THE EMERGENCE OF FAIRY TALE LITERACY: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY ON
PROMOTING CRITICAL LITERACY OF CHILDREN THROUGH
A JUXTAPOSED READING OF CLASSIC FAIRY TALES AND
THEIR CONTEMPORARY DISRUPTIVE VARIANTS

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ABSTRACT

Children nowadays perceive fairy tales from a number of sources; however, the strongest prior impressions toward this genre held by most youngsters are still built on the popular mass media-based adaptations such as the animated films or books of fairy-tale retellings by the Walt Disney Company. In order to make a change to such an undesirable situation, I suggest exposing them to a great variety of fairy tales as the one and only way to broaden their repertoire and to develop their critical thinking ability toward the genre. Classic versions of fairy tales have long been censored for their elements assumed inappropriate for children by adults such as violence and thus been discounted from the formal elementary curriculum. However, from the interviews I conducted for this study, children’s responses disputed such a false adult assumption. To deprive children of the opportunity to read these older texts is actually to prevent an important way to increase their knowledge regarding the genre’s origin. The fresh aspects of these earlier versions unfamiliar to youngsters who have already known roughly about the stories can stimulate their previous recognition and enhance their apprehension of fairy tales. Therefore, I strongly recommend that educators of children use traditional fairy tales as the first step to promote their critical literacy.

Moreover, in the field of children’s literature, there has been a common tendency to rewrite old fairy tales and bestow them with new possibilities in the past two decades. Many children’s books are retellings of fairy tales using various strategies to overturn or disrupt the stereotypical impressions established through preexistent stories. Such a new
kind of fairy tales functions as a “second chance” for children to question their prior perceptions toward the genre. By introducing them systematically with a juxtaposed reading of these contemporary disruptive variants with the classic versions, we can let children start to reflect and examine the stock knowledge they have held as truth about fairy tales so as to actualize the purpose of promoting critical literacy and further lead to the emergence of their fairy tale literacy.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Application of Fairy Tales in Educating Children

Starting early from one’s infancy, the genre of fairy tales has laid its immense effect upon him/her. The English author, Samuel Johnson (1709-1784), once commented about the function of this type of stories as a stimulus to infants: “Babies do not want to hear about babies; they like to be told of giants and castles, and of somewhat which can stretch and stimulate their little minds” (Piozzi, 1786, p. 6). Albert Einstein (1879-1955), held a similar opinion of using fairy tales to enlighten children: “If you want your children to be intelligent, read them fairy tales. If you want them to be more intelligent, read them more fairy tales” (Einstein). The educational values of fairy tales are doubtlessly undeniable and the genre also plays an indispensible role in the life of human beings. The American mythologist and writer, Joseph Campbell (1904-1987) in his influential book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) pointed out the close relations of this genre with human life:

…the patterns and logic of fairy tale and myth correspond to those of dream… it appears that through the wonder tales—which pretend to describe the lives of the legendary heroes, the powers of the divinities of nature, the spirits of the dead, and the totem ancestors of the group—symbolic expression is given to the unconscious desires, fears, and tensions that underlie the conscious patterns of human behavior. (p. 237)

As a result, the power of fairy tales penetrates almost all humans; there is seldom any person who has never encountered them in any form. Passed down generation after
generation, fairy tales not only transmit deep-rooted beliefs people establish for centuries but also reflect major adjustments of ideologies which have long been accepted unquestionably by human beings. The classic versions\(^1\) should be held in high regard due to the representations of the values appreciated by humans in the ancient times; on the other hand, modern rewritings of fairy tales\(^2\) can be introduced to young minds as the chances to examine and question the fixed thoughts internalized as truth.

**Definition of Fairy Tales**

Since the main texts applied in my study will be fairy tales, it is reasonable to spend some time giving a definition of this genre before I move on to the details of my research proposition. The genre of fairy tales, first of all, is often associated with folktales or even used interchangeably by some literary scholars; hence, making a distinction between them is always a difficult task. Therefore, to understand what fairy tales are, the meaning of folktales should be brought forth first.

Although folktales are usually regarded as one of the roots of fantasy, along with myths and legends, these three traditional genres are relatively easy to differentiate. According to Sheila Egoff (1988), myths can be seen as “a dim vision of a reality that our ancestors saw very clearly—the true and fixed nature of things that made for a more orderly world” while legends describe exploits of heroes who lived in history and are thus less supernatural than myths (p. 3). Unlike myths and legends which usually belong to a

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\(^1\) The “classic” versions of fairy tales here refer to the stories written/recorded by early folklorists (mainly in Europe) from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. The word “classic” is applied interchangeably throughout this dissertation with other synonyms like “traditional” and “conventional,” carrying the same meaning.

