Back to Ölenberg: An Intertextual Dialogue between Fairy-Tale Retellings and the Sociohistorical Study of the Grimm Tales

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Introduction

In discussions of fairy-tale retellings, the concept of intertextuality is often introduced to explain the relationship between a retelling and the traditional fairy tale(s) to which it refers. Although the notion of intertextuality was developed by scholars such as Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes, and Gérard Genette as a far more expansive network of verbal and even nonverbal texts, it is conventionally employed in literary studies to analyze the relationships and dynamics between fictional texts only. If we adopt a broader concept of intertextuality, one that considers not only fictional but also nonfictional pre-texts, a whole new intertextual dimension becomes accessible. For fairy-tale studies, such an approach offers valuable possibilities, especially when it comes to the interaction between fairy tales and the critical and theoretical discourses that have the fairy tale as their subject. Various thematic overlaps and mutual concerns can be perceived between fairy-tale retellings and feminist, psychoanalytic, and Marxist criticism so that fairy-tale criticism appears as a relevant intertext for the retellings, and vice versa. In this essay I will explore the intertextual dialogue between a selection of fairy-tale retellings from Dutch,
German, and English writers and the sociohistorical study of the Grimm brothers’ fairy tales. I will demonstrate how certain retellings have helped to undermine the Grimms’ authority as truthful and reliable folktale collectors, moving on to analyze in more detail retellings that seek an alliance with criticism on the oral tradition underpinning the Grimm collection.

**In Search of the Truth**

As the best-known collection of fairy tales worldwide, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm’s *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (Children’s and Household Tales) has been a popular topic of research. In the course of the twentieth century the editorial process of the Brothers Grimm came under discussion at various times and in various contexts. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the first academic publications had already appeared on the editions of *Die Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, and the question of editorial changes remained on the agenda throughout the century. In 1975 Heinz Rölleke sparked new interest in the collection’s genesis when he published *Die älteste Märchensammlung der Brüder Grimm*, an annotated edition of the Ölenberg manuscript from 1810, printed next to the tales as they appeared in the first published edition from 1812. This manuscript contains a handful of earlier versions of the Grimm tales as the Grimms had assembled them for their contemporary Clemens Brentano. The manuscript and subsequent published editions of the tales were the topic of further research by scholars such as Siegfried Neumann, Eric Hulsens, John Ellis, Ruth B. Bottigheimer, Klaus Doderer, Wilhelm Solms, Jack Zipes, and Maria Tatar. Writing in 1983, Jack Zipes states that “[u]ntil the 1970s it was generally assumed that the Brothers Grimm collected their oral folktales mainly from peasants and day laborers and that they merely altered and refined the tales while remaining true to their perspective and meaning. Both assumptions proved to be false” (*Subversion* 61). A substantial number of articles and books have addressed the issue of whether the Brothers Grimm “merely refined” the oral versions they had collected or whether they (un)consciously manipulated them in favor of their own ideology and literary taste. Although Zipes claims that the Grimms did change the meaning of the oral folktales, he stresses that their “intentions were honorable” (61) and that “there is no evidence to indicate that the Grimms consciously sought to dupe German readers and feed them lies about the German past” (*Brothers Grimm* 110). He refers here to the impression that the Brothers Grimm created of their tales being German stories when several of the best-known tales in their collection have older variants from Italy and France. Moreover, Zipes emphasizes, “the Grimms were totally conscious and open about their endeavors to make their material more suitable for children and to incorporate their notion of the fam-
ily, their sense of a folk aesthetic, and their political ideas in the tales” (112). Heinz Rolleke is more skeptical about this alleged openness: “They have only remained silent with regard to these issues, ambiguously silent, as the reception shows” (Quellen und Studien 36). More radical and less accepted in academic circles is John Ellis’s view “that the Grimms deliberately, persistently, and completely misrepresented the status of their tales” and “made claims for them which they knew to be quite false” (viii). Part of the problem in verifying this process is that the notes and manuscript versions of these other variants have not been preserved and that the oral tradition from which the Brothers Grimm supposedly drew their tales has long been beyond reach. Whether or not the Grimms’ intentions were honorable, comparisons between the various editions of Die Kinder- und Hausmärchen have invariably come to the conclusion that the brothers, especially Wilhelm, substantially altered the content and style of the tales. It is thus problematic to read the Grimm stories as the authentic rendition of an oral tradition.

