The Princess, the Witch, and the Fireside: Yanagi Miwa's Uncanny Restaging of Fairy Tales

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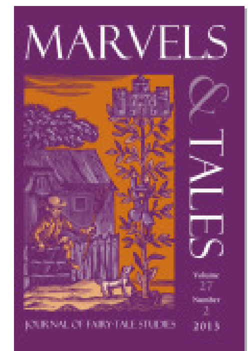

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The work of the Japanese artist Yanagi Miwa (1967–) explores received images of women and their own self-images in contemporary society, particularly through the reconfiguration of the intergenerational relationship between women. Among the cultural stereotypes reexamined in Yanagi's synthetic photographs and video installations are the images of female characters from classic fairy tales such as "Snow White," "Sleeping Beauty," and "The Little Match Girl." Yanagi's fairy-tale images reverse, blend, and dissolve the binary oppositions well established in traditional European fairy tales, which are often typified by the opposition between the princess and the witch. Her restaging of the relationship between the young girl and the old woman is more ambiguous and uncertain rather than simply either antagonistic or harmonious, which puts into question the apparent familiarity of the scenes taken from well-known fairy tales. On the one hand, the all-female fairy-tale fantasy staged in Yanagi's work can be seen as a feminist reinterpretation of the Freudian uncanny (*unheimlich*) which, instead of repressing autoeroticism with the threat of difference, castration, and death, allows for the sameness, the imaginary relationship with the mother, and the continuity of life and death. On the other hand, the same fantasy reveals itself as just another artifice that can constrict women's lives and imagination. In this article I also examine the way in which Yanagi's work dismantles not only the gender stereotypes in fairy tales but also the quintessential storytelling space of the fireside—a symbol of the homely and the familiar (*heimlich*)—to which women and children have traditionally been confined as marginalized figures in a patriarchal society.

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Dreaming of Grandmotherhood

Yanagi first became known for her synthetic photographs using prosthetic makeup and computer graphics. All the images in her oeuvre are elaborately manipulated, not to naturalize but to enhance their constructed nature; as Linda Nochlin puts it, "revealing the device" is Yanagi's prime strategy (232). Yanagi's first major series, *Elevator Girls*, appeared between 1993 and 1999 in the aftermath of the bursting of the bubble economy in Japan. The Japanese expression *erebētā gāru* (elevator girl) refers to a profession followed by young women in department stores.[1] Although the job had virtually disappeared by the end of the 1990s, for more than half a century it had been one of the most sought-after professions for young Japanese women, probably ranking just below flight attendant, which still remains a much desired job. Apart from pressing the elevator buttons for their customers, elevator girls announce such information as whether the elevator is going up or down and what kind of products can be found on each floor. The superfluous nature of their work seems to be an essential condition for its fetishized status as a kind of luxury commodity to be viewed for pleasure.

In the *Elevator Girls* series young women of "standard" body proportions wear the same uniform (often red), makeup, and hairstyle and assume an identical expression and similar postures (fig. 1). The provisional nature

Fig. 1. Yanagi Miwa, Elevator Girl House 1F (detail), 1997, 2400 x 2000 mm. Chromogenic print. © Miwa Yanagi. Courtesy of the artist and Seigensha Art Publishing, Inc.

of their existence—elevator girls are replaced as soon as they are past their bloom, that is, in their early 20s—is reflected in the exaggeratedly postmodern settings that seem to expand endlessly but in real life are places which we only pass through in transit. In other words, the temporality of commodifiable womanhood is transposed to spatial metaphors indicating passage, such as elevators, escalators, and station platforms. In this series uniformed and standardized young women are represented both as products of a postmodern, male-oriented consumer society and as proliferators of the image of ideal femininity that can be purchased in department stores. These women in their early 20s, the period traditionally considered the prime of womanhood, look as vacant and lifeless as shop-window mannequins. Yanagi's elevator girls embody a late-twentieth-century Japanese version of Snow White in the glass coffin, wearing the color of the poisoned apple and dreaming their standardized, endlessly reproducible dreams behind shop windows.