\(^2\) The phenomenon of rewriting fairy tales is actually nothing new. In the long history of this genre, people continuously adapt and revise stories to fit their social and cultural needs. However, for the modern rewritings of fairy tales here, I focused on the reworked versions employing various subversive and disruptive elements or strategies in the format of picture books, short stories or novels written for children.
specific culture or country, folktales often have different versions of the same story in various parts of the world with local coloration added (Egoff, 1988, p. 3). Furthermore, contrary to the previous two genres which more or less involve certain actual events which ever happened in history, folktales are “products of the pure imagination” (Egoff, 1988, p. 4).

Such a feature of deriving from people’s “pure imagination” makes folktales hard to be set apart from fairy tales since both bodies of stories share this same characteristic. However, Ruth Bottigheimer, among many researchers in fairy tale studies, demands a clear separation between folktales and fairy tales. According to Bottigheimer (2006), in the aspect of characters, we can find that folktales are typically peopled with figures from a familiar world of their audiences—husbands, wives, an occasional doctor, lawyer, priest or preacher, while fairy tales usually involve royal families or unrealistic roles such as witches and talking animals. In a word, the element of magic serves as an essential key to make a division between these two genres. Moreover, the standard endings of them are drastically different—“a large portion of folktales have dystopic endings” (Bottigheimer, 2006, p. 211) in order to reflect truthfully the hard life of peasants while fairy tales often end with the punishment of evil force and happy weddings which lead to a life lived happily ever after.

Bottigheimer (2009) in her latest book, *Fairy Tales: A New History*, further disputes the widespread belief that fairy tales originated in the oral tradition of peasants and were then written down or collected by numerous folklorists and argues for a book-based history of this genre. She considers that classic fairy tales we are familiar with today were actually the creations of traditional authors in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and
eighteenth centuries such as Giovan Francesco Straparola in Venice, Giambattista Basile in Naples, Charles Perrault in Paris, Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont in London. These Italian or French tales then formed the major source and basis of Brothers Grimm’s tales. In a sense, the works of the fairy tale authors/collectors can be all regarded as conventional fairy tales. Nevertheless, no matter whether the origin of fairy tales is established upon an oral tradition or a book-based history like Bottigheimer claims, the range of classic fairy tales employed in this study included the edited/written works of the most well-known folklorists such as Perrault, Brothers Grimm, and Joseph Jacobs as well as the contemporary reworked variants inspired by their tales in order to fulfill the purpose of forming a juxtaposed reading of fairy tales for modern children.

**Research Proposition**

Classic fairy tales have long been regarded as generating various ideologies for people to internalize and follow. Many scholars have pointed out the undeniable effect of them upon social norms as well as people’s belief system and daily behaviors. Donald Haase (1993), for instance, states the danger/problem canonical fairy tales cause to “prescribe normative forms of thought and behavior, and modes and models of humanity” so as to “stereotype” people, “either as members of a nationalistic or ethnic group, or as human beings defined by a certain concept of what is or is not normal” (p. 360). According to Haase, such a feature of fairy tales forms the main reason why these fairy tales have so often been utilized to socialize children.

Hence, despite the fact that they may not be told or written as part of children’s literature at the beginning, fairy tales “do have significance for its emergence since so many children’s books in some way or other are based on myth and folklore, not only
directly, in subject matter or action, but also with respect to narrative, characterization and the use of symbols” (Nikolajeva, 1996, p. 15). Bottigheimer (1987) also mentions the acculturating role of this genre plays in children’s socialization process in her book, *Grimm’s Bad Girls & Bold Boys*, where she considers fairy tales to be “a record and reflection of society, as a normative influence on its reader or listener, or as a combination of both” (p. 12). In other words, these tales are told with the adults’ attempt “to initiate children and expect them to learn the fairy-tale code as part of [the adults’] responsibility in the civilizing process” (Zipes, 1999, p. 29).

While the genre of fairy tales has been treated by scholars as a tool of initiation for children, we might wonder if modern children’s repertoire of this genre is really built upon what we assume to be the “classic” ones, that is, the original versions written or collected by the folklorists centuries ago such as Charles Perrault, the Grimm Brothers, Joseph Jacobs, etc. As a matter of fact, due to the massive influence of popular culture, prior knowledge toward fairy tales of most children nowadays is mainly drawn from the media-based adaptations among which the Disney animated versions serve as one of the major and powerful sources.\(^3\) Simply by looking for any well-accepted fairy tale images through the Google search engine, we may find that most of them come from the Disney versions.