The debate on the editorial changes in the Grimm collection proved inspirational for various critics, and related opinions and ideas also surface in some retellings. This is not to say that these authors have necessarily read fairy-tale scholarship, or that they apply theories or concepts in the same way as scholars. In the intertextual dialogue between fairy-tale retellings and literary criticism, it is usually difficult to trace where an idea appeared first or whether ideas that occur on similar occasions were actually “borrowed” from each other. According to Maria Nikolajeva, “the question of who has borrowed the idea from whom” is in fact “totally uninteresting” to intertextual analysis (183). It is more valuable to focus instead on the different use that authors and critics make of the same idea. Indeed, although several fairy-tale retellings can be intertextually linked to debates on the Grimm editions, they do so within a fictional context, and their assertions about the Grimms are often humorous and ambivalent. The alterations made by the Grimms, for example, are frequently called upon in fairy-tale retellings to explain their own raison d’être. Not surprisingly, most of these lack the nuance of the scholarly debates, and the brothers are usually not given the benefit of the doubt with regard to their honorable intentions. In an attempt to lure in the reader, the narrators of these tales claim to tell a more accurate version of the fairy tale, to report “what really happened.” Such fictional claims can be found in titles by Louise Murphy (The True Story of Hansel and Gretel), Bruce Bennett (“The True Story of Snow White”), Liya Lev Oertel (“The Real Story of Sleeping Beauty”), and Jon Scieszka (The True Story of the Three Little Pigs!), as well as in the titles and introductions of countless other retellings. Tomi Ungerer, for example, uses such a truth motif to catch the interest of his readership in the first lines of “Little Red Riding Hood” (1975):
The little girl in red was called...yes...you've already guessed it, she was called Little Red Riding Hood. But it was not the Little Red Riding Hood that you may have read about before. No. The Little Red Riding Hood here is the real, true Little Red Riding Hood, not the one from that stupid fairy tale, and this story is, I bet you a hundred to one, its truthful history. (87)

Rather than unearthing the true account of “Red Riding Hood,” should such a version exist at all, Ungerer writes a parody of the traditional version. Most retellings that contain such a fictional claim for truth do the same. In 1982, however, the Dutch critic Nel Teeuwen-Opheij wrote about Ungerer: “In the collection 'Fairy Tales' the original given is not distorted. Sometimes even—as in the fairy tale of ‘Little Red Riding Hood’—it is brought back further to its original form, before the Brothers Grimm adapted it” (108). Although this reviewer seems to be aware of the critical views on the genesis of Die Kinder- und Hausmärchen, she confuses the critical debate with the literary convention of playfully addressing the issue of “truth.”

Such confusion is unlikely to happen with the high number of retellings in which the claim for truth is formulated by a fairy-tale character who pretends to set the record straight. Jaak Dreesen’s version of “Tom Thumb” (2002), for instance, begins with such a reference to the Brothers Grimm:

Little Thumbling.
Call me Thumb.
I am old and sick, and I want to tell my story.
It will be, I promise, grimmer than that dull narrative that was launched by two German brothers. They mentioned a small house in the forest, a crone and a giant, and seven-league boots with which the giant crossed the land, looking for me and my six brothers. Nonsense! (Dreesen 46)

As with Ungerer, the claim for truth is accompanied by an antiauthoritarian attack against the Grimms’ version (“that stupid fairy tale” / “that dull narrative”). What these texts share with critics such as John Ellis is the fact that they discredit the Brothers Grimm as truthful mediators of either a fictionally “true” course of events or an oral tradition. That in Dreesen’s tale it is a fictional character who sets the record straight, and not a scholar, opens up the possibility for the retelling to be read not only as a parody of “Tom Thumb,” but also of Ellis’s critique of the Brothers Grimm.
An author who reflects more extensively on the Brothers Grimm’s editorial process is Roald Dahl (1989). He includes an autoreflexive comment in the scene where Gretel shoves the witch into the oven.

