipper to Cinderella's residence, the stepmother urges her daughters to cut off a heel and some toes in order for their feet to fit. When that does not work, Cinderella is allowed to try, and when the slipper fits, "the stepmother and the two sisters were horrified and turned pale with rage" (472). The tale ends with Cinderella's marriage; at the ceremony two birds—doves, ironically—peck out the eyes of the stepsisters. They are blind for the remainder of their lives. Although Perrault may be accused of overt didacticism in his moralizing, the reader recognizes an irony in the voice, a tension between the tale proper and the moral. And the Grimms' violence suggests that there may be more to the tale than proper gender conditioning (as Bruno Bettelheim has famously posited).

One is hard-pressed to find any irony in Walker's tales. In the general introduction to *Feminist Fairy Tales,* Walker sets the stage for her fairy-tale enterprise: she states that traditional fairy tales are "filtered through centuries of patriarchal culture and show little respect for women, except as young and beautiful 'princesses.' Only to be decorative is the customary female function in these old stories" (ix). Walker's purpose, she declares, is to "turn such misogynous messages around" (ix). She claims that in her retellings "a feminist message of some kind can be found embodied in each [tale]" (x). From the start, Walker's retellings, like Cruikshank's, are prescriptive. Power is conceived in simplistic ways; power is not multidimensional and complex but single-noted in its patriarchal domination. We argue that Walker's notion of power depends on essentialism: men and women act out particular gender roles (men in control, women submissive) that once overturned mean the world is in its proper place, usually with women in charge. A strength of fairy-tale retellings is that power is wrested and fought over, though appearing clearly drawn initially. Powerful feminist fairy tales, ones that are descriptive and self-reflexive, do not seek to simply subvert stereotypes—replace the old with the new; rather, they rattle the foundational cages of the tale where the power structures reside.

Walker further essentializes her tales by adding Jungian, New Age myth to convince us of the essential nature of woman and of the lost world of the goddess, further promoting the prescriptive nature of the tale. Walker provides an explanatory foreword to each of her tales that includes the genesis for her version. For "Cinder-Helle," Walker contends that the Cinderella story is an "uneasy truce between the urban power of Medieval Christianity and the spiritual power of pagan (meaning 'rural') cults of the old Goddess" (189). Cinder-

Helle, then, is named after the "Goddess Helle, or Holle, or Ella, or Hel" (189). In addition, Walker defines central symbols that relate to goddess worship: menstrual blood dates "from that remote prepatriarchal time when women's moon blood was considered the source of everyday life . . . [of] spiritual power" (189). Such menstrual blood is symbolic, argues Walker: "Patriarchy regarded it with horror, and its extraordinary taboos perpetuated many absurd superstitions about the capacity of such blood to defy the will of male gods" (189). The glass slipper, then, becomes "an ancient symbol of sexual intercourse or sacred marriage" (189). Walker makes a controversial appeal to prepatriarchal goddess culture, an appeal dismissed by many feminist academics, as her attempt to rewrite the paradigm or structure of the tale. Not only are feminist academics skeptical of the legitimacy of such archeological claims, but they also worry about the limiting possibilities of "difference feminism," or easy gender distinctions that accentuate the differences between the genders.[3] Ontologically, she simply retells the same tale by substituting matriarchal rule of the world for a patriarchal rule. Before the retelling of Cinderella, then, Walker has framed the tale in two interrelated ways: by reference to New Age goddess culture and by an essentialist feminist lens.

Walker draws on this "New Age feminism" that is based on essentialist ideas about gender to organize her tales. Walker's view of fairy tales is indebted to Clarissa Pinkola Estes's best-selling study, *Women Who Run with the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype*. Estes's feminist, Jungian response to James Frazer's *Golden Bough* and Robert Bly's *Iron John* attempts to show "that women's flagging vitality can be restored by extensive 'psychic-archeological' digs into the ruins of the female underworld" (3). To Estes, through the "Wild Woman archetype we are able to discern the ways and means of woman's deepest nature. The modern woman is a blur of activity. She is pressured to be all things to all people. The old knowing is long overdue" (4). Walker praises Estes's book in a dust-jacket blurb: "A fascinating collection of traditional stories with feminist-oriented interpretations, both enlightening and empowering for every woman in search of her own inner spirit." "Cinder-Helle," consequently, reflects Walker's longing to return to primitive and pagan celebrations of the goddess in all women.