Jane Yolen (1977) in her article “America’s Cinderella” concludes that “[t]he mass market American ‘Cinderellas’ have presented the majority of American children [as well as even other children around the world] with the wrong dream. They offer the passive

\(^3\) According to one previous qualitative research in which I interviewed five pre-service teachers as a focus group on five contemporary retellings of the Cinderella tale, almost all of them based their primary impression of the tale upon the Disney animated version.
princess… waiting for Prince Charming… and thus acculturate millions of girls and boys. But it is the wrong Cinderella and the magic of the old tales has been falsified, the true meaning lost, perhaps forever” (p. 27). Dorothy Hurley (2005) has also found a similar phenomenon: “In recent times, . . . the visual representation of fairy tale characters has been dominated by the Disney version of these tales. Such is the power of visual representation that children tend to believe that Disney’s version of the fairy tale is the real story rather than the ‘classic’ version to which they may or may not have been exposed through school or home” (p. 222). The detrimental effect of such a trend is further mentioned by Terri Windling (2007) who quotes the prestigious fairy tale scholar Marina Warner:

‘Disney's vision,’ writes Marina Warner, ‘has affected everybody's idea of fairy tales themselves: until writers and anthologists began looking again, passive hapless heroines and vigorous wicked older women seemed generic. Disney selected certain stories and stressed certain sides to them; the wise children, the cunning little vixens, the teeming populations of the stories were drastically purged. The disequilibrium between good and evil in these films has influenced contemporary perceptions of fairy tale, as a form where sinister and gruesome forces are magnified and prevail throughout — until the very last moment where, ex machina, right and goodness overcome them.’ (p. 3)

Therefore, as long as the media-based retellings of fairy tales play the dominant role in contemporary social practice, they continue legitimating and authorizing the impressions of modern children to “classic” fairy tales. It could be said that the visual images of fairy tales have also constructed a “template” for children. Consequently, we
may say that such so-called “white-washed” tales⁴ actually shape the foundation of socialization to modern children instead of the authentic versions of canonical fairy tales. Is reading solely these sanitized retellings really beneficial to modern children? Are these stories able to represent and replace the classic versions of fairy tales? In their *The Pleasures of Children’s Literature*, Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer (2003) point out that the adults’ intention of protecting children lying behind their rewritings of fairy tales leads to the tendency of leaving out “unsettling ideas and events. Such censoring deprives children of a basic pleasure of literature, the chance to experience painful circumstances without actually suffering from them and, therefore, to rehearse difficult situations and emotions before having to deal with them in real life.” (p. 313)

Jack Zipes (2009) in his latest book, *Relentless Progress*, brings forth the force of integral storytelling to resist the “relentless progress” in which negative trends in popular culture homogenize the transmission of fairy tales—“[w]hat we lack is an indication of what we value most, and the more success that globalization has had in commodifying and exploiting storytelling as spectacle, the more storytelling with integrity assumes value by pointing to this lack” (p. 156). Moreover, adults making attempts to provide children with “safe” versions of fairy tales with the intention to avoid any harm to their innocence or fear caused by the gruesomeness or the violence found in the classic fairy tales might underestimate children’s ability of receiving and appreciating the traditional versions of fairy tales and necessarily associate certain “harmful” elements with the inevitable result of causing damage to young people.

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⁴ Classic fairy tales have undergone a sanitation process of having the sexual and violent elements removed from them since the dawn of the 20th centuries, behind some adults’ concern to keep children’s innocence and sensitive souls intact. The result is the white-washed retellings which are generally considered to be “proper” for children.
In one of the previous studies in which Ann Trousdale (1989a) analyzed the responses of children to selected fairy tales, she claims that “adult interpretations of fairy tales are not necessarily the interpretations that children will make” (p. 41) so “the meanings and morals of the stories for the children were quite different from the morals which adults have found in the stories” (p. 43). In addition, what adults regard as detrimental to young minds in the old versions of fairy tales such as the violent defeat and punishment of evil force may contrarily even be beneficial to children’s mental and moral development (Auden, 1943; Lewis, 1966; Bettelheim, 1977; Trousdale, 1989).

Furthermore, the fact that the classic versions of fairy tales keep being passed down for centuries may indicate their indispensability in human life, including for childhood education. There are quite a few modern scholars who hold a positive view towards this age-old genre. For instance, Zohar Shavit (1983) in her article talks about the common attitude in the 17th century toward the “fashionable” genre of fairy tales then, saying that some “highbrow” people at that time actually considered the stories were too simple for adults so they were more suitable to amuse children (p. 61). She further compares different versions of “Little Red Riding Hood” which include Perrault’s, the Grimms’ and three modern ones and demonstrates how we can trace the development of the notion of childhood through these variants. In addition, Valerie Walkerdine (1984) also states the advantages classic fairy tales can bring to modern children:

Classic fairy tales are quite fantastic: they do not bear any resemblance to the lives of ordinary children. Yet they act powerfully to engage with important themes about ‘what might be’ . . . That is, they are removed from the everyday in various ways: a different historical period or geographical
location, and the overwhelming use of ‘surrogate’ parents and siblings. . . identification is possible at the level of fantasy. (p. 168)

Besides, Mara Tatar (1987) even mentions that “the hold these stories [classic fairy tales] have on the imagination of children is so compelling that it becomes difficult to conceive of a childhood without them. Growing up without fairy tales implies spiritual impoverishment. . . ” (Preface, xxvi).