These elevator girls also recall Olympia in E. T. A. Hoffmann's "The Sandman" (1816). In his 1919 essay "The Uncanny" Freud uses Hoffmann's story to explain the notion of the uncanny, an aesthetic phenomenon that he defines as the anxiety caused by the return of what is familiar *and* repressed either in real life or in art. Olympia is a "beautiful, but strangely silent and motionless" girl whom the main character, Nathaniel, falls violently in love with, but she turns out to be an elaborate "automaton" (Freud 137). Yanagi's *Elevator Girls* series creates the effect of uncanniness through the ambiguity of its representation of animate and inanimate (the elevator girls' doll-like beauty and rigidness) and the repetition of the same (the girls as a replica of each other and the architecture endlessly mirroring itself). By exaggerating the standardized, impassive beauty of young women and the surrounding space, the *Elevator Girls* series brings out the uncanny desire that is inherent in a patriarchal capitalist society and also internalized by women themselves.

In Yanagi's next series, *My Grandmothers*, the uncanny is evoked in a more liberating and life-enhancing way. In this series, which was begun in 1999 and still continues today, Yanagi creates photographic images after conducting a series of interviews with young women in which she asks them what they imagine they will be like fifty years from now. Interactions may last for as long as one year and involve the collaborative construction of a detailed chronology of imagined events leading to a particular moment in the model's future life; the model's future self as an old woman is gradually carved out of this story-sharing process. As a result, two stages of a woman's life are superimposed on one image in such a way that the images of both stages are revealed as imaginary constructs, blurring temporal and epistemological boundaries.

Some of the models wish to live out the dreams that they have as young women. Yuka, for example, roars across the Golden Gate Bridge in the sidecar of a Harley-Davidson driven by her boyfriend, who looks fifty years younger than she is (fig. 2). This image, apart from the unexpected combination of bright red hair and a deeply wrinkled face, seems to fulfill the standard fairy-tale wish that "someday my prince will come," although here "someday" is postponed until half a century later. In contrast to *Elevator Girls*, the women in the *My Grandmothers* series glow with vitality and individuality, as though old age were the golden age for women, when they could finally be freed from social obligations expected of women of reproductive age. In the disguise of a so-called second childhood, these women seem to regain access to their pre-Oedipal omnipotence.

Another model for the *My Grandmothers* series, 28-year-old Ayumi, imagines herself becoming a Sleeping Beauty—in this case, not the heroine of Charles Perrault's tale but the heroine of Kawabata Yasunari's novella *Nemureru bijo* (trans. *House of the Sleeping Beauties*, 1961) (fig. 3). Kawabata's story is narrated by a 67-year-old man who frequents a house where old men pay to spend a night with teenage girls drugged into unconsciousness. Ayumi's self-image as an

Fig. 2. Yanagi Miwa, Yuka, 2000, 1600 x 1600 mm. Chromogenic print. © Miwa Yanagi. Courtesy of the artist and Marugame Genichiro-Inokuma Museum of Contemporary Art / The MIMOCA Foundation for the Promotion of Fine Arts.

Fig. 3. Yanagi Miwa, Ayumi, 2001, 583 x 1000 mm. Chromogenic print. © Miwa Yanagi. Courtesy of the artist and Marugame Genichiro-Inokuma Museum of Contemporary Art/The MIMOCA Foundation for the Promotion of Fine Arts.

80-year-old Sleeping Beauty, who sells not her body but her dreams to her male customers and refuses to be woken up, can be seen as the uncanny double of those impassive young women in the *Elevator Girls* series; her version of "Sleeping Beauty" ironically rewrites Kawabata's fantasy about women's death-like submission to male desire, which is the kind of fantasy evoked in a more ominous manner in the *Elevator Girls* series.

Although the accompanying texts written by the models tell us that both Yuka and Ayumi have imaginary granddaughters, Yanagi claims that the expression *grandmothers* is not meant to exclude women with no grandchildren. It seems that she calls this series "grandmothers" rather than "old women" to emphasize not only familial but more broadly intergenerational bonding between women. In this context the plural *grandmothers* probably refers to more than the biological grandmothers we all have; women become grandmothers to younger generations of women who will follow their path. That the series has included three male models so far also shows that Yanagi's notion of grandmotherhood is not limited to its biological sense.