Walker's Cinder-Helle version finds one-to-one correspondences to the original Perrault tale: Cinder-Helle is transformed by magic into a beautiful woman who attracts the eye of Prince Populo. Thus the protagonist remains passive in the tale as the action works upon her. In addition, the jealousy of the stepmother, Christiana, and stepsisters, Nobilita and Ecclesia, are as pronounced as in the Perrault version; the two stepsisters are driven by vanity and beauty—and by their desire to marry the Prince and his wealth. Cinder-Helle tries on the slipper, it fits, and the Prince declares, "This is my bride" (96).

Cinder-Helle becomes Princess Helle; she makes Nobilita a secretary-companion, and Ecclesia lives "up to her pretenses of piety by taking a vow of poverty and ministering to the sick. Eventually, Ecclesia learned to feel useful in this life and became a sincere, almost saintly person. As for Christiana, she died dissatisfied. And of course, Prince Populo and Princess Helle lived happily ever after" (196). In effect, the gendered tale of Perrault remains in place.

Walker, as we have argued, is invested in essentialism: maintaining both the essential nature of the tale and essential ideas about gender. Does her retelling make visible an exhausted form or explore the implications of what is not stated in the original tales, as Bacchilega suggests? Does her retelling create a rupture or disturb the original's meaning, as Shuman suggests? We argue no. What Walker brings to the tale is a mythic backdrop that is placed over the original tale—the original tale remains the primary text, and the added goddess myth is forced upon it. For example, the tale begins, "Once upon a time, the ancient Underground Goddess was known as queen. . . . She had many priestesses on earth. Her priestesses established the ethical system, gave advice, kept records, mediated quarrels, prescribed medicines, delivered babies, kept the peace, and performed a thousand other physical and social services that held the world in balance" (191). We are in didactic Cruikshank territory here. The background of the story is that male priests came along, "who converted by the sword" (191), and the new king required all to worship the new male god and "officially abolished the Goddess's temples" (191). Cinder-Helle, we find out, was named by her mother, and the name was "one of the Underground Goddess's many names" (191). The name was one "of great holiness (or hellness)" (191). Only at the end of the tale does this myth subtext return: once married, Cinder-Helle "reestablished the temples of the Goddess. She founded a chapel and pilgrimage shrine at her mother's tomb and declared the willow tree sacred" (196). The willow tree was magical in the tale, becoming the fairy godmother who changes the pumpkin into a carriage after Helle weeps tears of sorrow on the tree.

Walker's retelling of "Cinderella," consequently, commits a fraud on the fairies: it is overtly *prescriptive* and primarily didactic. She maintains the frame of the Perrault text while embracing troubling gender assumptions. Cinder-Helle remains passive throughout the tale, is seen as an object of beauty and desire, and conforms to the patriarchal system of control, welcoming the Prince as her master. The other women in the text are not reimagined, but disciplined; just like in the goddess universe, one woman (Cinderella) is queen, and the others learn to be good and obey her. We even get a "happily ever after": the teleology remains fixed and the narrative, like the content, remains static. Audre Lorde famously said, "[T]he Master's tools cannot dismantle the Master's house" (36). Yet Walker does just that: though she uses myths about

goddess worship and pre-patriarchal female power to alter the stage of the tale, she still maintains the androcentric structure of Perrault's "Cinderella." The result is a fairy tale straining for aesthetic originality and resorting to didactic pronouncements about mythic goddesses and wild women who run with the wolves. Jack Zipes reminds us that most contemporary fairy tales are either "duplicates" (tales that repeat the classical fairy-tale structure and reinforce sexist stereotyping) or "revisions" (tales that "alter the reader's views of traditional patterns, images, and codes"). Walker's tale is a duplicate; she grafts revisionary material to the tale like Cruickshank grafted teetotalism to his Cinderella version.