In a sense, those remote and exotic elements possessed by the conventional versions of fairy tales, despite the fact that some are regarded by certain adults as endangering children’s minds, serve as exactly the clues for children nowadays to experience and understand the notion of childhood centuries ago. Just as Alison Lurie (1990) points out, such tales “reflect the taste of the literary men who edited the first popular collections of fairy stories for children” (p. 20). A more extreme example would be Zipes (2009), who talks about how the Grimms’ ‘The Frog Prince’ actually reveals the “mating strategies and courting practices that can be traced back hundreds, if not thousands of years in different societies” (p. 88). In a word, classic fairy tales do demonstrate a series of important and indispensible factors of human life.

As a result, to save elementary-school-aged children from “spiritual impoverishment,” as Tatar describes, and promote critical literacy of fairy tales, the first step I propose is to introduce them to traditional versions of fairy tales, collected or written by the well-known folklorists in the past. This way, modern youngsters can be offered an opportunity to appreciate the truly “authentic” and “original” tales in order to challenge their common impressions toward fairy tales built upon the mainstream media-based sanitized retellings and reshape the foundation of children’s previous
understanding of this ancient genre. Through being exposed to these traditional versions of fairy tales, present-day children can be bestowed with a deeper knowledge of this genre and get to know the foundation which the popular media-based versions are built upon.

While familiarizing children with classic versions of fairy tales, we may match such a “restoration” with other types of texts including both contemporary retellings and less familiar old tales to be juxtaposed with them in order to accomplish the second step of promoting critical literacy through the genre of fairy tales. Such a proposed practice of the juxtaposition of earlier and recent fairy tales for children is actually not something new. Lawrence R. Sipe (1993) in his study exploring the reading-writing connection made through a comparison of “traditional tales and modern variants” by his friend-teacher’s class of twenty-four sixth graders points out that “[w]e found that sixth-grade students loved to revisit and reexperience favorites from their childhood. The old fairy tales and folktales lived again in their imaginations. We wanted to extend this engagement to the enjoyment of modern stories that are based on the old models” (pp. 18-19).

In addition, Haase (1993) mentions the practice of “[c]omplementing the classic tales and anthologies with newer or lesser-known stories and variants places the traditional tales in a context that encourages diverse responses, questions, and significant comparisons—even among elementary school children” (p. 363). Tatar (1992) also urges

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5 The definition of the word “contemporary” here has a rough range of period from around the 1980s to the present.
the creation of “new cultural stories” which are based on canonical fairy tales but with added playful disruptions to empower and entertain children at the same time (p. 236).

In fact, during the past few decades, the notion of fairy tales has indeed been challenged and experienced a radical change, especially within the realm of children’s literature. Many talented children’s authors chose to retell classic fairy tales such as “Cinderella,” “Three Little Pigs,” “Little Red Riding Hood,” etc. from new angles and through various strategies, instead of simply sanitizing the “harmful” elements in order to produce “safe” versions. Sipe (1993) names such reworked tales which are deliberately based on the classic ones as “transformations”—“parallel, deconstructed, or extended versions of the original tale…” (p. 19).

Such retellings disrupt or subvert the original power structure constructed in the old tales so they are referred to, as Elizabeth Yeoman (1999) states, “disruptive” texts which “challenge and go beyond conventional and limiting traditional storylines about race, gender and class through presenting unexpected characterizations, plots, outcomes or details” (p. 427). These disruptive reworked fairy tales, mainly composed in the formats of picture books, short stories or fantasy novels, appear mostly to be more light-hearted than the canonical ones and offer fresh ways for modern children to comprehend the genre of fairy tales.

As Trousdale (1989b) asserts, “[t]hese contemporary tales, while not strictly folktales, invite contrast with discussion of values implicit in the traditional tales” (p. 244). Hence, rather than entirely overturning the importance of classic fairy tales, various retellings produced today actually enhance their values and can function as collaborative
narratives with the older versions. In fact, John Stephens and Robyn McCallum (1998) hold a similar viewpoint:

Retellings and reversions of texts which are literary classics of modern high culture and can be identified as the work of particular, canonical authors have the potential to throw this process into sharp relief. They tend to be more self-conscious about the ways they elaborate their dialogic relationship with their pre-texts and more overt about their reproductive or interrogative purposes. (p. 253)

**Typology of Contemporary Disruptive Fairy Tales**

To provide a more systematic categorizing method of these so-called contemporary disruptive fairy tales, I built up a typology including eight types listed in the table below:

| Type 1 | Retellings subverting gender ideologies implied in the original tales (the so-called feminist fairy tales): With the employment of a series of strategies, such tales provide alternatives of what gender relationship could be perceived and built. The creation of such retellings can be generally regarded as a feminist reaction against the dominant power of patriarchy conveyed through classic versions of fairy tales. Just as Stephens and McCallum (1998) points out, “[f]eminist critics are usually much more skeptical about the supposed universal and essential values in fairy tales, and argue rather that they offer boys and girls different developmental paradigms which are products of gendered social practices” (p. 204). Such feminist fairy-tale narratives can be further divided into three subtypes as follows.

| | A. The first subtype includes retold versions reversing and switching traditional gender roles in the old tales so as to create different role models such as male counterparts of Cinderella or Sleeping Beauty in *Prince Cinders* (1987) and *Sleeping Bobby* (2005) or a female one of Jack in *Kate and Beanstalk* (2000). |
B. The second subtype refers to reworked stories subverting certain concepts of the old tales, for instance, the beauty standards like small feet or attractive appearance established in them. *Cinderella Bigfoot* (1997) and *Sleeping Ugly* (1981) can be regarded as examples for this category. Moreover, the new story may also present a parallel storyline which keeps both the original main character and a new one functioning as a contrast to her, so as to overturn what believes to be good in the original narrative. *Cinder Edna* (1994) serves as one instance among a few.


