



A review of
**Fairy Tales, Myth, and
Psychoanalytic Theory:
Feminism and
Retelling the Tale**

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Fairy tales and psychoanalysis have long seemed intuitively connected, since both are concerned with desire and prohibition, wish and fear. In the 1970s, Bruno Bettelheim's *Uses of Enchantment* (1976) popularised the connection and argued for the therapeutic value of the Grimms' 'original' tales, permeated as they were with disturbing themes and imagery. At the same time, authors inspired by the revolutionary ferment of the 1960s revised the old stories, drawing attention to their reactionary qualities, particularly when it came to sex and gender.

Veronica L. Schanoes' study *Fairy Tales, Myth, and Psychoanalytic Theory: Feminism and Retelling the Tale* is a valuable contribution to the body of critical and creative work linking psychology with fairy tales. Not content with countering the patriarchal pronouncements of a Bettelheim or a Freud with feminist psychoanalytic critiques by Luce Irigaray or Carol Gilligan, Schanoes takes the useful position that both psychoanalysis and literature emerge from a context. Rejecting the notion that fairy tales and psychoanalysis exist outside of time, Schanoes contends that fairy-tale revisionists and psychoanalytic revisionists enjoy a mutually illuminating relationship. In Schanoes' words, *Fairy Tales, Myth, and Psychoanalytic Theory* 'proposes a new model of understanding the project of feminist literary revision in the 1970s and 1990s by considering that project as a necessary partner to the psychoanalytic theories [then] being advanced' (5). Schanoes examines the work of writers such as Angela Carter, Kelly Link, Kathryn Davis, Tanith Lee, and Toni Morrison to show, not influence exactly, but similar reliance on fairy tales for depictions and critiques of mother-daughter relationships under patriarchy. Their approaches, Schanoes argues, 'partner' with second-wave feminist psychoanalytic theory, particularly the work of Nancy Chodorow (*Reproduction of Mothering*, 1978) and of the relational psychologists of the Stone Center of Connecticut (*Women's Growth in Connection: Writings from the Stone Center*, 1991).

Thus, Schanoes engages with both literary and psychoanalytic texts as narrative, as stories about female subjectivity and the mother-daughter bond. Their union, separation, replication, and doubling is troped as mirrored images and doppelgangers. The book is divided into five chapters and two sections. In the first section, Schanoes surveys the pioneering feminist psychoanalysts such as Nancy Chodorow and Luce Irigaray, who challenged the objectification and reification of motherhood, the relegation of motherhood to an undifferentiated pre-Oedipal morass impervious to study or critique. Women writers and theorists of the 1970s and '80s sought to re-examine old narratives of the mother-daughter bond to question and reconfigure their generative qualities. Some considered motherhood as a patriarchal plot, while others thought it promised liberation from the Oedipal wound by reinstating female wholeness through the mother-daughter dyad. Chapters One through Three examine the marked continuities between second-wave feminist psychoanalytic thought and writers of the same period such as Angela Carter, Tanith Lee, and Toni Morrison. Schanoes posits that fairy-tale revisions are to traditional fairy tales as daughters to mothers; that is, texts embody as complicated a relationship to each other as do humans. Rather than seeing literary revision as the anxiety of influence described by Harold Bloom, however, Schanoes charts the complicated mother-daughter dance between homage and rejection in feminist revisions of Snow White, Bluebeard, Persephone, and others. Morrison's *Beloved*, Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*, Katherine Davis' *The Girl Who Trod on a Loaf*, and other novels and short stories from this productive period of fairy-tale revision, critique patriarchal structures, challenge dominant narratives about what it means to be a mother or a daughter, and revise old stories to caution or inspire.

The second half of the book turns from depictions of mother-daughter relationships to motifs familiar from fairy-tale typology: the mirror and the double. Reminding us that Luce Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other Woman* references a mirror as well as the gynaecological instrument, Schanoes examines the signification of the mirror as a metaphor for female subjectivity: it 'troubles the boundary between the subject and object, self and other, I and not-I' (9) in ways that Lacan's mirror stage does not necessarily take into account. Feminist fantasy writers of the '70s and '90s use the mirror to depict the troubled, permeable bond between mother and daughter. In these stories mirrors are not sterile imitators; they procreate new selves and replicate with a difference. Mirrors become a metaphor for revisionist storytelling. Likewise, feminist writers' appropriation of the double and its uncanny potency becomes a figure for the political and social engagement: for women especially, 'the uncanny quality of the double has to do', Schanoes writes, 'with very real social and psychological circumstances' (115) such as domestic abuse, incest, and other traumas of the private sphere. In this study, the personal is not only the political but also records the historical.

Schanoes does not discuss the popularisation of Jungian analytical psychology during this time period, such as *Women Who Run with Wolves* (1991) and its heirs. Neither does she take up the many Jungian-inflected fantasy writers who deal with mother-daughter themes and questions of subjectivity. Ursula K. Le Guin, a formidable fantasist and feminist, confessed to a preference for Jung over Freud in the 1970s! – did she change her mind over the course of the '80s? What does Le Guin's work, especially the powerful revisionist fantasy *Tehanu* (1990) and her later stories of Earthsea, contribute to this consideration of mothers, daughters, and storytelling? How does women's embrace of these counter-narratives of psychoanalysis complicate the story told here? That Schanoes' study inspires such questions is a testament to its contribution and offers possibilities for further engagement with the literature and theory of this period.

Schanoes' book is engaging and beautifully free of jargon, especially considering her psychoanalytic source material. Her catholic approach to literature – she treats popular fantasy writers such as Kelly Link and Terry Pratchett alongside Nobel-laureate Toni Morrison – strengthens her claim for the cultural-historical significance of her argument. Her acknowledgement and use of context and history makes the psychoanalytic argument more persuasive. Schanoes' readings are detailed and well developed. As part of the third wave of feminist fairy-tale scholarship, she continues to question patriarchal definitions of value, of subjectivity, and of meaning, recording how these thinkers and writers redefine female subjectivity as connected, relational, and different from the individual, atomised notion of Oedipal manhood. And in her insistence on the relevance of context and history to psychoanalytic expression, she offers a very useful model for researchers in the field.

Author: Veronica L. Schanoes.
Ashgate (2014), 160pp.

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References

1. 'Dreams Must Explain Themselves', *The Language of the Night* (1979), 47-56.