It is interesting that the images of future selves in *My Grandmothers* reveal how traditional fairy tales can inform the ways in which we understand and imagine our life stories as far as half a century into the future. In her next work, *Granddaughters* (2004), Yanagi reverses the temporal direction of *My Grandmothers*; *Granddaughters* is a video installation in which "real" grandmothers talk about their childhood memories of their grandmothers. While remembering and talking about their grandmothers, these women seem to

slip in and out of an identification with the young girls they once were as well as with their grandmothers, whose age they have now reached. As is often the case with distant memories, their memories of grandmothers consist of both remembered and imagined events, and it is sometimes difficult to tell whether they are talking about their grandmothers' lives or their own. For the viewer the uncanny confusion is further heightened by the fact that the speakers' voices are dubbed with those of girls of their granddaughters' age. Yanagi's exploration of women's intergenerational cross-identification in her *Granddaughters* series draws even more heavily than in her previous works on the idea of telling and sharing stories, the theme that Yanagi goes on to pursue further in her next series dealing with traditional fairy tales.

Recasting Grandmothers' Stories

Yanagi's *Fairy Tale: Strange Stories of Women Young and Old* (2007) is a book consisting of a series of photographic works based on classic fairy tales. As its subtitle makes clear, Yanagi's *Fairy Tale* focuses on the relationship between young girls and old women represented in fairy tales, the figures usually regarded as marginal for the fairy-tale happy ending. By foregrounding the periods *before* and *after* sexual reproductivity, Yanagi's *Fairy Tale* creates a narrative space in which women can break free from their socially prescribed roles and enact their fantasies, which are not confined to heteronormative desire.

Fairy Tale opens and closes with a framing story in which a young girl recalls the stories told to her by her grandmother, who, in turn, claims to have heard them from Suna Onna (Sand Woman) when she was a little girl. Sand Woman is depicted as a hybrid figure with a young girl's legs and an old woman's hands; she tells stories while traveling in the desert (fig. 4). If we connect this uncanny storyteller to Hoffman's Sandman, we can say that Yanagi's *Fairy Tale* incorporates the uncanny into the world of the fairy tale, which Freud sees as a genre particularly incompatible with the uncanny because of its unproblematic acceptance of anything unrealistic.[2] Whereas Freud sees the castration complex—Nathaniel believes that the Sandman tears out children's eyes, which Freud equates with the penis—as the basis of the uncanny effect of Hoffmann's story, Yanagi's fairy-tale images evoke the uncanny not through the castration threat but though the fantasy about the return to and from the womb, the most familiar "home" of all.

Unlike her former brightly colored works, the *Fairy Tale* series uses black-and-white images, enhancing the dreamlike, subconscious quality of the images. It also serves to foreground the indefinable nature of each character; the old witches' supposedly malevolent smiles may look rather innocent, and

Fig. 4. Yanagi Miwa, Untitled 1, 2004. Gelatin silver print, 1400 x 1000 mm. © Miwa Yanagi. Courtesy of the artist and Seigensha Art Publishing, Inc.

the young girls often appear more knowing than traditional stories tell us. This uncanny ambiguity is further intensified by the fact that all the models in *Fairy Tale* are girls between the ages of 5 and 10. The girls playing the parts of old women wear masks with exaggerated wrinkles and the hooked nose typical of a fairy-tale witch, but their bodies are undisguised, with lacy chemises revealing the smooth, plump limbs of young girls. Instead of trying to make the disguise look natural, Yanagi deliberately emphasizes the disjunction between the mask of a withered crone and its wearer's girlish body. The uncanny yet often humorous hybridity of these images destabilizes our naturalized notions

Fig. 5. Yanagi Miwa, Mud Mask, 2005. Gelatin silver print, 600 x 600 mm. © Miwa Yanagi. Courtesy of the artist and Seigensha Art Publishing, Inc.

of youth and old age, which are presented here as arbitrary and reversible; it is obvious that the models can exchange their roles by simply putting on or taking off their masks. The invented fairy tale "Mud Mask," which is the last of the narratives framed by the Sand Woman story and tells of a girl who carves out an old woman's face on her sister's mud-covered face, is a self-reflexive comment on this role-playing aspect (fig. 5). Reversibility and ambiguity are the underlying themes throughout *Fairy Tale*; they serve to dissolve the patriarchal value system setting one woman against another in terms of age, desirability, and knowledge.