Type 2 Versions narrated from alternative points of view of villains or minor characters in the tales: This type of new tales provides the account from a fresh perspective and hence breaks the imposition of identifying with the protagonist upon the reader established in the traditional ways of narration. Books such as *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs By A. Wolf* (1989), *Hansel and Gretel/The Witch’s Story* (1991), *The Awful Cinderella* (1993), *Snow White: The Untold Story* (1995), *Zel* (1996) and *The Wolf’s Story: What Really Happens to Little Red Riding Hood* (2005) all allow the antagonist in the original story to tell his/her own side of tale. In addition to these well known fairy tale villains, conventional minor characters also get a chance to voice themselves in “The Seventh Dwarf” (1926) or *The Very Smart Pea and the Princess-To-Be* (2003), only to name a couple.
| Type 3 | Stories describing what happens before or after the original tales (the so-called prequels or sequels to the original tales): This type of new tales, by adding extra parts of the events that happen either before the original story begins or after it ends, in a sense offers an extension of the story. The extended parts of the primary tale may serve as a reasonable explanation of how things turn out to what has been commonly perceived or a convincing account which overturns what is expected after the “happily-ever-after” ending. Short stories like “A Delicate Architecture” (2009) and picture books such as *The Frog Prince Continued* (1991) and *Rumpelstiltskin's Daughter* (1997) can be regarded as instances for such a type. |
| Type 4 | Intertextual narratives combining various characters from different fairy tales, either verbally, visually or both: Such a type of books employs the concept of intertextuality to build links between different and independent tales. In such narratives, the reader can see characters from a variety of stories put together to create new plots. The characters may keep their primary personality or not in the newly created story. *The Tunnel* (1990), *The Stinky Cheese Man and other Fairy Stupid Tales* (1992), The Jolly Postman series (1986–), *Into the Forest* (2004), *Yours Truly, Goldilocks* (2005), etc. can be included in this type. |
| Type 5 | Tales having a similar storyline with the original ones but set in a different geographical setting or cultural background (including the so-called multicultural fairy tales): This body of tales contain older versions deriving different cultures like *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters* (1987) and *Lon Po Po: A Red-Riding Hood Story from China* (1989) as well as newer adaptations moving to a modern or alternative setting from the originals such as *Snow White in New York* (1986) and *The Three Little Fish and the Big Bad Shark* (2007). |
| Type 6 | Lengthy retold stories presenting a detailed character development: The format of such narratives is usually the novel. The original short tale is expanded into a long story with many extra details added into it, especially... |
the mental development of characters. This type of elongated fairy-tale rewritings is in fact what Stephens and McCallum (1998) address as “novelization” of folktale materials—“In order to do this, writers have recourse to one or both of two main procedures, elaboration and combination. As with other kinds of story, folktale is expanded into novel by elaborating common elements of literary fiction: main characters may be more complex, the motivation may be depicted as having subjective or introspective impact and consequence; both social and physical setting may be more detailed and specific; reduplicated events or actions may be individually elaborated so as to stress difference rather than similarity; and the positioning of audience toward characters and event may be more complicated” (p. 221). Through this type of stories, the reader gets to understand more about the characters, settings and causes and effects of singles incidents depicted in the story which are merely described in a simplified fashion in the traditional fairy tales. *The Prince of the Pond: Otherwise Known as De Fawg Pin* (1992), *Ella Enchanted* (1997), *Confessions of an Ugly Stepsister: A Novel* (1999), *The Goose Girl* (2003) are examples among quite a few.

| Type 7 | Retellings switching the roles of characters in the originals: Such a type of stories intentionally reverses the common assumptions toward the roles played by specific animals/people. At the first glance, although this type may apply a similar strategy of role reversal as the tales of Type 1A do, it carries no underlying feminist messages. For instance, in *The Three Wolves and the Big Bad Pig* (1997), the role of the big bad wolf is replaced by a pig while there are three little wolves assuming the position of the three pigs in the original tale. *Somebody and the Three Blairs* (1991), a satirical send-up of “Goldilocks and the Three Bears” serves another similar example in which somebody becomes a bear who intrudes into the house of |

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6 Stephens and McCallum are two of the scholars who use the term “folktale” interchangeably with “fairy tale”
the Blair family.