The Brothers Grimm who wrote this story
Made it a thousand times more gory.
I’ve taken out the foulest scene
In order that you won’t turn green. [. . . ]
It might have been okay, who knows,
If there’d been humour in the prose.
Did I say humour? Wilhelm Grimm?
There’s not a scrap of it in him.

(Rhyme Stew 63)

By holding Wilhelm responsible for the cruel content and lack of humor, Dahl displays an awareness of popular theories regarding the genesis of the Grimm collection. In academic discussions Wilhelm was indeed identified as the most zealous editor and so the main target of critique.

In these retellings, the concept of truth becomes a shifting signifier that changes meaning every time it is used by a new narrator. This strengthens the impression that these stories deny the authority of any text, celebrating instead the possibility of multiple versions and truths. In problematizing the idea of one fixed fairy tale, retellings that make a fictional claim for truth can thus be placed in what Linda Hutcheon calls “the project of postmodernism”: “The challenging of certainty, the asking of questions, the revealing of fiction-making where we might have once accepted the existence of some absolute ‘truth’—this is the project of postmodernism” (48). As Elizabeth Wanning Harries argues: “[R]ecent storytellers tend to stress the subjective unreliability of their narrators. Each new tale is only one version of the many possible versions. They encourage to see the new retelling as a version, as one, but not the only, way to tell a tale” (102). By deduction, the retellings—sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly—make an appeal to their readers to consider every fairy tale as a version—in particular, the canonized ones that they may once have considered “true” and “authentic.”

**Recovering the Oral Tradition**

By problematizing the concepts of truth and authorship, Ungerer, Dreesen, and Dahl playfully break with the mythic status of the Grimm tales and legitimize their own right to adapt the stories. Few readers will consider their
rewritings as more “truthful” or authentic than the tales in *Die Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. Yet, in the wake of the critical debate on the Grimms’ editions, other authors have turned to the older and supposedly more “authentic” versions in the Ölenberg manuscript. Without referring to the manuscript explicitly in the literary text itself, these retellings return to it implicitly through intertextual links with the older versions. The authors sometimes reflect on this process in peritextual material (prefaces or interviews).

A first strategy of return to the older variants is via the undoing of the changes that occur in the Grimm editions after 1810. For example, several influential critics, including Bruno Bettelheim and Heinz Rölleke, have addressed the Grimms’ replacement of biological mothers with stepmothers in the second edition of *Die Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (1819). In many retellings, stepmothers are reconverted into biological mothers. An early example is Otto Gmelin’s retelling of “Hansel and Gretel” (1978). He explains his adaptation as follows: “Our variant printed above goes back to those before Grimm. [ . . . ] At the same time the closeness to folklore was a refusal of the Biedermeier and often started up ‘Grimm fairy-tale treasure’ as it is still run-of-the-mill in many records and radio broadcasts” (“Böses” 131).9 His adaptation of “The Frog Prince,” most notably the deletion of the king and the change in the female protagonist’s attitude toward the frog, is likewise informed by his knowledge of earlier (printed) versions of the Grimmtales. Moreover, Gmelin, like most philological scholars, distinguishes here between the attitudes of Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm regarding the adaptation of the oral material (*Tapfere Mädchen* 66–67).

