1. Kids, Fairy Tales, and the Uses of Enchantment

The idea that the fairy tale is an appropriate narrative genre for children predates psychoanalysis, but psychoanalysis nurtured that idea, building upon existing associations of childhood and primitive/folk culture. Psychoanalytic advocacy for the fairy tale began long before Bruno Bettelheim made the case in *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976). Bettelheim mobilizes familiar psychoanalytic arguments about the fairy tale, while addressing the issue of children's literature directly. Bettelheim disparages modern children's books and insists that the fairy tale is the real children's literature, exactly because it is so psychologically useful. Fairy tales, he thought, encourage children to work through various unconscious dilemmas. But Bettelheim could teach us how to read fairy tales psychoanalytically because Sigmund Freud had already learned from fairy tales and incorporated them into psychoanalytic discourse.

By the time Bettelheim published his book, the fairy tale was understood not simply as a genre of children's literature but indeed as its foundational and thus most important genre. Thus Leslie Fiedler declares that fairy tales “are the first form of ‘children’s literature’” (1973, xi). William Kerrigan and Jack Zipes agree, calling the fairy tale “the primal form of children’s literature” (Kerrigan 1985, x) and “the
classical genre for children” (Zipes 1983; this is part of the subtitle to his *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*). This chapter proposes that psychoanalytic attention to the fairy tale helped enshrine it as a cornerstone of children’s literature and child development. The fairy tale is perhaps not so representative of children’s literature; not all fairy-tale scholars see it as a children’s genre. Psychoanalysis helped consolidate its status as such.

At the same time, psychoanalysis took a cue from the fairy tale and from discourse about the fairy tale’s function and importance. We can see in the themes and forms of psychoanalysis the influence of fairy-tale discourse as well as the other way around. We do have to look more closely to see the former, because psychoanalysis did not profess interest in children’s literature until well into the twentieth century. Earlier, psychoanalysis expressed interest in the fairy tale as a children’s form, one showing up in patient histories and overlapping with common dream material. Rather than conceptualize the fairy tale as children’s literature, however, Freud and subsequent analysts approached it in the context of folk culture, with its alleged correspondences to the primitive mind. For Freud, the fairy tale belonged not to children’s literature but rather to the individual child, even when the same tale surfaced in multiple case histories. Even so, some understanding of fairy tales as the narrative stuff of childhood was operative in psychoanalysis. As much as Bettelheim, Freud knew that fairy tales were useful to analysts as well as to children and their caregivers.

This chapter examines the interrelation of psychoanalysis and the fairy tale, in and around the question of children’s literature. I show how Freud and others capitalized upon but were also instructed by fairy-tale discourse, so that psychoanalysis has certain fairy-tale correlates. The chapter also explores the consequences of this interrelation for psychoanalysis, for children’s literature, and for the study of children’s narrative. The psychoanalytic study of the fairy tale heightened the genre’s status as children’s literature—as canon, in a sense—even as it gave fairy-tale and children’s literature studies a critical method and a strong psychoanalytic inflection. Psychoanalysis, in turn, has been kept relevant and useful by its association with fairy tales. The relationship between psychoanalysis and the fairy tale might be described as symbiotic, mutually dependent and beneficial.
Freud and Fairy-Tale Discourse

Fairy-tale scholars largely agree that the fairy tale came to be thought of as primarily for children in the eighteenth century, as adult literate and literary culture moved in other directions and as the fairy tale migrated in association from the folk to the child-folk, to unlettered and ostensibly simple people. Whereas the folktale is still associated with folkish adults, the fairy tale is widely presumed to be a form of children’s literature.¹ There are various scholarly accounts of this transformation and its consequences. As Maria Tatar notes, the “process by which adult entertainment was translated into children’s literature was a slow one with a long transitional period when the line between the two was by no means clear” (1987, 21). The sorting of children’s and adult literature along the orality/literacy line was ongoing in the nineteenth century. Tatar points especially to the case of the Grimms’ 1812 Kinder- und Hausmärchen (Nursery and Household Tales), which began as a scholarly tome with preface and explanatory notes, only to be refashioned by the second edition as a collection of stories appropriate for children because of its ostensible proximity to the oral tradition. This refashioning, at the hands of Wilhelm Grimm in particular, was part of a broader rewriting of the fairy tale as being for children. As early as the 1830s, the English extravaganza producer and French fairy-tale translator J. R. Planché felt obliged to remake fairy tales into appropriate fare for adults, so thoroughly had they already been claimed for children. Planché blamed Charles Perrault and Madame d’Aulnoy for this ostensible infantilization. The association of fairy tales with children’s literature was firmly in place by the time of Freud.

Freud and his scientific predecessors were less interested in the fairy tale’s literary status or in questions about its major audience than in what the fairy tale could reveal about “primitive” man. The allegedly natural association of children with fairy tales, as Jacqueline Rose points out, emerges from a “preoccupation with cultural infancy and national heritage,” a metanarrative in which children and the “folk” are made equivalent (1984, 56). That metanarrative influenced and in turn was supported by popular adaptations of evolutionary theory in the nineteenth century. The evolutionary notion of recapitulation, first articulated by Ernst Haeckel (and popularly summed up as “ontogeny
recapitulates phylogeny”), found widespread application and adaptation from the nineteenth century forward, underwriting and overlapping with a broader theory of evolutionary social progress. Caucasian child and non-Caucasian primitive or savage (and sometimes the criminal) were said to be at the same developmental stage or level, and the theory was sometimes even extended to nations, with, say, the “cultural infancy” of Western nations being ostensibly equivalent to the maturity of primitive cultures. Freud and other analysts later made extensive use of recapitulation and these ostensible correspondences.

Even so, it is no accident that Freud and his colleagues kept encountering folklore and fairy tales (which they tended to conflate). Fairy tales were already known and loved across Europe and were especially cherished in Germany, where they represented a proto-nationalistic collective. In the nineteenth century, in and around nationalistic movements, scholars and collectors considered folktales expressions of the folk soul or psyche—as belonging to and thus reflecting the psyches of the people. Mythic and anthropological conceptions of the fairy tale echoed the evolutionary doctrines of the day, linking folk and fairy tales to ostensibly primitive levels of individual and group development. Freud and his colleagues took a cue from philologists as well as from anthropologists and folklorists, recognizing in dreams, fairy tales and even parapraxes the power (even magic) of words. They generally maintained the principle of recapitulation, seeing parallels among primitive people, children, and young nations, likening folklore to children’s “researches” and to national legends.

Freud made frequent appeals to fairy tales, examining particular variants alongside the genre more broadly. His 1913 paper “The Occurrence in Dreams of Material from Fairy Tales” (1963c), for instance, tells the story of a patient who dreamed of Rumpelstiltskin, and both “Little Red Riding Hood” and “The Wolf and the Seven Little Goats” are pivotal to the famous Wolf Man case of 1918 (1963e). Freud approached the fairy tale much as he approached dreams: as symptomatic expressions of wish fulfillment. Fairy tales, in other words, play out the usual dynamics of sexual repression and its consequences. Because fairy tales openly suspend reality and openly indulge in “wish-fulfillments, secret powers, [and] omnipotence of thoughts,” notes Freud in his 1919 essay “The Uncanny,” they do not achieve the kind of uncanny effects
typical of more literary productions, such as E. T. A. Hoffmann’s *The Sandman*. “Who would be so bold as to call it uncanny,” writes Freud, “when Snow-White opens her eyes once more?” (1955, 246). The fairy tale, for Freud, was not a complex form, though it afforded insight into complex minds.