Framed by the story of Sand Woman are scenes drawn from well-known, mostly European fairy tales, each accompanied with a short text. Classic fairy tales, especially those written by such canonical writers as Perrault, the Grimms, and Hans Christian Andersen, are replete with binary oppositions typified by the female rivalry between the good, beautiful, young princess and the evil, ugly, old witch. As Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue in their discussion of "Snow White" in *The Mad Woman in the Attic* (1979), the antagonism between the wicked Queen and Snow White can be seen as a paradigmatic

instance of male-generated twin images of monster-woman and angel-woman. Yanagi's *Fairy Tale* restages these oppositional images as elements in coded role playing that can be exchanged and transformed.

Yanagi states that the first work she made in the *Fairy Tale* series is based on Gabriel García Márquez's short story "The Incredible and Sad Tale of Innocent Eréndira and Her Heartless Grandmother" (1972), in which Eréndira and her grandmother travel together through the desert and eventually merge into one another (Yanagi, "Supremely Comfortable Place," 220). The reversibility of the power relation between the young and the old is shown most schematically in the two works based on the story of Eréndira placed in the middle of *Fairy Tale*. "Erendira I" (fig. 6) depicts the grandmother in control of her granddaughter's life, commanding impossible tasks like the wicked queen in fairy tales, whereas "Erendira II" (fig. 7) shows the girl attempting to poison her grandmother by forcing her to eat the cake in which she and her lover secretly put "enough arsenic to exterminate a whole generation of rats" (Yanagi, *Fairy Tale*, 53).[3] This intergenerational female bonding, antagonistic and intimate at the same time, structures the *Fairy Tale* series.

In Yanagi's recasting of fairy tales the alleged opposition between young and old women is revealed to be deceptive. In her version of "Snow White," for example, the young girl and the old woman are shown as the mirror image of each other (fig. 8). The figure with her back to the camera appears to be the young

Fig. 6. Yanagi Miwa, Erendira I, 2004. Gelatin silver print, 1000 x 1000 mm. © Miwa Yanagi. Courtesy of the artist and Seigensha Art Publishing, Inc.

Fig. 7. Yanagi Miwa, Erendira II, 2004. Gelatin silver print, 1000 x 1000 mm. © Miwa Yanagi. Courtesy of the artist and Seigensha Art Publishing, Inc.

Fig. 8. Yanagi Miwa, Snow White, 2004. Gelatin silver print, 1000 x 1000 mm. © Miwa Yanagi. Courtesy of the artist and Seigensha Art Publishing, Inc.

Snow White, and the figure confronting the girl looks like her wicked stepmother. A closer look, however, reveals that the masked figure is the reflection of the girl in the mirror. In the Grimms' "Snow White" it is the wicked stepmother who sees not her own but her stepdaughter's face in the magic mirror. She then sets out to kill Snow White, whose youthful beauty has defeated her in a beauty contest that defines aging as a demeaning and fatal process for women.[4] In Yanagi's version, however, the two stages of a woman's life are compressed into one figure in which the young self coexists with the old self, as they do in the *My Grandmothers* series, and it is the potential for death that connects them, as one side of the apple must be as poisonous as the other. This image offers an alternative reinterpretation of "Snow White" to the one given in the *Elevator Girls* series, in which women are preserved young and beautiful forever behind the glass.

In contrast to the Grimms' moralistic tale about a girl who is thrown onto the fire by Frau Trude because she disobeys her parents, Yanagi's version of "Frau Trude" foregrounds a feeling of intimacy, rather than conflict (fig. 9). The expected violence, foreshadowed by the bloodstained walls and curtains, is suspended by the two women's expressions, which are not necessarily suggestive of imminent atrocities. The old woman's faint smile and the fascination on the girl's face as she looks into the fireplace make their grappling look more pleasurable than lethal. The accompanying text, "You will burn well if I

Fig. 9. Yanagi Miwa, Frau Trude, 2005. Gelatin silver print, 1000 x 1000 mm. © Miwa Yanagi. Courtesy of the artist and Seigensha Art Publishing, Inc.

put you on the fire" (Yanagi, *Fairy Tale*, 50), can be interpreted as a playful threat exchanged between the women at a warm, intimate fireside.