The Ölenberg manuscript is mentioned as a source of inspiration in the peritextual material of several retellings of “Snow White,” most notably those by Tom Naegels, Angela Carter, and Wim Hofman. These three authors incorporate longer passages from earlier versions. In “Spiegelliegeltje,” for instance, Naegels adds a paragraph from the Ölenberg manuscript that is not included in the 1812 printed edition of the Grimm tale.10 When the mother tells the tale to her daughter, she resorts to a variant of the so-called expulsion episode:

Spiegelliegeltje was abandoned by her mommy in the dark forest. It was a bad mommy, who was jealous of Spiegelliegeltje because Spiegelliegeltje was so beautiful. More beautiful than mommy and mommy couldn’t bear that! So she brought Spiegelliegeltje in her coach into the forest, and in the middle of the forest, she said all of a sudden: “Oh, do get out and pick some of those beautiful roses for me!” But as soon as the girl had got out, the mother closed the door and drove away at full speed. And she hoped that the wild animals would quickly devour her beautiful little daughter. (Naegels 96)11
This description differs from the canonical version of “Snow White,” in which there is only one expulsion episode, when Snow White’s stepmother orders a huntsman to kill her daughter. The double expulsion in Naegels’s retelling signals an intertextual return to the variant in the Ölenberg manuscript that was later deleted:

And as the Lord King had once travelled to war, so she had her coach harnessed & ordered to drive into a great dark forest & she took Snow White with her. Now in the same forest stood many really beautiful red roses. When she had now arrived there with her little daughter, she spoke to her: oh Snow White do get out and break off some of those beautiful roses for me! And as soon as she had left the coach to obey this order, the wheels drove on at full speed, but the Lady Queen had ordered it all like that because she hoped that the wild animals would soon devour her. (Rölleke, Märchensammlung 244, 246)

In the preface to the collection in which “Spiegelliegeltje” appeared, Naegels explains that the basis of his retelling is the “oerversie,” the prototypical “Snow White,” and “not the later version, adapted by Wilhelm Grimm, that is included in all fairy-tale collections, not that of Disney” (10). In fact Naegels’s “Spiegelliegeltje” combines elements from the Ölenberg manuscript and the printed editions of Die Kinder- und Hausmärchen with personal alterations. He rephrases the second expulsion episode in a style that dramatizes the reading-aloud session with a young child. This is notable in the choice of words (“a bad mommy”) and the addition of exclamation marks. The adaptation of the register clashes with the non-adaptation of the disturbing content. The tale that Spiegelliegeltje’s mother tells is in fact even crueler than the Grimms’ version, because the mother replaces the name of Snow White with her own daughter’s, thereby encouraging identification.

Angela Carter’s retelling of “Snow White,” “The Snow Child” (1979), is inspired by a second variant based on a letter by Ferdinand Grimm from 1808 and included in the Ölenberg manuscript but not in the printed version of Die Kinder- und Hausmärchen. The Ölenberg manuscript mentions it as an alternative beginning (Rölleke, Märchensammlung 250). This variant starts with a count and countess who travel together in a coach. The count wishes for a daughter with the features of Snow White, and the countess then tries to get rid of her. Some of the scenes in Carter’s tale are reminiscent of the expulsion episode in the Ölenberg manuscript and in Naegels’s retelling. The countess asks the girl to retrieve her glove, for instance, in order that she should leave the coach. In the Ölenberg manuscript, Snow White’s mother uses a similar excuse to get rid of her daughter when she asks her to pick some roses.
According to Soman Chainani, this variant is a “version of Snow White that eschews all the popularized, supposedly indispensable elements of the tale” through which Angela Carter can “reclaim the story’s original meaning” (217). It is, however, debatable whether the variant is more “original” than the other manuscript version of “Snow White,” on which the subsequent editions were based. That the latter was better known may have motivated the Brothers Grimm to include it in the first edition. And that the concept of “originality” is problematic in the discussion of “Snow White” variants also becomes apparent in Chainani’s article. Whereas in the beginning of her article she still uses the term “original meaning” with reference to the variant that includes the count who is not Snow White’s father (217), a few pages later she uses “original story” for the variant that lies at the basis of the 1812 edition: “Carter brings back the King/father figure to imply that an unflinching depiction of current relations provides sufficient context for a meaningful revision of the original story” (219).