Fairy-tale analysis was not simply a by-product of psychoanalysis but rather a key genre through which psychoanalysis was practiced and disseminated. “Actually,” notes Alan Dundes, “almost every single major psychoanalyst wrote at least one paper applying psychoanalytic theory to folklore” (1987, 21). The list includes Karl Abraham, Ernest Jones, Otto Rank, Carl Gustav Jung, Herbert Silberer, and Franz Ricklin—the last of whom published a book-length study of fairy tales as wish-fulfillment in 1908, sixty-plus years before Bettelheim took up the subject (Ricklin 1915). Moreover, some of this literature (much of it German) focused on the child and adolescent, notably Charlotte Bühler’s *Das Märchen und die Phantasie des Kindes* (The fairy tale and the child’s imagination; 1918) and Bruno Jöckel’s *Der Weg zum Märchen* (The pathway to understanding the fairy tale; 1939). Freud and his colleagues appealed to the fairy tales because they were turning up in analysis and because they could be used to spread the gospel of psychoanalysis. Fairy tales provided a common cultural reference point. As Dundes shows, Freud did not just encourage the analysis of folktales; he actively sought out folklorists who could demonstrate the power of psychoanalysis through analysis of folklore. He encouraged his students to develop their knowledge of folklore and fairy tales and accepted an invitation from the Austrian folklorist Friedrich S. Krauss to write a preface to the German translation of John G. Bourke’s 1913 study *Scatalogic Rites of All Nations* (Dundes 1987, 7).

Freud’s invocation of fairy tales often accompanies the invocation of allegedly more adult literature, as if Freud hoped to cover all bases, appealing to and speaking the language of common folk as well as more learned men and thereby achieving the broadest possible audience. Freud used his education in classical literature not only to dramatize psychoanalysis (hence the borrowing of Oedipus from Sophocles) but to give it a classical—even classically tragic—feel and appeal. Psychoanalysis was situated within the male homosocial curriculum of European education, Sarah Winter (1999), emphasizes, ensuring both
widespread recognition and cultural legitimacy. Freud sought to reach other men of his class and intellectual interests, and folding Sophocles into his discourse was one strategy for outreach. Psychoanalysis functions still as intellectual capital for the educated classes, both in its own right and as part of that broader thing called theory.

But the story of Oedipus, of course, was a folktale before it became a play, and if Freud sought to legitimize his work through the classics, he also sought to popularize it through stories of the folk. In Freud’s work, classical material coexists peacefully with fairy tales and less tragic, more populist or folkish material. In The Interpretation of Dreams, Oedipus is but one of the many figures dramatizing psychic life. In the second of four sections devoted to “typical dreams” in chapter 5, “The Material and Sources of Dreams,” Oedipus is introduced almost casually, as literary evidence of the universal childhood wish that loved ones should die. In the first of those four sections, Freud discusses the typical dream of being naked, which he reads as fulfillment of the desire to exhibit oneself, and there he turns to Hans Christian Andersen’s original fairy tale “The Emperor’s New Clothes.” After devoting several pages to this narrative and the dream-wish of exhibition, Freud notes that the connections between typical dreams and classic fairy tales “are neither few nor accidental” (1965, 279). “The Emperor’s New Clothes,” of course, did not come to occupy so central a place in the Freudian universe as has the story of Oedipus, but Freud did make strategic if local use of Andersen’s tale. Whereas Oedipus demands a “tragic” recognition of the truths of psychoanalysis, “The Emperor’s New Clothes” offers comic engagement with the psychopathology of everyday life.

The Interpretation of Dreams, moreover, could be read as a collection of folktale-like dreams in common, analogous to the tale collections of the Grimms or Perrault. We might make the same case for The Psychopathology of Everyday Life, a collection of representative parapraxes and errors. It is not a stretch to see Freud as a collector-scholar-theorist of folk material. Perhaps Freud intuited this method from tale collectors and scholars. Early folklore studies was structuralist in orientation, offering taxonomies of tale-type lineage and derivation; Freud likewise offers taxonomies of representative, overlapping dreams and mistakes, suggesting the structuralist energies of his own broader project. Whether deliberately fashioned after folklore studies
or not, Freud’s engagement with fairy tales goes beyond his thematization of fairy tale as symptom.

In *Making American Boys* (2004), I propose along similar lines that Freud’s case histories of the Rat Man (of 1909) and the Wolf Man be understood as psychoanalytic variants on the feral tale, the story of a human animal living among other animals or otherwise not fully socialized into human culture. Freud adapted the feral tale to psychoanalytic ends, I suggest, but in the process psychoanalysis was also shaped by the feral tale, especially in the form of popular psychology about men and their inner wildness. Freud positioned himself as a teller of fabulous tales by turning his male patients especially into heroic if also pitiable characters, most famously the Rat Man and the Wolf Man. Talking animals abound in folklore and fairy tales, as in anthropology, and psychoanalysis seems to have been formulated with such creatures in mind. Freud’s insistent and often colorful presentation of humans as, in fact, human *animals* maintains fidelity to Darwinian critique of human exceptionalism.

While Freud’s texts do not particularly look like fairy tales—just the opposite, at first glance—fairy-tale discourse more broadly provided a kind of exemplary history and method for Freud. The talking cure requires that the analysand talk freely and openly while the analyst textualizes his or her story—writing it down, rearranging it, finding subtext, making it public or pedagogical, and so forth. Psychoanalysis, in short, performs as much as it thematizes the transformation of oral narrative—the patients’ stories—into written text. Simon Grolnick makes this argument as well:

In other words, psychoanalysis itself stands within the folkloristic tradition. The patient and the analyst tell and retell, interpret and reinterpret the story of the patient. Oral tradition prevails until, in the fashion of Perrault or Grimm, the decision is made to write up and publish a case report. (1986, 212)

Psychoanalysis remains a system of oral delivery as much as a system of writing (indeed, the two are in perpetual tension, as not a few commentators have underscored). But while it fetishizes orality and the child-folk subject, it actually favors literacy and textuality, thus affirming and speeding up the orality-to-literacy metanarrative of folklore and
folklore and fairy-tale studies. Psychoanalysis has made the fairy tale even more textual and more literary, often to the point of dismissing oral tradition.

**Beautiful Material**

Psychoanalytic attention to the fairy tale helped shift the fairy-tale conversation from the question of morality to the question of psychosocial instrumentality. From that orientation, a powerful case can be made for appropriateness, arguing that the fairy tale is ideal for kids not merely because it enchants but also because it disturbs, unsettles, even terrifies. Psychoanalytic discussion of the fairy tale did not so much abandon the issues of morality and aesthetics as reframe them in the idiom of analysis.

Franz Ricklin’s *Wünscherfüllung und Symbolik im Märchen* appeared in 1908, and in 1915 it was translated as *Wishfulfillment and Symbolism in Fairy Tales*, monograph 21 in the (American-published) Nervous and Mental Disease Monograph Series. Ricklin, a clinical psychiatrist, was determined not merely to analyze “such beautiful, inviting material as fairy tales” but “to bear a weapon” in the “struggle for and against the Freudian theories” in psychiatry especially (1915, 1; emphasis mine). While the interpretive scheme is strictly Freudian, the book is thoughtful and nuanced, with Ricklin worrying over questions of “historical pedigree” (2), tale variation, and the politics of translation and language. (“Is not every word a symbol!” he declares [26].) Ricklin draws upon a wide range of fairy-tale material, including Icelandic, Italian, and Russian tale collections as well as German sources other than the Grimms. He blends tale analysis with patient case histories, focusing like Freud on dreams with fairy-tale material. “The human psyche,” he writes early on, “is always still a fairy poetess” (3).

Whereas Ricklin emphasized the invitational beauty of fairy tales, Hermine Hug-Hellmuth, generally recognized as the first child analyst, positions such beauty as the child’s heritage, anticipating later declarations by children’s literature critics. In her 1924 work “New Ways to the Understanding of Youth” she writes, “Fairy tales and sagas, songs and sounds should become a precious heritage for the child’s soul. They speak simply but powerfully about the old days with simple experiences and primitive feelings at a time when the child is still susceptible and
inclined” (1991c, 191). Precisely because they are so exciting, fairy tales should be carefully screened, she thinks. “We know that the child’s waiting desires, imaginations, feelings, and impulses will jump like wild animals onto the corresponding literature,” she continues, “and that’s why we don’t recommend reading frightening stories at bedtime and why we recommend to parents to keep their bookcase locked from their children” (191). Hug-Hellmuth, in short, does not see fairy tales as useful in the way Bettelheim does, instead hewing to the classical view of fairy tale as symptom while also stressing their aesthetic appeal. Her conception of the fairy tale as a “precious heritage” is echoed by later advocates within children’s literature.