| Type 8 | Postmodern/metafictional stories with fairy-tale motifs or elements: It is usually hard to identify which specific fairy tale is adapted in the stories belonging to this category. Unlike the postmodern picture book *The Stinky Cheese Man and other Fairy Stupid Tales* which contained identifiable fairy-tale characters such as Jack, Ugly Duckling and Little Red Hen, this type of books/tales only applies motifs or elements of the genre and combines them with the narrative strategy of postmodernism, for example, double-layered or fragmented stories. *Who’s Afraid of the Big Bad Book?* (2003), *Once upon a Cool Motorcycle Dude* (2005) and *An Undone Fairy Tale* (2005) can be listed as instances; all of the three picture books break the boundaries between the narrators (the protagonists as story-tellers) and the tales they tell in the books, presented through in the verbal and visual texts. This type of fairy-tale retellings which possesses “drastic” postmodern features also fits the description Stephens and McCallum (1998) claim: “…the conventionalized forms of folktales—for example, the formulaic beginnings and endings, the general recourse to character stereotypes, the recurrent patterns of action—tend to reinforce existing metanarratives and so make it difficult to reshape the stories without recourse to more drastic processes of revision, such as parody, metafiction, or frame-breaking” (p. 201). |

**Table 1-Typology of Contemporary Disruptive Fairy-Tale Variants**

The typology presented above forms a guideline if any work of contemporary reworked fairy tales is meant to be categorized. However, sometimes a text may have features from more than one type listed in this typology. For example, the novel *Just Ella* (1999) describes the dull life in the palace after Ella is found by the prince, a story happening after the happy ending of “Cinderella” (Type 3). At the same time, the author also provides a detailed character development of Ella (Type 6). *Fairest of All: A Tale of the
Wicked Queen (2009), another reworked novel based on Disney’s “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,” also provides a complex mental development of the characters (Type 6), especially the new queen (the stepmother of Snow White) and the reasons for her transformation as well as the motivations behind her cruel deeds. Besides, the major focalizer of the story is the queen so it presents a narrative from the evil character’s point of view (Type 2). Additionally, the picture book Bubba the Cowboy Prince: A Fractured Texas Tale, a fractured tale based on the fairy tale “Cinderella,” combines the feature of gender switch from Type 1 with that of an alternative setting (Texas) from Type 5. Lastly, a book may even display the application of more than two types of strategies. With combination of Type 2, Type 3 and Type 6, I Was a Rat! (2002) is also another fairy-tale variant of “Cinderella” which happens after the original tale, is focalized from the viewpoint of a minor character (a boy turned from a rat in Cinderella’s kitchen) and offers an in-depth characterization development of the protagonist as well as the social setting. In a word, it can be foreseen that the genre of fairy tales “will continue to be mediated for young audiences” through a variety of strategies and methods listed above (or even more) “so as to convey a sense of universal human values moral insight and some aspect of cultural tradition” (Stephens and McCallum, 1998, p. 227).

A Juxtaposition of Fairy Tales to Promote Critical Literacy of Children

No matter which type a work of contemporary fairy tale variant can fall into, all of them present a series of creative and subversive strategies children’s authors employ to dispute the prior assumptions toward fairy tales modern children might already internalized. In other words, we may say that such texts provide similar functions as “re-caption” asserted by Adrienne Rich (1972) in her article, “When We Dead Awaken:
Writing as Revision,” referring to “the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction” (p. 18). Although Rich refers this concept of “re-vision” mainly to casting a fresh and critical look at the relationship between an oppressive economic class system and the sexual class system which caused the oppressive nature of male/female relations and encouraging women to pursue self-knowledge and resume power against male-dominated society through writing as a way of “re-naming” (p. 23), it certainly shares a similarity with rewriting fairy tales from alternative angles in order to bestow the old texts with a new look. Through the form of books written for children, more and more instances can be found which offer the child reader “fresh eyes” to understand the genre of fairy tales and examine the inherent stereotypes in the classic versions critically. While the classic versions can be used to bestow modern children a deeper understanding of the roots of the old genre, various types of contemporary disruptive texts offer a systematic way of subversion to unsettle what they hold as truth about fairy tales. These new stories can be employed to achieve collaboratively with the old versions of fairy tales the goal of promoting critical literacy of school-aged children.

Both Linda E. Western (1980) and Trousdale (1989b), among many other scholars, show their agreement for the positive effect of such a juxtaposition and comparison of literature (fairy tale variants, specifically) upon children:

If children are to be introduced to a ‘progressive and systematic study’ (Northrop Frye, 1970) of literature, they will require activities involving extensive comparison, so that they may begin to learn the important general understanding that literature grows out of literature, or, as Jane Yolen has put it, ‘stories lean on stories’ (1977). (Western, p. 395)
Trousdale also mentions:

The comparative analysis provides an exercise in literary analysis and criticism that is within the grasp of elementary-age children. The value of such an exercise lies in the children’s own discovery and analysis of the various elements in the tales, and in the accompanying discussions. (p. 245).

