

Editorial: Recycling stories of old

If myths and folktales are told not only to gain a sense of what has happened in reality but also of what has happened on psychological, economic and cultural levels, it follows that the current urge to rewrite and revivify them is an urge to test, to legitimate, or to free ourselves of the narratives that have prescribed and ordered our thinking. Thus, to recycle an older tale is in some sense to “dis-order” it, to redefine its force and meaning. Of course, rewriting an older text implies that one has a world-view, an overall perspective on history, an ideology, whether conscious or unconscious. And this is nowhere more clear than in the many feminist retellings of fairy tales, tales where Snow White gets a life, as it were, and even a real name.

But are our recent retellings as ideologically prescriptive as the older versions? And in our zeal to offer children alternatives to the sexist, racist and ethnocentric visions of the Grimms and the ancient Greeks, have we forgotten something—that art, for instance, is not simply a social document that prescribes behaviour? These are questions that both Cornelia Hoogland and Anna Altmann address in their articles about the feminist recycling of fairy tale narratives and motifs. In “Real ‘wolves in those bushes’” Hoogland analyzes several versions of “Little Red Riding Hood” from both a feminist perspective and a literary one, arguing provocatively that “rewriting fairy tales according to strictly feminist guidelines misses the value of their motifs, themes and forms as the material and means of new and fresh responses.” Equally arresting is Altmann’s original claim in “Parody and poesis in feminist fairy tales” that parodic fairy tales are less powerful than those which she classifies as “poesis”—fairy tales that are busy “creating a new vision rather than contesting the old” and thus offer “the sense of wonder that fairy tales should induce.”

Whereas Altmann and Hoogland begin asking us to drop “art as mimesis” as our exclusive critical orientation, Maria Nikolajeva does just that: she assumes a more “objective” orientation, rather than a mimetic, pragmatic, or expressive one, and looks not at whether behaviour is “realistic” or plausible or dangerous, but at whether motifs from one text are reused in another. For her, children’s literature is a virtual heterocosm of intertextuality. Intertextuality—in this case, art’s formal borrowings from myth—also concerns Sue Easun. Her article, “From metaphor to metamorphosis,” examines how Monica Hughes’ recycling of Egyptian mythology in her Isis trilogy supports the texts’ imaginative and ideological understanding of adolescence as a time of metamorphosis—of

change and crisis.

Finally, to give you an idea of the extent to which myths and folktales are currently being revised, we include several reviews of recent recycled tales—tales which range from a sedate retelling of the Greek myth *Gilgamesh, the king* or the suspenseful Scottish folktale, *The Nightwood*, to a whimsical version of “Cinderella” featuring penguins and a glass flipper, no less. Many of these retellers haven’t forgotten that folktales are also oral performances; hence, Mary Alice Downie uses the rhythms of an Irish dialect to retell *Cathal the giant killer* and Sonja Dunn uses the rhythms of rap for her version of *Rapunzel*. Not all retellings are spellbinding, magical, or even competent, as our reviewers make abundantly clear.

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