As in so many areas, Melanie Klein is a transitional figure in her orientation to fairy tales. Klein’s ideas about infantile aggression have not been popular in the United States, as they make difficult the kind of upbeat theorizing about ego development typical of Americanized psychoanalysis. In her 1921 “The Development of the Child,” Klein reviews the interest of a young boy named Fritz (in fact, Klein’s son Erich) in fairy-tale material. Like Freud’s Wolf Man, Fritz is both afraid of and obsessed with wolves in fairy tales and picturebooks, and also like the Wolf Man, he dreams about wolves. The Grimms’ tales, she notes, nearly always elicit anxiety manifestations (1988a, 52), thus serving as a kind of litmus test for mental health. Klein proposes that psychoanalysis will give us the insight and maturity with which to experience these tales in all their heady, violent glory, including their encouragement of normal sadistic fantasy in children. Klein here moves into Bettelheim territory, her interest in enchantment more focused on aggression than on sexuality.

Whereas for Freud the fairy tale offered something like a side path to the individual unconscious, for Freud’s disciple-turned-rival Jung the fairy tale led to the collective unconscious and its repertoire of ostensibly universal symbols and forms, or archetypes. Although Jung was more interested in myth than in the fairy tale, he did discuss the fairy tale as an archetypal form, notably in “The Phenomenology of the Spirit in Fairytales” (“Zur Phanomenologie des Geistes im Märchen,” 1948) but also in “On the Psychology of the Trickster-Figure” (“Zur Psychologie der Schelmenfigure,” 1954). Jung’s approach to myth and the fairy tale has been enormously influential.

In “The Phenomenology of the Spirit of Fairytales,” Jung holds that
fairy tales in all or most cultures incorporate the archetype of “spirit,” or the presence of the collective unconscious within the psyche of a person. This “spirit” can be manifested with the proper guidance and attitude. Evidence of its existence can be gleaned from our ability to solve problems beyond our usual cognitive and rational resources. Fairy tales, he thinks, are “spontaneous, naïve, and uncontrived products[s] of the psyche” that cannot express “anything else except what the psyche actually is” (Jung 1959, 239). Jung elaborates this theory of the fairy tale against the sexual-symptomatic analysis of Freud. For Jung, “spirit” unifies the good and evil encountered in fairy tales, and indeed unifies all aspects of the form. Within fairy tales, spirit may be personified by characters like a “wise old man,” a “dwarf,” even “animal forms” (213). Archetypes, he proposes, sometimes approach consciousness and can be partly perceived through forms ostensibly made of psychic energy itself, including the fairy tale.

Jung’s thoughts on childhood are explored at length in “The Psychology of the Child-Archetype” (“Zur Psychologie des Kind-Archetypus,” 1941), which mentions fairy tales although the primary focus is myth. For Jung, childhood is the primitive stage of life prior to the development of individual ego—and a stage or state to which we should aspire. Jung’s system is cyclical as well as linear; the child, or rather the Child archetype, represents wisdom that may be reclaimed. Jung emphasizes the futurity of this archetype: “The child is potential future” (1949, 115). But he also insists that the child is “thus both beginning and end, an initial and a terminal creature. The initial creature existed before man was, and the terminal creature will be when man is not. . . . the ‘child’ symbolizes the pre-conscious and the post-conscious nature of man” (134). Jung also gave attention to children’s dreams, in a series of seminars not published until after his death. While there are significant differences between Freud and Jung, both saw the child as an analogue to primitive man, in keeping with the principle of recapitulation.

“Freud may still be the genius of choice for the learned elite of the late twentieth century,” writes Richard Noll, “but it is clear that, in sheer numbers alone, it is Jung who has won the cultural war and whose works are more widely read and discussed” (1994, 6). Although Jung was no more attuned to “children’s literature” than was Freud, analytical psychology has further ratified the fairy tale as a cultural
form and as one in proximity to childhood. Moreover, for Jung and his followers, the fairy tale is not tied to psychopathology; rather, its association with the unconscious is positive, the stuff of “spirit” rather than destructive affect or even simple neurosis. Jung’s spiritual and esoteric tendencies have encouraged fairy-tale interpreters to see the genre as a source of wisdom and higher consciousness.\footnote{Whereas for Freudians fairy tales point to infantile dramas, for Jungians fairy tales reveal spiritual truths. Jung even seems to position analytical psychology as being on a par with fairy tales. His friend and disciple Marie-Louise von Franz similarly calls fairy-tale language “the international language of all mankind” (1996, 27–28).} Analytical psychology is not privileged over the fairy tale but rather acts as its coconspirator and translator.

Jacqueline Rose claims that Jung “has in fact been much better received than Freud in relation to children’s literature” (1984, 18), thanks largely to Freud’s emphasis on sexuality. While I am not sure that Jung still overshadows Freud in children’s literature studies, Rose is right to note that Jungian readings of children’s literature have long proliferated, readings that apply Jungian ideas about archetypes—chief among them the Shadow, the Anima, and the Animus, as well as the Child—as well as the concept of individuation. As with Freudian readings, not a few Jungian analyses of the fairy tale and other genres are vulgar or reductive, missing out on the complexities of Jung’s actual discourse.\footnote{In any case, Jungian criticism of children’s literature originates more with the work of von Franz and other Jungian commentators than with Jung himself. Because the Child archetype can and should be sought after by the adult, Jung’s system does not itself support the idea of a separate “children’s literature”; rather, Jung emphasized the intertwining of child and adult forms (or Forms). Fairy tales, myths, and dreams do make up for Jung a literature of the Child archetype. Jung appeals to this archetype to emphasize the integrative psychological work we should all undertake. Even so, the literature of the Child archetype, in Jung and especially in pop-Jungian discourse, supports a modern and largely affirmative conception of children’s literature.} Not all the texts in which children take an interest, or which adults devise for them, would qualify for Jung as literature of the Child archetype. In Jungian terms, children’s literature might be literature...
that returns us to the Child archetype and to knowledge of the collective unconscious. “The child-motif,” writes Jung, “represents the preconscious, childhood aspect of the collective psyche” (1949, 111). Jung’s understanding of the child in literature has perhaps been more influential than that of Freud, who did not stress the unity of genres in which the child was called up or called forth. Together, Freud and Jung make a compelling case for the intimacy of childhood and the fairy tale.

Fairy Tales, Fantasy, and Useful Children’s Books: The American Scene

In the United States, psychoanalytic interest in the fairy tale merged with and supported a fairy-tale friendly popular culture, generally speaking. Perrault’s 1697 *Histoires ou contes du temps passé* was translated into English as early as 1729, the Grimms’ *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* in 1823. By the end of the nineteenth century, these and other collections of fairy tales had reached a wide American audience, inspiring the likes of Nathaniel Hawthorne and Lydia Maria Child to experiment with the genre. In the September 1881 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*, John Fiske takes note of the popularity of fairy tales and remarks that every new translation has increased readerly demand. The fairy tale apparently resonated with residually Puritan American literature and with various newer genres of sensational literature.14

American attitudes towards fairy tales have long been mixed, but for the most part, fairy tales were accepted in the nineteenth century as proto-therapeutic. So, too, with sensational literature, despite widespread fears about the excitable young imagination. In “Books for Our Children,” which appeared in 1865 in the *Atlantic Monthly*, the Reverend Samuel Osgood argued that children’s books need to stimulate the imagination and stressed the importance of play, the subject of my next chapter. Children’s books, held Osgood, must facilitate imaginative engagement with the so-called real world and keep alive the fantasy worlds of childhood. More optimistic still is Thomas Wentworth Higginson’s spirited 1879 defense of “sensational” boy books by Oliver Optic (William Taylor Adams) and Horatio Alger Jr., which he presented at the meeting of the American Library Association (see Darling 1968). His defense anticipates the twentieth-century argument for fairy
tales, from the first wave of psychoanalysis forward. Fairy tales, we now think, enable psychosocial development, giving outlet to yearnings and nurturing creativity. Assuming assessments like those of Osgood and Higginson to be representative, it would seem that belief in child-centered as well as sensational narrative was already allied with faith in the child’s imaginative powers before psychoanalysis took up the cause. Perhaps that faith emanated from the literature itself, to some degree.