Chainani discusses Carter’s tale in the context of her other fairy-tale retellings and notices that “Snow Child” stands out because of an “apparent incompleteness of revision”: in contrast to the other stories, where Carter mixes fairy-tale elements with other genres, “Snow Child” “retains and even exaggerates the fairy-tale milieu” (218). In his attempt to determine the intertextual pre-text of Wim Hofman’s Zwart als inkt (“Black as ink”), the Dutch scholar Tom Baudoin comes to similar conclusions: “Hofman has not so much sought alliance with the definitive version of Snow White as with the creative process that the Grimms themselves went through” (379). In some aspects, Hofman’s retelling returns to the Ölenberg manuscript. First, Snow White is not persecuted by her stepmother, but by her biological mother. Second, in the first edition of Die Kinder- und Hausmärchen, it is not mentioned where Snow White’s father has gone once his wife starts to pursue their daughter. Both the Ölenberg manuscript and Hofman’s retelling do state his absence explicitly and give the same explanation: he has gone to war (Rölleke, Märchensammlung 244; Hofman 11–12, 14). Third, the wish that Snow White’s mother expresses in Hofman is more similar to the wish of the count in the alternative “Snow White” variant included in the Ölenberg manuscript (1810 B) than to the first edition of 1812:

1810 (A)

then she wished & said: ah, if only I had a child, as white as this snow, with cheeks as red as this red blood and eyes as black as this window frame! (Rölleke, Märchensammlung 244)

alternative variant 1810 (B)

then the count wished and said: if only I had a girl, with cheeks as red as this blood! Soon thereafter three coal-black ravens flew over
and the count wished once again for a girl with such black hair like these ravens. (Rölleke, Märchensammlung 250, 252) 

1812 (C)
so she thought: if only I had a child white as snow, red as blood and black as this window frame. (Rölleke, Märchensammlung 245) 

Hofman
She has to be white as snow, her lips red as blood and her hair as black as those ravens there. (Hofman 14) 

Hofman’s wish includes the element “hair as black as ravens” (alternative variant 1810 B) but puts these words in the mouth of Snow White’s mother. In the long version of 1810 (A), the mother wishes for a child with eyes as black as the window frame. The 1812 printed edition (C) leaves unspecified what aspect of the child should be black, but does include the window frame as a reference point. For another aspect of the wish, the fact that the girl’s lips should be red, the 1812 edition presents itself as a more relevant intertext: in the 1810 versions (A and B), the mother (long version) and count (alternative version) do not wish for red lips, but for red cheeks. Like Naegels, Hofman mixes elements from versions in the Ölenberg manuscript with aspects from the printed tales and personal alterations.

Some of Hofman’s alterations intensify changes that the Grimms had made, as Baudoin has noted but discusses only briefly. Hofman increases the number of religious references, for instance, a dimension that the Grimms had developed only in later editions (Hulsens 29). Likewise, the list of household chores that Snow White is ordered to fulfill in exchange for her stay at the seven dwarves’ house gradually increases in the later editions (30), and is further expanded in Hofman’s retelling:

1810
The dwarves pitied her and invited her to stay with them, and to cook their dinner when they left for the mine. (Rölleke, Märchensammlung 246, 248) 

1812
Then the dwarves pitied her and said: ‘if you take care of our household, and cook, sew, make the beds, wash and knit, also keep everything tidy and clean, you can stay with us and you will lack nothing; in the evening we come home, then dinner has to be ready, during the day we are in the mine and dig for gold, then you are alone. [. . . ]’ (Rölleke, Märchensammlung 251)
In Hofman, the dwarves become even more demanding and give Snow White very specific instructions:

That's how it began. The girl stayed / at home, they went to work. [. . . ] / A few weeks long they got soup. / From beans and nettles, / plenty of nettles. / ‘You could cook something else, you know,’ / they said. / She cooked apples and beans / and the leaves of a cabbage. / ‘You should first take off the caterpillars,’ / the dwarves said. / ‘Take off the caterpillars / and throw them into the fire. / Just take care of the garden a bit, / put ladybirds with the lice. / Hang the bunches of onions / here on the joists. / Hang the bags of beans too. / The rats can't reach them then. / If you see a rat: kill it.['] (Hofman 66)

Whereas the dwarves in Grimm discuss the tasks when Snow White arrives, Hofman’s dwarves gradually become more exigent. Their part of the arrangement, which was still included in the Grimm version of 1812 (“you will lack nothing”), remains more implicit in Hofman. The list of random instructions becomes so elaborate, extending over several pages, that Snow White needs to write it all down, which leads to even more orders (67). Her personal freedom is increasingly curbed by trivial instructions that affect every single one of her actions. She is required to attend to and maintain the household in exactly the fashion preferred by the dwarves, and to sit still and be quiet for the rest of the time. Several commands are patronizing and reminiscent of parents speaking to a young child (“do not wobble your legs”); others seem to have no purpose at all except to exert power (“crawl under the table”). From these examples, it becomes clear that Hofman’s expansions can indeed be said to intensify the editorial process of the Grimms. However, Hofman’s retelling appeared after the so-called second wave of feminism and its counterpart in fairy-tale criticism; when the list of Snow White’s tasks extends over three pages it is clear that the Grimms’ enumerations are exaggerated to a degree that invites criticism. Hofman drives to the extreme some of the stylistic idiosyncrasies of the Gattung Grimm, and the effect is a parody with an implied feminist twist.

**Iring Fetscher’s Critical View on the Ölenberg Manuscript**

For Carter, Naegels, and Hofman, the recovery of older Grimm editions proved inspirational, and they engage approvingly with the textual material. Iring Fetscher takes a more critical position with regard to research on the Grimms’ manuscript and editions. In 1972, even before Rölleke had published the annotated manuscript, Fetscher addressed the philological study of the Grimm tales in *Wer hat Dornröschen wachgeküßt?* (Who kissed Sleeping Beauty awake?). It contains several “Ur-Versionen,” which supposedly lie at the basis
of the Grimms’ collection. Fetscher’s prototypes are in fact all parodies. His “Ur-Version” of “Snow White,” in which the protagonist is depicted as a militant member of the labor union, is concluded as follows:

This is what—reduced to its essential features—the proto-version of “Snow White” must have looked like. The fearful adaptors from the petty bourgeois or crofter circles, to whom we owe the version noted by the Grimms, have done everything to disguise this prototypical version so as to be unrecognizable: they turned Snow White’s voluntary, politically motivated decision into an expulsion from the court motivated by the jealous stepmother’s private revenge. (61–62)

In “Cinderella” Fetscher shifts the focus of the authenticity question from the Brothers Grimm to their oral sources: “It appears to me that in this case the Brothers Grimm are not solely to blame for the adaptation. It is likely that they have come across the fairy tale in an already fearfully distorted form and merely harmonized and smoothed it further” (63).

While Fetscher parodies the philological discourse on the Grimm editions, even before the most vehement debates had truly started, he had and still has some interesting insights to offer. To what extent did the oral sources of the Brothers Grimm, whether they were educated middle-class women or elderly peasants, apply some form of self-censorship? And, one may add, if this was the case, does that make their versions less representative of “the oral tradition”? Is “the oral tradition” uniquely reserved for the lower social classes and the illiterate? How is our concept of this tradition formed, and, to refer back to Fetscher, is it ever possible to retrieve a tale in an “undistorted form”? Fetscher’s parody explicitly addresses the Grimms’ tendency to harmonize the tales, yet he also invites critical reflection on the contrived mythic status of “the oral tradition,” a topic that Ruth B. Bottigheimer (2009) has picked up again most recently in her alternative history of fairy tales.