By contrast, when we turn to Emma Donoghue's and Francesca Lia Block's versions of "Cinderella," we see tales that avoid didacticism by retelling the original tale in a more self-reflective, sophisticated, and *descriptive* way. Donoghue and Block challenge the original tale's faulty gender assumptions and provide new, liberatory gender possibilities that work only when the structures of their tales are exploded. Donoghue's version, "The Tale of the Shoe," is the first story in her collection *Kissing the Witch.* Donoghue dedicates her book to Andrew Lang, whose fairy tales inspired her—at the outset, then, Donoghue acknowledges the influence of her fairy-tale forefathers. But "The Tale of the Shoe" immediately breaks from that influence, as seen from the beginning of the tale: "Till she came it was all cold. Ever since my mother died the feather felt hard as a stone floor. Every word that came out of my mouth limped away like a toad. Whatever I put on my back now turned to sackcloth and chafed my skin" (1). The story begins in real time, not once upon a time. Cinderella has a voice, an active voice of the "I." She has an individual self. "I scrubbed and swept because there was nothing else to do"; "Nobody made me do the things I did, nobody scolded me, nobody punished me but me. The shrill voices were all inside" (2). Thus we see that this Cinderella is not the same girl that Perrault and the Grimms create. Donoghue revises their tales both thematically and structurally.

In the tale Cinderella also hears voices in her head, and one voice becomes manifest as a stranger, the proverbial fairy godmother, who "took me into the garden and showed me a hazel tree I had never seen before. I began to ask questions, but she put her tiny finger over my mouth so we could hear a dove murmuring on the highest branch" (3). And so begins her transformations. "And then, because I asked, she took me to the ball. Isn't that what girls are meant to ask for?" (3). We see how Donoghue evokes the residue of the Perrault and Grimms tale—even with the early reference to the dove—yet she revises the old tales into an original retelling. Cinderella is acutely aware of *how* she should act as a girl, but she is simultaneously defiant. Cinderella even has a meta-awareness that she is in a fairy tale that has certain expectations,

ones that this Cinderella will challenge. This Cinderella is aware of the construction of gender and subverts it; she is aware of the form of the fairy tale and rewrites it.

At the first ball, for example, Cinderella dances with some old men out of obligation, but she feels uncomfortable, for "the voices were beginning to jabber. They each told me to do something different. Take me back tomorrow night, I said" (4). At the second ball, Cinderella tells us, "I got right into the swing of things" (5) and then dances with the Prince (as she feels she should and as the fairy tale requires). When she returns to the ball on the third night, she is supposed to continue to court the Prince. But there is a dramatic change: "I swallowed a little of everything I was offered, then leaned over the balcony and threw it all up again" (6). When the Prince takes a walk with her, Cinderella says, "Out on the steps he led me, under the half-full moon, all very fairy-tale" (6), another incident of meta-commentary. When he asks for her hand in marriage, she tells us, "I opened my teeth but no sound came out" (7). Donoghue cleverly inverts the notion of the voiced and voiceless—Cinderella is voiceless because she refuses to conform to the patriarchal and to the narrative code that drives the canonical "Cinderella" fairy tale. Even the earlier reference to bulimia indicates the difference in tales between Walker and Donoghue. While certainly bulimia is a dangerous disease that may be lurking in the hearts of many fairy-tale women, in Donoghue the reference is coyly made in passing: Cinderella knows that ingesting undesirable men is not healthy so she throws them up. Walker might turn this moment into a lesson about the dangers of bulimia for young girls; Donoghue retains the playful tension that describes the situation leading the reader to imagine the possibilities rather than prescribe a single, teacherly meaning. At the end of tale the fairy godmother asks, "What about the shoe?" "It was digging into my heel," answers Cinderella, and she throws it away, the final rejection of the original fairy tale. And then the final, subversive inversion: Cinderella and the godmother/stranger leave in the carriage, with Cinderella musing: "So then she took me home, or I took her home, or we were both somehow taken to the closest thing" (8).

This tale is as much about the transformation of the fairy-tale "Cinderella" as it is about the transformation of Cinderella the character. We see the old tale from a new light as Donoghue's version challenges the original, ruptures the tale, and disturbs the status of fixed meanings. The surprise ending, finding Cinderella embracing self-love (if the stranger is only a voice in her head) and lesbian love, disturbs the very fabric of the original fairy tale in sophisticated thematic and structural ways.[4] Cinderella's self-reflection is complemented by the self-reflexive nature of the overall narrative of *Kissing the Witch,* which finds a character in one tale becoming the teller of the next tale, a story-within-a-story technique that wholeheartedly embraces the freedom of metafictionality.

Form is constructed rather than kept essentially, and form mirrors gender transmutation.