The 1920s saw the eruption of the so-called fairy-tale wars between progressive educators led by Lucy Sprague Mitchell, founder of the Bureau of Educational Experiments (informally known as the Bank Street School from its address), and more traditionally minded book advocates led by librarian and critic Anne Carroll Moore. Moore was especially vocal in defending fairy tales, myths, and legends against the encroachments of the modern realist (usually urban) tale for children, which Mitchell was encouraging at Bank Street. This discussion took the form of a debate about the merits of “ Fantasy,” meaning both fantastical narratives and psychological fantasy (also phantasy) as theorized by Freud, Klein, and others. As Jacalyn Eddy reports, child experts at first inveighed against fantasy, but gradually the tables turned, with the experts often championing fantasy along psychological lines (2006, 110–17).

By midcentury, both child psychology and commentary on fairy tales emphasized the importance of fantasy and imaginative narrative, dismissing residual concerns about escapism. Arguments in favor of fantasy tended to be psychoanalytic in formulation, if not always explicitly, since fantasy was seen as emanating from unconscious processes, instinctual drives, or both. “Books for children have,” notes Kate Friedlaender, “even in the early days of Psychoanalysis, aroused its interest. Up till now it has chiefly concerned itself with the Fairy-Tale, literature for older children only rarely playing a part in analytical research” (1942, 129). Friedlaender, a psychiatrist, makes the case that books appealing to children in the latency stage do so because they help children meet psychological challenges. Decades before Bettelheim, she identifies a number of features common to favorite latency-period books, features also more explicitly present in fairy tales, she notes. These include orphanhood or dramatic changes in circumstance for
the main character, which she likens to the family romance, as well as the regular “taming” of bad adults alongside an impossible goodness in child character, symptomatic of “certain functions of the Ego’s defence-mechanisms” (138). In short, she proposes that children read for emotional satisfaction rather than for information, which brings them into conflict with adults. They love fantasy, she notes, and prefer substandard literature that speaks to them emotionally to more literary material that does not. The adult classics they like best, she notes, are likewise those with the same themes and emphases as appear in favored latency-period books and fairy tales, books such as *Jane Eyre* and *David Copperfield*. Friedlaender urges adults to give greater consideration to the psychodynamic dimensions of reading and to “avoid prohibitions of every kind” when it comes to children’s reading (150). Tacitly she acknowledges that the insights of psychoanalysis have been anticipated by imaginative literature.

In 1946 Martha Wolfenstein, staff psychiatrist for the Walden School in New York City and future collaborator of Margaret Mead, made a similar assessment. Wolfenstein reports on an interesting experiment in applied psychology, designed to see how a children’s story about the birth of a sibling and with a strong fantasy element might affect a young child and his or her mother. Commissioned by Wolfenstein and her team, established children’s author Leo Rosten wrote a story (without pictures) called *Sally and the Baby and the Rampatan*, in which young Sally, faced with the arrival of a sibling but ignorant of the facts of life, fantasizes that the baby will be a “rampatan,” an animal part duck, part bunny, and part pussycat. Sally asserts control over the situation, refusing to tell her mother what a “rampatan” might be. The rampatan fantasy, remarks Wolfenstein, “expresses with the ingenuous condensation of a dream image the wishes of the child in the given situation: the wish to create something as the parents have . . . the wish to determine what the baby will be, the wish to outdo the Mother, to destroy the Mother’s baby and at the same time to make restitution” (1946, 3–4).

Ten four-year-old subjects and their mothers were presented with this story in various settings, and the results were analyzed through interviews and individual play sessions (complete with doll sets and art materials). Wolfenstein discovers that the children most likely to dislike the rampatan fantasy belonged to the mothers most inclined to repress discussions of sexuality and to deny the emotional complexity
of childhood, whereas the children most likely to enjoy the fantasy belonged to the mothers more willing to see their children as sexual and sometimes hostile little creatures. The fantasy element of the rampatan ensures the proper unconscious processing of standard psychological anxieties, she concludes, and sublimation is infinitely preferable to repression. Like Friedlaender, Wolfenstein argues that aesthetic merit should always be secondary to affective power. Wolfenstein goes one step further than Friedlaender by showing what happens when mothers resist the importance of fantasy, thereby positioning mothers as potential hindrances and shoring up her own authority as a child expert. The adult more generally, she declares, “seems to have little ability for cathecting fantasy” (28).

Whereas Friedlaender and Wolfenstein spoke on behalf of the experts, Josette Frank—educator, anthology editor, and executive director of the Child Study Association of America—served as an intermediary of sorts between the experts and parents seeking advice about children and their books. As Lynn S. Cockett (1996) details, Frank is one of a number of women in the first half of the twentieth century who wrote about children’s reading for parents in mass-market publications such as Good Housekeeping and Parents Magazine. Cockett documents through this literature a shift away from moralistic understandings of children’s literature and toward more contemporary concerns with both the child’s developmental needs and the needs of parents who want to be involved with their children’s reading. In an essay in the winter 1948–49 issue of Child Study, the Child Study Association’s official journal (aimed primarily at parents), Frank concurs with the contemporary emphasis on the importance of fantasy and children’s emotions, associating them with “mental hygiene” rather than with psychoanalysis. She acknowledges and approves of the newer emphasis on children’s pleasure in reading but notes that didactic stories persist. “Practically every kind of child behavior has been exploited recently in stories for the young,” she notes, and most of those stories “are cheerful and positive” (1948–49, 6). Frank is more cautious than Friedlaender and Wolfenstein in her assessment of this shift toward pleasure and fantasy, however, noting, “There are things which reading can and cannot do for children. Books cannot substitute for experiences. . . . Neither can reading motivate emotions, overcome defects, or revise personality patterns” (26). Contra Wolfenstein and more-alarmist expert opinion,
Frank sees parents as uniquely qualified to preside over the emotional lives of their children and to find material best suited for them.

A decade or so earlier, Frank had published a book called *What Books for Children? Guideposts for Parents*, which argues for a new kind of valuation of children’s books, one based more on emotional and developmental relevance. “We will save ourselves many heartaches,” she writes, “if we think of our children’s reading not in terms of ‘culture’—of good books or bad, or of more books or fewer—but rather as an avenue of expression and inner satisfaction for each according to his needs” (1937, 23). Appealing briefly to the wisdom of psychoanalytic psychiatry concerning the appeal of fairy tales, she emphasizes that parents and children do not necessarily want the same thing from literature, and that the child’s needs always come first. “The important thing is not that a child shall read all the good books which are available or which his parents read before him,” she writes, “but that what he does read shall have meaning and value for him and that he shall know how to find the books which have” that value and meaning (80). She is not worried about less-than-literary narrative and in fact even acknowledges its appeal. She likens series reading to the measles—harmless enough and perhaps even beneficial.

By midcentury, fantasy narrative, with the fairy tale center stage, was widely deemed essential to the psychological health of children. This was probably the combined effect of psychoanalytic advocacy and the imaginative literature itself. Parents generally came to accept their children as vexed and pleasure-seeking creatures who could be coaxed into responsible selfhood. Jack Zipes may be right that fantasy “was really on the defensive while appearing to be on the offensive,” that if anything it was “used to compensate for the growing rationalization of culture, work, and family life in western society” (1983, 171). Whether liberatory, normative, or both, the clinical and popular literature on fairy tale and fantasy prepared the way for Bettelheim.

The Uses of Enchantment

At the time of his death in 1990, Bettelheim was one of the most respected psychologists in the world, praised for his work at the Sonia Shankman Orthogenic School in Chicago, a residential treatment cen-
ter for children, and for his writings on the Holocaust, autism, kibbutz life, and childhood. From 1968 to 1973, he ran an advice column in *Ladies’ Home Journal* for mothers, titled “Dialogue with Mothers” after his 1962 *Dialogues with Mothers* (itself based on a series of talks for mothers given at the University of Chicago); other books dealing with childhood and parenting include *Love Is Not Enough: The Treatment of Emotionally Disturbed Children* (1950), *Truants from Life: The Rehabilitation of Emotionally Disturbed Children* (1955), *The Children of the Dream* (1969), and *A Good Enough Parent: A Book on Child-Rearing* (1987). Already well-known, he became famous thanks to *The Uses of Enchantment*, his fairy-tale study that also functioned as a child-rearing book of sorts. The book was the recipient of both the National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award and was praised by the likes of Harold Bloom, Leslie Fiedler, and John Updike. In 1995 it was named by the New York Public Library as one of the most influential volumes of the century (Pollak 1988, 351). *The Uses of Enchantment* enjoyed such success because it effectively synthesized and repackaged decades of psychoanalytic research on childhood and fairy tales.