Fetscher reproaches the philological paradigm for its arbitrariness and irrelevance and seems to be well acquainted with the methods and findings in this field of research. From his retelling of “Snow White,” it becomes clear that Fetscher was equally familiar with the research on the Grimm editions. His retelling of “Mother Holle” provides further evidence. Fetscher claims that his (fictional) alternative version is inspired by a textual fragment that was discovered by philologists: “Fortunately the progressive folklorists’ year-long search has now been rewarded with an unexpected find” (109). The report that follows parodies the discovery of the Grimm manuscript in the monastery of Ölenberg. Fetscher’s new version of “Mother Holle,” supposedly discovered in a Franciscan monastery, turns the traditional versions upside down in a move reminiscent of the critical debate regarding the Ölenberg manuscript. In
comparison with the old text, the printed Grimm version of “Mother Holle” is shown to promote racial purity and blind obedience. In nonfictional fairy-tale criticism, findings of older texts by feminists did the same with regard to gender: scholars such as Zipes, Bottigheimer, and Rolleke revealed that Wilhelm Grimm had inscribed the tales with patriarchal ideology and argued that the Ölenberg manuscript and earlier editions of Die Kinder- und Hausmärchen still showed aspects that were more controversial to the nineteenth-century middle-class image of women (for instance, the existence of the bad mother). These older versions also featured heroines with greater personal freedom and agency. Yet the subtleties in the research of these scholars contrast with the exaggerated results that Fetscher’s critics achieve. His claim that philologists manipulate textual material to confirm any random meaning is supported by the fact that the fictional fifteenth-century manuscript links up perfectly with twentieth-century Marxist and feminist critiques, as well as with the reproach of the late 1940s that the Grimm tales were “partially responsible for generating attitudes that led to the acceptance of the Nazis and their monstrous crimes” (Zipes, Brothers Grimm 231). Fetcher’s warning that philologists may use the older texts to support a contemporary ideological agenda also has validity outside the fictional realm.

Conclusion

The motto of Wim Hofman’s Zwart als inkt is a quotation from T. S. Eliot’s “Little Gidding.” It can be read as a metacomment on his use of intertextuality and on the use of intertextuality in the genre of fairy-tale retellings as a whole: “What we call the beginning is often the end / And to make an end is to make a beginning” (qtd. in Hofman 5). Whereas the final edition of Die Kinder- und Hausmärchen, with its status as the “ultimate” fairy-tale collection, has been said to have curbed the oral tradition, Hofman shows that it also creates new beginnings: the beginning of intertextual play with the old and the canonized versions, and the beginning of a new tradition of parodies and retellings. Tom Baudoin convincingly shows that Zwart als inkt, like other fairy-tale retellings, thus creates an alliance with a fundamental characteristic of the oral tradition—its performativity and flexibility: “In the process of telling and retelling some constant elements can be noted, yet fundamental for the story is the act of telling itself, with all its improvisations, additions and accentuations” (Baudoin 379). Some of these additions can be connected intertextually to fairy-tale criticism, yet the examples above show that the retellings rarely duplicate the criticism directly, completely, or uncritically. Rather, what can be perceived is a dynamic process that involves a combination of textual elements from various
pasts with aspects and interests of the present, a fascinating amalgam of critical insights and creative transformations.

Notes

1. See, for example, Tom Baudoin, David L. Russell, Claire Malarte-Feldman, and Belinda Stott.


4. All the translations included in the body of this essay are my own. The original text is given in the endnotes. Original text for Rölleke: “Sie haben zu diesen Dingen nur geschwiegen, vieldeutig geschwiegen, wie man an der Wirkung sieht.”

5. Note that this is an equally popular strategy in fairy-tale films, such as Hoodwinked and Ever After.


7. “In de bundel ‘Sprookjes’ wordt het oorspronkelijke gegeven niet vervormd. Soms zelfs—zoals in het sprookje van Roodkapje—nog verder teruggebracht naar de oorspronkelijke vorm, voordat de gebroeders Grimm het bewerkten.”