Nevertheless, while I hold the assumption from an adult’s point of view that such a juxtaposed reading of both classic fairy tales and their contemporary disruptive variants can be applied as a way to benefit modern children in building their critical thinking ability and giving them a chance to re-examine their memories toward fairy tales, there may still be gaps between what I assume and how children actually perceive such a way of re-introducing fairy tales which they may already be familiar with. As Trousdale (1989a) has once stated, “. . . we might have more to learn about children’s responses to fairy tales by paying attention to how children do respond to them, rather than by trying to predict what their responses will or should be” (p. 37).

Besides, the previous study I held with five pre-service teachers about their responses to five contemporary retellings of the Cinderella tale also strengthened my mind to work with children to get their direct reactions instead for the research of my dissertation. While these future educators mostly agree on the possible effect which modern retellings may bring to children, their thoughts still appear to be adult assumptions. As a result, this motivated me to conduct a qualitative research with school-aged children to collect their actual responses to both the classic versions of fairy tales and the contemporary disruptive retellings so as to see if such a juxtaposed method of introducing the genre can be beneficial to children to achieve the goal of promoting critical literacy.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, I provide two sections illustrating the two research procedures I had conducted before I formally put my qualitative study with children into practice—literature review and theoretical framework. The first section is meant to give an overview of the previous research done in the past two decades about children’s responses to fairy tales or to literary works (children’s stories/books) in general. There is a considerable amount of the articles/books in my review which are specifically related to the issue of gender while others focus on different aspects such as intertextuality. Building a basis on the examination of those former relevant works, I designed the framework of various theories as the theoretical foundation of my own research.

Literature Review

Earlier research about the effect of fairy tales on children mainly remains at the level of conducting pure evaluation of texts and then making assumptions. Kristen Wardetzky (1990) points out that “given the variety of effects attributed to fairy tales, it is surprising that none of the positions taken by psychological or pedagogical critics of fairy tales has been subjected to empirical investigation. The disciplines of literary criticism and folklore have also contributed to discussions of the subject, yet only a minuscule number of studies have attempted to illuminate the effectual components of fairy-tale reception” (p. 159). However, along with the gradual rising attention of children’s literature and actual children’s interactions with literary texts, such a situation has changed. During the past two decades, exploring elementary school-aged children’s
responses to fairy tales has become a popular research topic, especially in the field of education.

As a matter of fact, Trousdale (1989a, 1989b, 1995, 2003) has devoted her earlier research largely to analyzing children’s responses to selected fairy tales. In the article “Let the Children Tell Us: The Meaning of Fairy Tales for Children” (1989a), using both the classic versions (Brothers Grimm’s) and television adaptations (Faerie Tale Theatre) of “Snow White” and “The Sleeping Beauty,” Trousdale interviewed three girls to find out that those research participants were all actively engaged in making their own meanings of the chosen tales, according to their own personal experiences, preoccupations, and inner needs. Her findings from this research indicate that several of the patterns discovered in these children’s responses “present a united argument that adult interpretations of fairy tales are not necessarily the interpretations that children will make” (p. 41).

Trousdale later put much focus on inquiring into the reception of a seven-year-old girl toward “feminist” fairy tales.7 Analyzing the responses of her participant, she discovered the ambivalent feelings of the girl toward the images of strong and independent females with physical strength and unattractive looks. While admiring the power which made the various accomplishments of these strong female protagonists to occur, the girl also showed her reluctance to be “like” them, reflecting an adherence to traditional norms and the need to be socially acceptable. Nevertheless, the attraction of these unconventional heroines to the girl still indicates the importance of giving children

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7 The feminist tales (“Tatterhood,” “Twelve Hunsmen,” and “Three Strong Women”) Trousdale chose for her later research were older texts and actually derived from the oral tradition so they formed part of the body of “classic” fairy tales as well, like other patriarchal tales such as “Cinderella.”
“the opportunity to read and to discuss alternative models of female behavior such as those offered by ‘feminist’ folktales’ so that they can “actively reflect on, articulate, evaluate, and deconstruct models of femininity that are sanctioned by society” (Trousdale, 1995, p. 179).

Such a trend of investigating the issue of gender in fairy tales and its influence upon children is not limited to the studies of Trousdale. Bronwyn Davies' *Frogs and Snails and Feminist Tales: Preschool Children and Gender* (1989) is an ethnography of how Australian preschool children's play, their conversation, and their responses to literary feminist fairy tales such as *The Paper Bag Princess* (Robert Munsch and Michael Martchenko, 1980) can provide new insight into the social construction of gender.