In "Sleeping Beauty" the girl sits astride the old woman and holds the spindle, which in Perrault's story puts the heroine to sleep (fig. 10). The power relation of the traditional tale is thus challenged in this recasting, with the girl threatening to put the old woman to sleep. At the same time, it is clear that the models can swap roles at any time by taking off or putting on the mask, as they look almost identical otherwise. The accompanying text reads: "'Time for bed.' 'I am not sleepy.' 'It is time to sleep.' 'Then you sleep first, Grandma'" (Yanagi, *Fairy Tale*, 36). Yanagi turns Perrault's parable about female sexual passivity into a bedtime game played by two women in a spinning room with soft, cocoonlike balls of yarn rolling all over the floor, a womblike space pervaded with an aura of female-centered eroticism, where the childlike flirting with death, which is symbolized by the spindle, serves to strengthen the female bonding. There is no need for a prince to come and awake the girl to full-fledged sexuality.

In "The Little Match Girl" the girl and the old woman are merged into one image straddling the border of death (fig. 11). At first sight, the figure, with her legs carelessly stretched out, looks like a little girl, but a closer look reveals that her face is full of wrinkles; the face of the dead grandmother, who has come to guide the poor girl to heaven in Andersen's story, has been

Fig. 10. Yanagi Miwa, Sleeping Beauty, 2004. Gelatin silver print, 1000 x 1000 mm. © Miwa Yanagi. Courtesy of the artist and Seigensha Art Publishing, Inc.

Fig. 11. Yanagi Miwa, The Little Match Girl, 2005. Gelatin silver print, 1000 x 1000 mm. © Miwa Yanagi. Courtesy of the artist and Seigensha Art Publishing, Inc.

superimposed on the face of the girl. This is the only photograph in this series that uses, not the kind of exaggerated masks we see in the other photographs, but a more subtle makeup, through which the girl's dead grandmother comes back to life in an uncanny manner. Yanagi's heroine continues to live wearing the dead old woman's face as though in vengeance for a world that sacrifices young girls as innocent and willing victims.

Thus Yanagi's *Fairy Tale* series envisions different life-stories for women by blending the binary oppositions well established in classic European fairy tales, often cast as the opposition between young and old women. In doing so, Yanagi's work explores an alternative mode of desire centered on the intimate bond between women at the two extreme ends of the cultural spectrum of representations of women. At the same time, it moves toward the uncanny ambivalence that Freud defines as follows: "*Heimlich* thus becomes increasingly ambivalent, until it finally merges with its antonym *unheimlich*" (134). Yanagi's *Fairy Tale* is precariously balanced between two apparently opposite desires; one part seems to indulge itself in its womblike fantasy of sameness and circularity, yet another part tries to distance itself from the fantasy it is creating by breaking its own magic spell. In an interview conducted in the same room used for the shooting of *Fairy Tale*, Yanagi explains the ambivalence she feels about *Fairy Tale*:

> I feel a visceral connection to this kind of female expression, so while I appreciate that, at the same time I try to distance myself from it and look at my work objectively, arriving at a balance between the two. That very feminine part of me is the same thing as my wanting to be in this room all the time, it's a supremely comfortable place to be. It allows me to become very subjective, but it's also important that I am able to distance myself from it. (Yanagi, "Supremely Comfortable Place," 221)

Yanagi's *Fairy Tale* certainly creates a narrative space in which women can dissociate themselves from prescribed roles and act out alternative scenarios, but it is an uncanny utopia constantly undermining its own foundations, refusing to settle down with the formulaic happily-ever-after.[5] As we will see in the next section, this "supremely comfortable place" will also be dismantled.