Anyone versed in the scholarship on fairy tales knows the criticisms that have rightly been made of Bettelheim’s study, chiefly that it is indifferent to tale variation and historical context and that it has an overriding commitment to Freudian hermeneutics. In *Off with Their Heads!*, Maria Tatar takes Bettelheim’s role as a public intellectual seriously when she also accuses him of siding with parents against children. In fact, she finds that attitude to be common among scholars. “With few notable exceptions,” she writes, “nearly every study of children’s fairy tales published in this century has taken the part of the parent. . . . For a book that champions the interests of children, *The Uses of Enchantment* is oddly accusatory toward children” (1992, xvii–xxii). In Tatar’s view, Bettelheim’s refusal to acknowledge the sociohistorical realities of child abuse or any sort of adult hostility toward children—a position in line with Freud’s emphasis on the child’s polymorphous perversity—has the effect of making children into villains. The “transhistorical assumption of a disturbed child and a healthy adult” (xxiv) has been nurtured by psychoanalysis, she holds, and Bettelheim’s book is “deeply symptomatic of our own culture’s thinking about children” (xxv).
I find this critique persuasive, but I would stress the complexity of Bettelheim’s vision, not only in *The Uses of Enchantment* but also in his larger body of work. Even in the fairy-tale study, Bettelheim does not, in fact, position himself so unequivocally against children, nor does he remain entirely faithful to Freudian theory. *The Uses of Enchantment* pointedly situates the child as existential hero engaged in the “struggle for meaning” (the title of his introduction) by way of the fairy tale. Bettelheim’s ideas about the psychological value of fairy tales are usefully understood in light of his lifelong interest in the feral tale. Long before he wrote about fairy tales, he wrote about feral children, beginning with a famous case of wolf-girls in Midnapore, India. In so doing, he fashioned after Freud his own psychoanalytic variants of the feral tale, in which parents—and specifically mothers—are villains. Bettelheim did not believe that trauma only comes from within; as early as 1943, he focused his attention on the devastating effects of concentration camp imprisonment and other environmental realities, including beastly parenting. In this respect, he was a pioneer in trauma studies, as David James Fisher hints (2008, 38–39). Adults are not blameless in his work. Bettelheim has in fact been charged with a special hostility toward mothers, particularly in his autism study, *The Empty Fortress: Infantile Autism and the Birth of the Self*, first published in 1967.

Operating from the standard psychoanalytic assumption that children are repeating the developmental history of the species, *The Uses of Enchantment* is divided into two sections, the first dealing with the “need for inner integration” and the second with “oedipal problems” (1976, 90). While he does not shrink from invoking Freud, Bettelheim appeals strategically to contemporary faith in “integration” before he returns to the thornier issue of oedipality. In part 2 he ingeniously rediscovers the story of Oedipus in the form of a fairy tale, offering a comparison of the Oedipus story with the fairy tale “Snow White and the Seven Dwarves.” In this way, he positions himself as Freud’s successor. At the same time, he takes a more radical position by implying that the fairy tale is an *improvement* on the tale of Oedipus, in that “Snow White” offers the child hope, unlike the Greek legend. In fairy tales, he remarks, “the hero’s story shows how these potentially
destructive infantile relations can be, and are, integrated into developmental processes,” whereas in myth, including the myth of Oedipus, “there is only insurmountable difficulty and defeat” (198). In the final section of the book, Bettelheim turns to the “life cycle” model of neo-Freudian Erik Erikson, reading the fairy tale “Cinderella” as a lesson in autonomy and integration. Bettelheim urges that children be raised on fairy tales so they can mature. As Dundes points out, Bettelheim’s conviction on this point is more obvious from the title of the German translation of the book: Kinder brauchen Märchen, or “Children need fairy tales” (Dundes 1991, 73). Further, to allow children the freest engagements, holds Bettelheim, adults should tell the stories, again and again, rather than let children read them. And never should they reveal to the child the fairy tale’s psychological attraction; that would spoil the enchantment.

Bettelheim emigrated to the United States in 1939 and was in many ways an Americanized analyst, pragmatic and open to revisionist thought. The Uses of Enchantment is often described as resolutely Freudian, but the book indicates Bettelheim’s simultaneous commitments to classical and revisionist psychoanalysis and to competing views of childhood. Consider, for example, this representative passage from the introduction:

This is exactly the message that fairy tales get across to the child in manifold form: that a struggle against severe difficulties in life is unavoidable, is an intrinsic part of human existence—but that if one does not shy away, but steadfastly meets unexpected and often unjust hardships, one masters all obstacles and at the end emerges victorious. (1976, 8)

Here, as throughout the book, a traditionally Freudian outlook meets the more utopian perspective of ego psychology, which overlaps considerably with the American-dream narrative of success through adversity. The Uses of Enchantment is not only a book of interpretation but also a child-rearing primer, its readings designed for practical use. Bettelheim speaks of the importance of “personality integration” and “healthy human development” (12), in keeping with both Jungian tradition and humanistic or third-force psychology. He also acknowledges the
importance of play, affirming the contributions of Klein and Jean Piaget on play and symbolization. In fact, he positions the encounter with fairy tales after play as the next “solution” to unconscious challenges:

Some unconscious pressures in children can be worked out through play. But many do not lend themselves to it because they are too complex and contradictory, or too dangerous and socially disapproved. . . . Knowing fairy tales is a great help to the child, as illustrated by the fact that many fairy stories are acted out by children, but only after children have become familiar with the story, which they never could have invented on their own. (55)

Bettelheim’s psychoanalytic formulations are certainly problematic from a contemporary perspective, especially with respect to gender and sexuality. For instance, he approves of doll play among boys, but only if it can be sublimated by maturity. He recommends that homosexual desires be kept unconscious. Even so, he refuses to pathologize either children or fairy tales, emphasizing the resourcefulness of the former and remarking (contra Freud) that the latter “are not neurotic symptoms” (19). He takes parents to task for their “fear of fantasy” (122). Most critically, he express faith in the complementarity of children’s forms and psychoanalysis, remarking that “the fairy-tale answer [to the question of human identity] is the same one which psychoanalysis offers: To avoid being tossed about and, in extreme cases, torn apart by our ambivalences requires that we integrate them” (89–90). Whereas Freud understood psychoanalysis as offering insight but not necessarily dramatic change, Bettelheim grants the fairy tale great transformative power as well as foreknowledge of the wisdom of psychoanalysis, claiming that “the form and structure of fairy tales suggest images to the child by which he can structure his daydreams and with them give better direction to his life” (7). Fairy tales got there first, he seems to say.

*The Uses of Enchantment* is about fairy tales, not children’s literature, as Bettelheim is quick to emphasize. He finds children’s literature—“modern stories”—insufficiently deep and useful. “The pre-primers and primers from which [the child] is taught to read in school,” writes Bettelheim, “are designed to teach the necessary skills, irrespective of meaning. The overwhelming bulk of the rest of so-called ‘chil-
dren’s literature’ attempts to entertain or to inform, or both. But most of these books are so shallow in substance that little of significance can be gained from them” (4). “The deep inner conflicts originating in our primitive drives and our violent emotions are all denied in much of modern children’s literature” (10). Only fairy tales offer the right balance of conflict and hope, in his view.