Francesca Lia Block, in "Glass," from *The Rose and the Beast,* works in a similar vein of describing rather than prescribing. Block uses the third-person-omniscient narrative technique that drives the Perrault and Grimm tales. But Block's Cinderella is a storyteller and is perfectly content to be independent at the beginning of the tale: "She did not mind her days alone, away from the eyes outside. It was better this way, her secret stories hidden so no one could touch them, take them." By altering the teleology of the tale by freeing the protagonist from the beginning rather than postponing freedom to the end, Block enables Cinderella to tell a different story. Her stories become powerful tools: "She had the stories she gave to her sisters that made them love her. Or need her, at least." Cinderella, then, has a powerful voice as the story begins. The godmother empowers Cinderella by telling her, "You are the one who transforms, who creates," and the proverbial glass slipper, in fact, is created out of Cinderella's powerful storytelling, as the godmother says, "And here are glass shoes made from your words, the stories you have told like a blower with her torch forming the thinnest, most translucent sheets of light out of what was once sand. But be careful; sand is already broken but glass breaks. The shoes are for dancing not for running away" (61–62). In a sense, the godmother tells Cinderella that she cannot run away from the fairy tale—she must confront the tale head-on.

Furthermore, by eliminating the trope of the wicked stepmother and sisters, Block eliminates the jealous competition among the women, suggesting a rejection of the plot device used by Perrault and the Grimms. Block also reconfigures the relationship between Cinderella and the prince, one based on equality and mutual creation. When Cinderella meets the prince at the ball, we are told that "maybe she had not created him, maybe she was his creation and all she dreamed, his dream. Or maybe they had made each other. Yes" (63–64). Cinderella also has complex feelings that round out her character. She feels bad about her stepsisters—who become a tad jealous over Cinderella's powerful storytelling—because: "all the things that girls feel they are not when they fear that if they become, if they are, they will no longer be loved by the sisters whose hearts they have not meant to break. And besides, if the sisters are gone and only the beloved remains with his dense curls and his lips, how safe are you then? You have to have him or you will die if the sisters are gone with their listening ears and their feet to rub and their bodies to dress and their shared loneliness" (66–67). Here Cinderella controls the story, the narrative. Rather than being reinserted into prelapsarian female power, in the now she is given control over her speech, over her body, singular and plural. She creates the collective body of reimagined domesticity. In this version the stepsisters are also multifaceted characters who think about longing and love—Cinderella does not just show com-

passion for her sisterhood; she also knows that to make family new, if it is at all possible, means their profound inclusion.

Not content to create a simplistic matriarchal substitution for the nuclear family, Block pushes the idea of "family" to its absolute limit through a complex love triangle: Cinderella loves her stepsister, the stepsister loves Cinderella, and Cinderella loves the prince. Block resolves this dynamic by allowing Cinderella to construct—literally make—her individual and corporate gendered self: she is the subject, not the object; she is active, not passive. The prince even realizes this, for we are told that he "wanted her to tell him the rest of the story. He felt bereft without it, without her" (69), and the stepsisters "knew that if they tried to take this from her they would never know, have nothing left, they would starve, they would break, they would never wake up" (70). The story's title, "Glass," reaches beyond the traditional slipper to reflect the fragility of all the characters who desire companionship and love—a truth about both genders, though the articulation of these desires is shaped by gender. Block describes an alternative family structure in the narrative realm of the canonical or classic Cinderella story, though she never prescribes a particular way to view the relationship. Because Cinderella becomes the storyteller, she is the one who provides stories that nourish the hungry souls of the prince and the stepsisters. The tale ends: "The fairy who was not old, not young, who was red roses, white snowfall, who was blind and saw everything, who sent stories resounding through the universe said, You must reach inside yourselves where I live like a story, not old, not young, laughing at my own sorrow, weeping pearls at weddings, wielding a torch to melt sand into something clear and bright" (70). It is also important to notice how Block's allusive, highly symbolic style complements the theme of fragility (notably in direct response to the hard, concrete prose of Perrault and the Grimms): imaginative language is necessary to conceptualize new gender possibilities.