Dismantling Grandmother's House

"Hitotsuya" (A Lonely House) is the only work drawn from Japanese folklore in *Fairy Tale*. "Hitotsuya," sometimes known as "Ishi no makura densetsu" (The Legend of the Stone Pillow), is an oral legend associated with a place that used to be called Asajigahara (literally, a field rank with short cogon grass) and that is now a densely populated area of central Tokyo. Because cogon grass (a species of Asian grass traditionally used for thatching and fodder) is a topos symbolizing a desolate, uninhabited place in Japanese literature, the name of the place is associated with a liminality that dissolves spatial, temporal, and epistemological boundaries. The first written version of the tale appeared in *Kaikoku zakki* (A Memoir of Traveling Around the World, 1487), a travelogue written by the Buddhist priest Dōkō, who claimed to have heard the story from a local old man. Several different versions of this story exist, and most of them share the following basic plot: An aging woman and her beautiful daughter live in an isolated house in the middle of a desolate field. They offer to give a night's lodging to travelers overtaken by nightfall. While the traveler is asleep with his head on a stone pillow, the old woman kills him by dropping an enormous rock on his head and takes his money and other valuables. The old woman and her daughter make their living in this way until one day the daughter falls in love with one of the travelers and tries to save his life by taking his place in his bed. The mother realizes her mistake only after having dropped the rock on her own beloved daughter's head. In Dōkō's version the daughter is forced to tempt men into their house, just as Eréndira is forced by her grandmother

to prostitute herself to make their living. In some variants the old woman lives in the house by herself, and because there are no variants without her, she seems to be the essential inhabitant of "A Lonely House."[6]

The old woman in "A Lonely House" can be seen as a kind of *yamauba* (mountain witch), a topos as prevalent in Japanese folklore as the witch or the evil stepmother in Western fairy tales.[7] The *yamauba* is an ambivalent figure; she can be either beneficial or malevolent, humorous or cruel, nurturing or destructive. She is old, ugly, and wild, with her unkempt long white hair hanging over her shoulders and with her withered, bony chest and sagging breasts showing through her tattered clothes. She is a guardian spirit of a mountain and roves through the wilderness alone. Like the *yamauba*, the old woman in "A Lonely House" lives at the outer edge of human society and embodies marginalized femininity in the Japanese folkloric imagination.

The story of the evil crone and her beautiful daughter living in a lonely house captured the popular imagination widely and was adapted for literary, theatrical, and visual works. That it became an especially popular subject in *iki-ningyō* (realistic life-size doll) exhibitions, a public entertainment widespread in the latter half of the nineteenth century (Itō), indicates its visual as well as narrative appeal. Andō Hiroshige (1797–1858), a leading nineteenth-century ukiyo-e artist, visualized the scene in which the old woman peeps into the traveler's bedroom as the daughter prepares his bed (fig. 12). As in Hiroshige's work, many visual images of the tale dramatize the contrast between the beautiful, kindhearted daughter and the hideous, greedy crone, which has appealed to generations of viewers.

Instead of contrasting the images of the two opposite and opposing women, Yanagi's version of "A Lonely House" depicts only the old woman mourning the death of her daughter (fig. 13). This work presents female antagonism in its most extreme form; the old woman has actually murdered the girl. The fact that the daughter, presumably flattened under the rock, is not visible except as what appear to be blood stains on the bottom of the rock implies that the two women are actually one figure; the younger woman can be seen as an alter ego of the older woman, the part of her self that is beautiful and benevolent and capable of loving the other. The huge stone seems to represent the old woman's hard, cold, and barren inside; at the same time, the loving manner in which she embraces the rock suggests the strong emotional bond between the two women, which has long been cherished in a secluded all-female household.

Looking at the settings of the *Fairy Tale* series, we are reminded that so many of the canonized fairy tales are set in either an enclosed domestic space or a complete wilderness, both separated from society. This sense of isolation

Fig. 12. Andō Hiroshige, Asaji-ga-hara Hitotsuya Ishi no Makura no Yurai (The Origin of the Stone Pillow in a Lonely House in Asaji-ga-hara), 1843-47, The Digitised Contents of the National Diet Library.

is reflected in the fact that all the photographs in the *Fairy Tale* series are set in one small room, a space that secures a certain level of freedom for women in the seclusion of the fireside.

Fig. 13. Yanagi Miwa, A Lonely House, 2006. Gelatin silver print, 1000 x 1000 mm. © Miwa Yanagi. Courtesy of the artist and Seigensha Art Publishing, Inc.