Bettelheim knows very little about children’s literature and seems unaware of the ascendance of fantasy in American literature and culture, which made possible such a favorable reception for his own book. Friedlaender, Wolfenstein, and Frank had already granted the psychological benefits of the fairy tale to other forms of children’s narrative, in effect setting up the fairy tale as a template for good children’s literature. While Bettelheim’s psychology was far from rigid, his faith in form was strikingly so: in his mind, only the fairy tale can enable “personality integration.” Bettelheim was old-fashioned in many respects, and his fidelity to the fairy tale may reflect nostalgia for the Old World. For whatever reasons, Bettelheim refused to recognize other fantasy forms, famously objecting to Maurice Sendak’s Where the Wild Things Are as insufficiently attuned to the child’s inner life. As I discuss in chapter 4, Bettelheim wrote against Sendak’s book—now viewed as the picturebook fantasy—in one of his “Dialogue with Mothers” columns, at some level recognizing Sendak as a rival authority on childhood (Bettelheim 1969).

While Bettelheim endorses the fairy tale as authentic children’s literature, he does not examine the difficulties attendant on such a claim. Is the fairy tale real children’s literature because it appeals to real children, we might ask, or because it reflects the folk-childish-unconscious mind, or some combination thereof? These possibilities are somewhat in conflict, in that individual meaning making in and around fairy tales requires some level of mature awareness of their import and value; might not such awareness run counter to unconscious needs and desires? Freud “used” fairy tales with his patients, helping them see how fairy tales screen infantile fears and fantasies; according to Bettelheim, children ostensibly use fairy tales themselves, with parents functioning as analyst surrogates.

In more ways than one, The Uses of Enchantment is not original work. As I have suggested, Bettelheim builds on the groundswell of
support for fantasy. But there is more to the story. There is good evidence that *The Uses of Enchantment* was plagiarized from Julius E. Heuscher’s *A Psychiatric Study of Fairy Tales: Their Origin, Meaning, and Usefulness* (1963). Joan Blos was the first to make this discovery in 1978, with Alan Dundes and especially Bettelheim’s biographer Richard Pollak following up on the story. Heuscher’s study “was rich with psychological gingerbread,” writes Pollak, “and like the hungry Hansel, Bettelheim helped himself” (1988, 343). Pollak’s side-by-side comparisons of passages from the two books make obvious the derivative nature of Bettelheim’s book. “Bettelheim had been in this forest before,” continues Pollak, “scrambling for nuts and berries that would give him something to say about concentration camps or parenting or autism or kibbutzism or the youth culture, but seldom digesting his pickings before announcing their meaning to a waiting world” (347).

Dundes is more measured, finding Bettelheim’s study “infinitely superior” to Heuscher’s, whose work he calls “a confusing mix of Freudian, Jungian, and anthroposophical theories” (1991, 80), but faulting Bettelheim for this “sin of commission” as well as for neglecting other relevant work (76–77). Heuscher’s book is indeed a mishmash of ideas, but Heuscher himself thinks we have surpassed the strictly “natural-scientific” orientation of Freud (1963, 43) and argues for a composite approach. For Heuscher, the fairy tale helps us “regain the spiritual or moral impulses which can liberate our imprisoned ‘everyday Ego.’ This Ego,” he continues, “is captured in a narrow materialistic world just like Rapunzel who is jailed by the witch in a stone tower” (vi). Heuscher’s vision of the fairy tale is very much one of collective spirituality and empowerment, one motivated by the alleged dangers of materialism. Heuscher sees reflected in the fairy tale three “epochs” of both individual and historical life: a prematerialistic period, a materialistic one, and a (future) postmaterialistic phase. Even more than most psychologically oriented commentators, he idealizes the child as especially receptive to the fairy tale’s visual and narrative magic. In the last chapter of *A Psychiatric Study of Fairy Tales*, “The Child and the Fairy Tale,” he asserts, like Bettelheim, that “fairy tales have an educational and therapeutic value” (186). Heuscher’s utopian faith in the genre may well have tempered the Freudian tendencies of Bettelheim, causing the latter also to emphasize
the fairy tale’s transformative potential. When Heuscher learned of the plagiarism, he quite generously responded, “We all plagiarize. I plagiarize. Many times, I am not sure whether it came out of my own brain or if it came from somewhere else. . . . I am only happy that I would have influenced Bruno Bettelheim” (cited in Pollak 1988, 351).

Is the alleged plagiarism less scandalous if we understand Bettelheim as the most successful in a long line of psychoanalytic commentators on fairy tales? With this subject at least, he is more popularizer than original thinker, and his book has in turn spawned a cottage industry of bibliotherapeutic writing on fairy tales. There is Sheldon Cashdan’s *The Witch Must Die: The Hidden Meaning of Fairy Tales* (1999), for instance, as well as Catherine Orenstein’s *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked: Sex, Morality, and the Evolution of a Fairy Tale* (2002). Orenstein pays homage to Bettelheim, who, she says, “almost single-handedly catapulted the modern genre into vogue” (11–12). These are but two of the many sequels to *The Uses of Enchantment* that trend away from the scholarly monograph and toward popular, applied psychology.

*Do You Believe in Magic?*

As children’s literature criticism developed, librarians and literary scholars turned to fairy tales for insights into childhood and as a template for children’s narrative more generally. Psychoanalysis borrows from the fairy tale, but literary criticism also borrows from psychoanalysis, especially when it comes to children’s narrative. One example is Canadian librarian Lillian Smith’s 1953 textbook *The Unreluctant Years: A Critical Approach to Children’s Literature*. In her first chapter, titled “The Case for Children’s Literature,” Smith insists upon the differences between children and adults and upon the need to respect those differences in writing for children. She notes that “the adult’s conception of what constitutes a children’s book [does not] coincide always with that of the child. . . . Children are a race whose experience of life is different from that of adults” (Smith 1991, 5). Smith’s book is organized by genre, beginning with a chapter on fairy tales, in which she emphasizes their staying power and transformative potential. Smith holds that the fairy tale helps children manage their fears. “Against the limitless terrors of a child’s own imaginations,” she remarks, “are set the limits
opposed by the conventions of the fairy tale” (50). She quotes Walter de La Mare's claim in his 1940 work *Animal Stories* that fairy tales “may feed the imagination, enlighten the mind, strengthen the heart, show us *ourselves*” (quoted in Smith 1991, 51; emphasis La Mare’s). “In turning from one kind of fairy tale to another,” she remarks, “a child finds, in their variety, a deepening and broadening of emotional sympathy” (51). She remarks that children “are aware, consciously or unconsciously, that in hero stories they find experience. Beyond their glamour and magic and romance there is something tough and real” (84).

Most histories of Anglo-European children’s literature, as well as textbooks on children’s literature, consider fairy tales and the oral tradition the foundation of children’s literature. Even when fairy-tale literature is not presented as a precursor to ostensibly more adult or more literary genres, it is nearly always positioned as coming first in the child’s experience of stories and thus as setting certain patterns of expectation. It is not that fairy tales have been grandfathered into children’s literature, but rather that the modern understanding of children’s literature was argued for on the basis of the fairy tale’s value and the broader uses of enchantment. The general story of Anglo-American children’s literature is that entertainment began to displace didacticism in the nineteenth century, as fairy tales and fantasy became more popular. I would call this the progressive hypothesis of children’s literature, the idea that children’s literature gets freer in form and content with time and ostensibly gives free reign to the child’s imagination. Such freedom probably constitutes yet another chapter in the rationalization of child-centered discourse or in the instrumentalization of children’s forms (per Michel Foucault, this might be the disciplinary hypothesis). After centuries of contestation, fairy tales were made authoritative in our own time through a rhetoric of children’s psychological, emotional, imaginative needs: children *need* to fantasize, to dream, to sail to where the wild things are. Amusement, play, and fantasy are core terms in the newer language of child development, not displacing didacticism or rationality but giving them a makeover. Fantasy is the new realism. The ongoing debate about the psychological appropriateness of fairy tales for children is part of the fairy tale’s long history of adult–child negotiation and helps maintain rather than undermine the fairy tale’s centrality to children’s literature.
Not only are fairy tales seen as foundational, but also cultural preference has shifted away from narratives that teach rationality and character development and toward narratives that distill as well as model psychological challenges. Introducing a new forum of ideas in a special issue of *Children’s Literature in Education* in 1978, children’s author Joan Blos turns immediately to the subject of children’s literature and child psychology, emphasizing their “reciprocal content and corresponding statements” (1978, 101) and pairing remarks by psychologists about childhood with passages from classic children’s books. Writers and psychologists seem to know the same truths, she observes. More to the point, she connects good children’s books to fairy-tale wisdom:

We begin by recalling that in the old tales repetition, over time, has tended to refine their material to what folklorist Tristam P. Coffin has aptly termed “the emotional core” of the narrative. We note that in more cases than not that core locates in childhood the great and most universal aspect of human experience. Equipped with our insight we speculate that the regression that underlies creativity—whether practiced by a contemporary author with an electric typewriter or a story teller by the hearth or kitchen fire—put that emotionally relevant material into the stories in the first place, and that it is this presence in the stories that makes them appeal to children. The tale, in other words, achieves by evolution what the children’s book of excellence has by virtue of its author’s skill, as well as that person’s tolerance for the particular kind of regressive experience demanded by valid art. (104)

This universalizing attitude is one serious consequence of the conflation of fairy tales with children’s literature at large. Not only are differences among fairy tales and tale types thereby collapsed, but fairy tales as a group define “good” children’s books, as measured by an “emotional core” produced through “the particular kind of regressive experience demanded by valid art.” By this standard, books that are deliberately crafted rather than forged from the primal depths do not qualify as good children’s books. Without regression, suggests Blos, there can be no emotional core and therefore no art.
The sanctification of the fairy tale as the real, original, or good children’s literature exacts a price, including the suppression of the actual diversity of children’s literature with respect to genre, mood, tone, audience, conditions of production and reception, and so forth. Bettelheim, for instance, finds Johann David Wyss’s 1812 book *The Swiss Family Robinson* lacking because, quite simply, it is not a fairy tale, and thus “did not hold out any promise that [an unnamed adolescent reader’s] life would take a turn for the better—a hope which would have made life much more bearable for her” (1976, 131).

Another consequence of such fairy-tale sanctification is the dominance of developmental theories about childhood reading, which coexist uneasily with the universal-transcendent model of children’s literature represented by Blos above. Even though fairy tales represent the child’s first and most powerful contact with children’s literature, the child is also expected to leave them behind. “I was given [fairy tale] collections to read—two or three of the Andrew Lang coloured *Fairy Books*, French anthologies, Hans Christian Andersen,” reports Marina Warner, “but I was expected to grow out of them, I could tell” (1994, xiv). Warner has made a career out of resisting that expectation. Nicholas Tucker, in his age-graded guide to children’s literature, ranks fairy tales as best suited for children around age seven; he puts fairy tales, myths, and legends after nursery rhymes and “story and picture-books” (1981) but before early fiction, comics, and literature for older children. Tucker has in mind the child’s reading ability and puts picture-based texts before fairy tales for this reason, but others have argued that fairy tales should be experienced before or alongside picturebooks, as they encourage the move from orality to literacy. “It is precisely through fairy tales and fantasy,” affirms Tatar in *Enchanted Hunters*, “that children learn to move beyond magical thinking” (2009, 140), coming to prefer the magic of words.

This logic harkens back not so much to Freud as to ego psychology and other traditions of developmental psychoanalytic theory. In *The Magic Years: Understanding and Handling the Problems of Early Childhood*, Selma H. Fraiberg, a popular childhood expert and professor of child psychoanalysis at the California School of Medicine, writes that the first five years of a child’s life are “‘magic’ years because the child in his early years is a magician—in the psychological sense. His
earliest conception of the world is a magical one; he believes that his actions and his thoughts can bring about events” (1959, ix). Fraiberg endorses the developmental model without giving up Freud and Klein, asserting that if we did not provide monsters to children, they would invent their own (she makes this point in a chapter called “Witches, Ogres, Tigers, and Mental Health”). Fraiberg’s vision is Freudian, even as she acknowledges the influences of ego psychology and anticipates humanist psychologist Carl Rogers with section titles like “On Becoming a Person” (Roger’s book with the same title was published in 1961). Fraiberg’s book, which sold well and was widely reviewed, typifies the period’s faith in practical, distilled psychoanalytic wisdom.

Children’s literature is still regularly framed as progressing from simple to complex textual encounters and from simple to complex psychological tasks. Eschewing the traditional language of developmental stages, J. A. Appleyard argues for a sequence of reading roles beginning in childhood and running through adulthood: the reader as player, as hero/heroine, as thinker, as interpreter, and as pragmatist (1990, 14–15). Early childhood features the reader as player, and Appleyard talks first about young children who play with (you guessed it) fairy tales and their characters, Snow White specifically. He then stresses the affective power of fantasy and magical thinking, citing Bettelheim in support (36–37). If children are to grow into critical thinkers, the logic runs, they must get past magical thinking and the fairy-tale fetish. The positioning of the fairy tale as the first form of children’s literature, then, supports two variations on the fairy-tale-as-magic theme. Childhood is at once envisioned as a magical place to which adults (especially creative writers) can return via the fairy tale and analogous forms (Blos’s universal-transcendent model) and a stage of life that should be left behind in search of “higher” magic (the developmental model).

In summary, the psychoanalytic presentation of the fairy tale as the exemplary form of children’s literature enabled an expansion of genres—from fairy tales to other imaginative genres—and of keywords, such as “magic,” “enchantment,” and “play.” Across the twentieth century, psychoanalytic writing on the fairy tale helped authorize a broader discourse on the forms and uses of enchantment. The broadening of terms accompanied and facilitated a broadening of the canon, so that certain children’s classics are now invoked alongside the fairy tale
in illustration of theoretical or interpretive claims. At the same time, that broadening has its limits or conditions, and texts or genres that fail to meet fairy-tale standards can be pushed to the sidelines.

**Under the Influence: Fairy-Tale Studies**

The fairy tale’s partial takeover of children’s literature—and the psychoanalytic coordinates of that takeover—also has consequences for academic criticism. The field of children’s literature studies within English and related humanities fields began to take shape around the same time that Bettelheim’s fairy-tale book appeared, with the founding of the Children’s Literature Association and of specialized journals, book series, and graduate programs. Scholars of children’s literature have advocated a broad and diverse understanding of that literature even as they continue to study the fairy tale. Even so, it is no accident that fairy-tale scholarship enjoys great visibility and circulation within and especially outside children’s literature studies. A recent example is Ruth B. Bottigheimer’s *Fairy Tales: A New History* (2009), featured prominently in a 2009 article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Jack Zipes and Maria Tatar, first-rate scholars to be sure, have likewise benefited from ongoing fascination with the fairy tale within the public sphere.

Psychoanalytic engagement with the fairy tale has left its mark on fairy-tale scholarship. “We tend to believe,” notes Elizabeth Wanning Harries, “that the fairy tales we know and love come from ancient oral sources, that their appearance in print is a late and somewhat disturbing development. And we tend to believe that they are an expression of the deep wisdom and knowledge of the ‘folk’” (2001, 12). Classical psychoanalysis affirms these beliefs, endorsing the orality-to-literacy meta-narrative despite evidence of a more complicated process of fairy-tale emergence. Harries has challenged such faith, which persists in some scholarship. So has Bottigheimer, who has argued in several monographs that fairy tales are literary in origin as well as in destination. In *Fairy Tales: A New History*, she pulls no punches: “Folk invention and transmission of fairy tales has no basis in verifiable fact. Literary analysis undermines it, literary history rejects it, social history repudiates it, and publishing history (whether of manuscripts or of books) contradicts
Focusing especially on “rise tales”—tales in which a lowly protagonist climbs the social ladder—Bottigheimer provides instead a book-based history that traces the canon of Perrault and Grimm back to the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italian authors Giambattista Basile and Giovan Francesco Straparola. This point has been made before, but as Bottigheimer emphasizes, the “oralist-privileging” history of fairy tales still reigns even in specialist scholarship. The matter is far from settled, most fairy-tale scholars now taking the view that fairy tales are a provocative and confusing mixture of oral and literary tradition (and perhaps also, of wonder and realism).