9. “Unsere oben gedruckte variante ging auf solche vor Grimm zurück. [. . .] Zugleich war die folklorische nahe eine absage an den biedermeierlich und oft verkitschten ‘marchenschatz Grimm,’ wie er in vielen schallplatten und funksedungen auch heute noch gang und gäbe ist.” Note that Gmelin uses alternative spelling, refraining from using capitals for nouns, as is common in German.

10. “Spiegelliegeltje” is an untranslatable title, a nonsense word relying on wordplay. It refers to the name of the little girl in the story and is an extension of the Dutch word “spiegel” (mirror). The association with the verb “liegen” (lying) is also possible.

11. “Spiegelliegeltje werd achtergelaten door haar mama in het donkere bos. Het was een slechte mama, die jaloers was op Spiegelliegeltje omdat Spiegelliegeltje zo mooi was. Mooier dan mama en dat kon mama niet verdragen! Dus bracht ze Spiegelliegeltje met haar koets het bos in, en in het midden van het bos zei ze plots: ‘Och, stap toch uit en pluk van die mooie rozen voor mij!’ Maar zodra het meisje uit-
gestapt was, sloot de boze moeder de deur en reed er in volle vaart vandoor. En ze hoopte dat de wilde dieren haar mooie dochtertje snel zouden opeten.


13. “niet de latere, door Wilhelm Grimm herwerkte versie die in alle sprookjesboeken staat, niet die van Disney.”

14. Naegels also doubles the ending, combining both Disney’s (the kiss) and the Brothers Grimm’s (Snow White coughs up the apple).

15. “SpiegeÌëlliegtje” is a retelling for children that tells the story of a mother who suffers from manic depression and attempts to kill her daughter with a poisoned apple. It is unclear whether the daughter dies and is revived by magic or if she simply pretends to have died. At the end of the story, the mother kisses her back to life.

16. “Hofman niet zozeer aansluiting zoekt bij de definitieve versie van Sneeuwwitje als wel bij het creatieve proces dat de Grimms zelf doormaakten.”

17. “da wünschte sie u. sprach: ach hätte ich doch ein Kind, so weiß wie diesen Schnee, so rothbackigt wie dies rothe Blut u. so schwarzäugig wie diesen Fenster rahm!”


19. “so dachte sie: hätt ich doch ein Kind so weiß wie Schnee, so roth wie das Blut und so schwarz wie dieser Rahmen.”

20. “Wit moet ze zijn als sneeuw, haar lippen rood als bloed en haar haar zo zwart als die raven daar.”


22. “Da hatten die Zwerge Mitleiden und sagten: wenn du unsern Haushalt versehen, und kochen, nahen, betten, waschen und stricken willst, auch alles ordentlich und reinlich halten, sollst du bei uns bleiben und soll dir an nichts fehlen; Abens kommen wir nach Haus, da muß das Essen fertig seyn, am Tage aber sind wir im Bergwerk und graben Gold, da bist du allein [ . . . ].”


25. “Mir scheint, in diesem Fall darf man den Brüdern Grimm jedenfalls nicht allein die Schuld an der Umarbeitung geben. Sie haben das Märchen vermutlich schon in ängstlich deformierter Gestalt vorgefunden und es lediglich weiter harmonisiert und geglättet.”

26. “Zum Glück ist nun aber die jahrelange Suche der progressiven Volkskundler durch einen überraschenden Fund belohnt worden.”

27. See, for example, Bottigheimer's analysis of “Our Lady's Child” in various editions (Bad Girls 87).


29. “In het proces van navertellen en doorvertellen zijn weliswaar enkele constanten aan te wijzen, maar wezenlijk voor het verhaal is het vertellen zelf, met al zijn improvisaties, toevoegingen en accentueringen. [...] D[ee openheid en dynamiek [zijn] ook kenmerkend voor de versie van Wim Hofman.”

Works Cited