On the other hand, in Yanagi's video installation *Lullaby* (2010) this familiar and familial storytelling space is itself defamiliarized. *Lullaby* features two women wearing prosthetic makeup, one playing the role of a girl and the other the role of a grandmother, which suggests that this is another of Yanagi's stories about the antagonism and friendship between young and old women. The setting is a living room with a fireplace as in *Fairy Tale*. The grandmother sits on a rug with the girl's head on her knees; she gently strokes the girl's head and softly sings a lullaby for her (fig. 14). The room, however, is visibly miniaturized to enhance its artificiality. The girl gradually reaches up her arms toward the old woman and suddenly springs up to force her to the floor. The girl then puts the grandmother's head on her knees and starts singing a lullaby for her. The two women continue to engage in this vigorous battle over who will force down the other and sing a lullaby for her. The audience soon becomes aware that both women are in fact trained wrestlers as they start flinging each other down with a loud thud. The warm, cozy fireside, a typical Mother Goose–like storytelling space, like the one depicted in the frontispiece of Perrault's collection, gradually comes apart to reveal a wrestling

Fig. 14. Yanagi Miwa, Lullaby, 2010. Video installation. 12 min. © Miwa Yanagi. Courtesy of the artist.

ring on which the two women physically enact the power struggle. Then the camera pulls back to show that the ring is set on the rooftop of a skyscraper in the middle of a big city at night, with the streets below busy with traffic.

Lullaby can be regarded as a contemporary version of "A Lonely House"; the once desolate Asajigahara is now located right in the middle of the urban bustle, as I mentioned earlier. Here Yanagi not only draws attention to gender stereotypes in fairy tales but also lays bare the backstage reality of the storytelling fireside, which symbolizes the traditional notion of home and family. The two women, unperturbed by this epistemological dismantling, continue to grapple with each other, competing to lullaby their masked selves into oblivion.

From *Elevator Girls* through *My Grandmothers* and *Fairy Tale* to *Lullaby*, the uncanny effect of Yanagi's images gradually dismantles the narrative and visual conventions of traditional fairy tales, especially those relating to cultural representations of women and their domain. The doll-like beauty of "Snow White" is undermined by young women who dream of varieties of grandmotherhood that transgress patriarchal norms. Grandmothers' stories are reenacted by young girls in such a way that the boundaries between the good, beautiful, young woman and the evil, ugly, old woman become blurred. The traditional notion of home and family symbolized by the fireside storytelling space is also dismantled to reveal its culturally constructed nature. The question that Yanagi's uncanny fairy-tale restaging poses is how to tell our own stories now that our home is no longer that "supremely comfortable place" that we want to believe it is.

Notes

1. The job of operating elevators exists in other countries as well, but with the disappearance of manually operated lifts in the 1960s, the job has become almost obsolete, except in Japan and Taiwan.
2. Although acknowledging that "the uncanny becomes the familiar and the norm in the fairy tale," Jack Zipes argues that "once we begin listening to or reading a fairy tale, there is estrangement or separation from a familiar world inducing an uncanny feeling which can be both frightening and comforting" (174).

3. Reassuringly enough, Márquez's story tells us that the grandmother does not die even after eating the whole cake. In her commentary on the contrast between old women and young girls in her works, Yanagi reveals that it was Eréndira's grandmother, "an extremely wicked, immortal being with powerful fixations on life and sexuality, a really grotesque creature," whom she had in her mind as a kind of ur-grandmother for her *My Grandmothers* series (Yanagi, *Fairy Tale*, 70).
4. In "Some Day My Prince Will Come: Female Acculturation Through the Fairy Tale" (1972), Marcia K. Lieberman points out that the "beauty contest" is "a constant and primary device" in many traditional fairy tales and is considered a sign of patriarchal ideology (187).
5. This uncanny juxtaposition of the desire to indulge in a fantasy arising from one's deep psyche with the urge to pull away and regard it from the outside is evocative of Angela Carter's postmodern feminist rewritings of fairy tales in *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979).
6. In a similar tale called "Adachigahara," the old woman lives alone and devours travelers. For other variants, see Sasama (1992).
7. *Yamambatachi no monogatari: Josei no genkei to katarinaoshi* (The Stories of Mountain Witches: Female Archetypes and Their Retellings, 2002), edited by Mizuta Noriko and Kitada Sachie, celebrates the transgressive power of the *yamauba* represented in literary, historical, and artistic works in Japan.

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