In 1970 and 1971 Alison Lurie argued that fairy tales advance the liberation of women because they are, finally, populated with more strong female characters than weak, passive ones. Lurie suggested this in "Fairy Tale Liberation" and "Witches and Fairies," two articles from the *New York Review of Books;* she modified these essays for her critical study *Don't Tell the Grown-Ups*. Lurie's comments came under scrutiny and caused a flurry of feminist critical readings of classic fairy tales arguing the opposite—that fairy tales demean women. Soon, fairy tales written by women proliferated as writers tried to reclaim the woman's voice in the tales. We know, though, that simply changing the gender of characters or upending a patriarchal work for matriarchy is not enough to imagine gender transformation. In *Fairy Tales and Feminism: New Approaches* (2004), an essay collection that addresses the complexity of fairy tales and feminism, Donald Haase argues that "some feminist fairy-tale analyses remain

stuck in a mode of interpretation able to do no more than reconfirm stereotypical generalizations about the fairy tale's sexist stereotypes. Such studies are oblivious to the complexities of fairy-tale production and reception, sociohistorical contexts, cultural traditions, the historical development of the genre, and the challenges of fairy-tale textuality" (ix–x). The same could be said about retellings of fairy tales, particularly those that reappropriate the tales toward feminist ends.

Barbara Walker, Emma Donoghue, and Francesca Lia Block are only three writers undertaking this enterprise, but their work may represent the nexus that brings the complexity of issues together. Kay Stone, in a personal essay on fairy-tale scholarship and fairy-tale creation, writes, "Jane Yolen's stories . . . always make me look again at my own favored traditional tales" (113) and concludes: "I found that if someone worked only from the surface tale rather than from its depths, the story invariably lost something in translation. Archetype became stereotype and the mystery was gone" (122). Stone's comments may have garnered a nod from Charles Dickens, who also argued that some retellings committed a heinous fraud on the fairies. Our essay treads on similar ground, as we explore the possibility that feminist retellings might commit a similar fraud when they rely on simplistic notions of power, essentialist ideas of gender, and staid narrative forms. Gender inclusion is not gender revolution when tales became prescriptive rather than descriptive. Powerful feminist fairy tales are clearly more than a single feminist message: without thinking gender and form anew, a feminist fraud on the fairies may be inevitable.

Notes

1. We have chosen the Cinderella story because of its wide universal appeal and because the tale has been challenged by many feminist critics as irrevocably androcentric.
2. Dickens's retelling of "Cinderella" is certainly a parody of Cruikshank's versions of fairy tales. Interestingly, Cruikshank's retelling of "Cinderella," Harry Stone tells us, "seemed bent on out-parodying Dickens' parody" (15). James Finn Garner seems to have imbibed the Dickens-Cruikshank debate, for his *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories* retells classic fairy tales to eliminate any offensive issues. In the book's introduction he writes wryly that "when they were first written, the stories on which the following tales are based certainly served their purpose—to entrench the patriarchy, to estrange people from their own natural impulses, to demonize 'evil' and to 'reward' an objective 'good.' . . . Today, we have the opportunity—and the obligation—to rethink these 'classic' stories so they reflect more enlightened times" (ix). Garner's version of "Cinderella" finds the young "wommon" (31) or "womyn" (33) trapped in a tale that requires women "to enslave their natural body images to emulate an unrealistic standard of feminine beauty" by "cosmetic augmentation" (32). When the men at the ball begin fighting over

"'possessing' the young wommon" (34), Cinderella and her women friends flee, throw off their constrictive clothing, "set up a clothing co-op that produced only comfortable, practical clothes for womyn," aptly named "CinderWear" (37), and "through self-determination and clever marketing, they all—even the mother- and sisters-of-step—lived happily ever after" (37). Garner is clearly in Dickens's camp here and suggests an important element that is missing in Walker's version of "Cinderella": the ability to reflect upon the absurdity of retelling the tale with a direct moral purpose.

3. Feminist archaeologists such as Margaret Conkey and Ruth Tringham assert that goddess historians lack scientific proof and exhibit an "indifference to—and rejection of—historical specificity" (209). See Tringham, "Households with Faces."
4. Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochére, focusing on a queer reading of *Kissing the Witch,* argues that "Donoghue—a self-proclaimed lesbian writer and scholar—uncovers the underlying assumptions of the classical versions as she explores 'deviant' or 'perverse' alternatives which challenge stereotypical representation of gender roles and sexual desire and derail the straight path of female destiny encoded in the tales" (14).

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