Even Max Lüthi’s formalist-narratological approach to the fairy tale emphasizes its “abstract style” but thereby suggests a psychological function for the fairy tale. While the fairy tale itself has little psychological content for Lüthi, he speculates that its “abstract style” encourages psychological engagement:

The individual characters of a folktale are thus seen as components of a human personality, and in essence the folktale represents a psychological process. The abstract stylization of the tale, together with the figurative quality of its human beings and animals, is called on to witness that tales do not deal with fully individualized persons or the portrayal of an external world; rather, they represent an internal reality. Even if this conclusion cannot be proven absolutely, one still must grant that precisely because the folktale never directly expresses the psychological, its characters and events can easily be taken as symbolic images of inner potentialities and processes. (1982, 117–18)

Furthermore, fairy-tale scholars have had to contend with the towering influence of Bettelheim. Zipes and Tatar especially have developed their analytical projects against as well as through Bettelheim. Zipes is the fairy godfather not only of fairy-tale studies but also of theoretical children’s literature studies, having cofounded the journal *The Lion and the Unicorn*, established the first monograph series on children’s literature, and generally functioned as a galvanizing presence for the field. Published seven years after Bettelheim’s blockbuster, Zipes’s *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and*
the Process of Civilization approaches the fairy tale not as a psychological symptom or cure but as a “symbolic act” to be understood historically and culturally. The fairy tale, he writes, is “intended to transform a specific oral folk tale (and sometimes a well-known literary tale) . . . [to] address the concerns of the educated and ruling classes of late feudal and early capitalistic societies” (1983, 6). “We must remember that the fairy tale for children originated in a period of absolutism when French culture was setting standards of civilité for the rest of Europe,” he notes. “Exquisite care was thus taken to cultivate a discourse on the civilization process through the fairy tale for the benefit of well-raised children” (9).

Zipes finds Bettelheim’s approach “unhistorical and too glib” (32), a familiar criticism. Zipes emphasizes instead “the development of the individual and family in different societies in relation to the civilizing process,” calling his approach “an historical psychological point of view” (32–33). “Beauty and the Beast” tales are important not because they enable children to work through their fears and fantasies, Zipes insists, but rather because these tales “set standards for sexual and social conduct which complied with inhibiting forms of socialization and were to be internalized by the readers and auditors of the tale” (33). His inspiration is Norbert Elias’s The Civilizing Process, a Freudian study of the relays between the “psychogenetic” development of the species and the “sociogenetic” evolution of society. This emphasis, of course, on the parallelism of social body and the individual subject owes something to recapitulation theory. While Freud often leaned automatically on recapitulation theory, he was also critically engaged with the question or problem of ontogenetic–phylogenetic correspondence. In some ways, even as he offers a sociohistoricist or Marxist–materialist response to Bettelheim, Zipes shares this engagement, drawing on Elias who draws on Freud.

Zipes has since published a remarkable number of fairy-tale studies. His 2006 Why Fairy Tales Stick: The Evolution and Relevance of a Genre reconsiders the argument of Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion, using recent evolutionary studies of human cognition to theorize about the psychocultural reasons for narrative canonicity. That is, he returns psychology to the scene of explanation. After twenty-five years of reflection, he concludes that classical fairy tales “did not
become stable and establish their value . . . simply because they re-

inforced the ideological norms of patriarchal societies. They spoke to
the conflicts and predicaments that arose out of the attempts by so-
cial orders to curb and ‘civilize’ our instinctual drives.” Fairy tales, in
short, “enabled listeners and readers to envision possible solutions to
their problems so that they could survive and adapt to their environ-
ment” (2006, xii). Drawing on linguistics, epidemiology, evolutionary
psychology, and genetics, Zipes theorizes that we prefer certain stories
because they help us adapt to often-harsh realities. At the same time,
Zipes still follows Freud’s general model of instincts and the workings
of civilization. Zipes rejects Bettelheim but continues to engage with
Freudian theory.

Tatar variously criticizes, affirms, and imitates Bettelheim’s fairy-
tale work. Her first book, The Hard Facts of the Grimms’ Fairy Tales,
is both historicist and psychological in orientation. She likens fairy tales
to dreams but says that “rather than giving us personalized wishes and
fears, they offer collective truths, realities that transcend individual ex-
perience and that have stood the test of time.” “This is not to say that
folktales and folklore function as repositories of a sort of Jungian collec-
tive unconscious,” she is quick to clarify. “Rather, they capture psychic
realities so persistent and widespread that they have held the attention
of a community over a long time” (1987, xvi). “For all its excesses, psy-
choanalytic criticism has scored numerous successes in its encounters
with fairy tales” (55). While she emphasizes the historical and cultural
aspects of tale variation and transmission, she insists that the fairy tale
“lends itself more readily to literary and psychological analysis than to
historical inquiry” (57).

Tatar is openly critical of Bettelheim in Off with Their Heads!, ac-
cusing him of siding with parents and suppressing tales “that run counter
to the Freudian orthodoxy” (1992, xxii) and aligning him with Sendak as
champion of a masculinist empowerment fantasy. “Bettelheim endows
children with a power over the text that they do not in reality pos-
sess,” she declares. “The fact that fairy tales guide feelings and control
responses gives the lie to the notion that children work their way from
dependence to autonomy through literature” (77). The ideal of the in-
nocent, naive child “has haunted the children’s literature industry since
its inception,” she writes. “For this reason, fairy tales, which seem to
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represent both the childhood of fiction and the fiction of childhood, occupy a special position in the hierarchy of children’s literature” (79). Tatar also registers the triumph of the therapeutic: “Our own culture has moved into yet another mode of telling children’s stories, one that might be best described as empathetic/cathartic, resting as it does on a therapeutic model” (90).

This critique disappears in her 2009 book *Enchanted Hunters*, which was aimed at a broader audience and marketed, in fact, as “in the tradition of Bruno Bettelheim’s landmark *Uses of Enchantment*” (dust jacket). (Her title, by the way, derives from Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita.*) Sendak and Bettelheim return as pioneers: “Sendak, like the renowned child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim, endorses a therapeutic model that embraces fantasy as a way of working through the complex primal emotions of childhood” (119). Whereas *Hard Facts* and *Off with Their Heads!* are concerned with the history and transmission of fairy tales, *Enchanted Hunters* focuses on the aesthetic and emotional engagement of readers of children’s literature more generally. Tatar presents her work as a contact zone between her own desire to “break the spell” with the readerly belief in literary magic (6), as evidenced in her interviews and autoethnographies of reading. The result is a decidedly pro-magic book, in which Tatar presents herself and is presented by her publisher as an improved Bettelheim, an expert on enchantment and the enchanted hunters called children.

Perhaps the psychoanalytic texture of fairy-tale scholarship has been mostly a good thing. And perhaps I am overstating the case; fairy-tale scholarship is certainly a rich undertaking, with many intellectual and cultural aspects and influences. Still, I would stress that a psychoanalytic understanding of the fairy tale is very pervasive in academic as well as in popular culture, so much so that we do not always see it clearly.

Whatever its effects on children’s literature studies, the association of the fairy tale and psychoanalysis has certainly benefited the latter. The fairy tale has furnished much grist for the psychoanalytic mill, extending its relevance and giving it a popular (even populist) tone. We might protest that, say, Cashdan’s *The Witch Must Die* is not properly psychoanalytic, but I see this and other texts of pop-psychology as continuous
with Freud’s fairy-tale commentary and his commitment to the applied analysis of folklore. Freud believed in lay analysis and wanted psychoanalysis to have wide purchase; the fairy tale has achieved this goal better than all the psychoanalytic institutes combined. Moreover, the fairy tale has helped maintain childhood at the center of psychoanalysis.

More recently, the fairy tale has been remodeled as a key genre in what has been called the “children’s literature of atrocity.” The fairy tale has been a preferred genre for negotiating not only the existential challenges of everyday life but more extraordinary experiences of trauma. This emphasis also extends back to Freud and Bettelheim, and it has been picked up by a number of trauma theorists who see in the fairy tale an imaginative reckoning with otherwise unspeakable loss and shock. The final chapter of *Freud in Oz* takes up trauma writing for the young, starting with fairy-tale forms. First, however, comes a consideration of magic’s companion term, another word for the uses of enchantment and one central to child analysis: “play.”
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