Assuming a theoretical lens of poststructuralist feminism, Davies argues that “[c]hildren can take up a range of both masculine and feminine positionings in contexts where that multiplicity is constituted as non-problematic” through being given access to alternative, liberating stories as opposed to well-received patriarchal tales presenting a fixed order of gender (p. 12). Moreover, Davies’ 2004 ethnographical study (co-authored with Hiroyuki Kasama) titled *Gender in Japanese Preschools: Frogs and Snails and Feminist Tales in Japan* further explores the formation of gender identity from Japanese preschool children’s responses to two chosen feminist stories. The significance of this research lies in the fact that it is one of the few studies treating Asian children as the research subjects, and juxtaposed with Davies’ previous research about Australian ones, it serves as a comparative study to show how the influence of culture laid upon these preschool

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8 Besides *The Paper Bag Princess*, the other feminist story applied in the research was *Oliver Button Is a Sissy* (Tomie DePaola, 1979). Both books were employed in Davies’ former Australian study.
children’s responses to the selected tales. In this study, Davies and Kasama find that the responses of Japanese children, while sharing certain similarities with those of their Australian counterpart, were deeply influenced by their cultural education and various customs. They tended to behave more conservatively and “properly,” presenting a unique Japanese way of doing gender.

Meredith Rogers Cherland (1992) also mentions the effect of social/cultural background on children’s readings—“Anthropology reminds me that children do not read in a vacuum. They are part of a culture, part of a society. People share cultural norms for acting as readers” (p. 187). The influence of one’s social/cultural background further molds children to “behave in gender-appropriate ways in all the activities and practices of their daily lives” (p. 187). Analyzing the talks of fourteen literature response groups formed by sixth graders, Cherland discovered the pattern of “gendered readings” and termed the two types of discourses relatively applied by males and females—“discourse of action” and “discourse of feeling” to indicate the possibility that gender may affect the type of talk used in discussions (p. 189). Although the texts Cherland used in this research were actually not fairy tales, the mode of gendered readings found by her functions as a basic framework for analyzing the important differences in children’s responses to literature between genders.

In his article “What If Beauty Had Been Ugly?: Reading Against the Grain of Gender Bias in Children’s Books,” Charles Temple (1993) examined how children’s stories with depictions implying gender bias help to build children’s assumptions about sex roles in society. Through observing a female elementary school teacher reading the story of “Beauty and the Beast” to a mixed class of twenty-five second and third graders
and the group discussion afterwards, he found the surprising fact that “children don’t just have to receive stories passively. Children are capable . . . of arguing back” (p. 93). Thus, according to Temple, teaching children to read “against the grain,” that is, to question roles and relationships in stories as readers, may function as a better way than banning books.

In addition, the mixed method research of Ella Westland (1993) “Cinderella in the Classroom: Children's Responses to Gender Roles in Fairy-Tales” included over 100 boys and girls aged nine to eleven in five Cornish primary schools, whose perceptions of fairy tales were recorded through group discussions, pictures they drew, and stories they wrote. While the boys appeared to have little liking for the alternatives to the standard fairy-tale structure because they had more to lose than to gain from the changes, the girls argued they would not want to be a princess because it was simply too boring and restrictive. The stories written by these girls were closely molded on contemporary feminist stories with independent, plain, and active heroines. As a result, Westland concluded that the work of the past few decades has indeed created a generation of “resisting readers” and such a resistance “can best be encouraged by making them familiar with alternative gender images, including upside-down fairy tales” as well as “by increasing their understanding of the ways in which cultural forms like the fairy-tale create sex stereotypes” (p. 246).

A similar study about exploring the influence of gender on children’s responses to literature among small-group discussions was conducted by Karen S. Evans in 1996. Like Temple, Evans also points out “many of the narratives young children encounter contain
a narrow range of roles available to them as males and females” (pp. 183-84). Therefore, Evans brings up the notion that children’s ability to read against the grain may be affected by the type of text being read (p. 184). Furthermore, she located patterns of “gender readings” noted by Cherland in the talks of the all-girl and mixed gendered literature discussion groups of fifth graders, with few exceptions. Although Evans seemed to repeat what Cherland did in her research by revealing the effect of gender on literary responses, she also stated that “[l]abeling such talk as ‘gendered talk,’ however, should not be interpreted to mean that gender is the only factor that influences the type of talk used in discussions” (p. 187). Borrowing from the term of Louis Rosenblatt (1978)—“lived-through experience,” Evans also discussed various intertextual connections with such experiences of her research participants appearing in the responses while they interpreted the given novels.

The research focus of examining the impact of gendered storylines upon the formation of children’s gender identity and how intertextual connections in children’s responses to certain multicultural fairy tales indicate their ability to resist the impact can also be found in the research conducted by Elizabeth Yeoman (1999). Drawing on data collected from a case study in which the participating fourth and fifth graders responded to books like *Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters* (John Steptoe, 1987) and wrote their own stories, Yeoman states that repeated exposure to certain images and themes produced by influential institutions such as the Disney studios does seem to have a cumulative effect on children’s concepts toward gender; hence, she proposed the method to expose children “to a rich variety of disruptive texts and response activities” so as to develop children’s
intertextual knowledge and enhance their ability to critique limiting stories and to understand and create new texts” (p. 438).

Sipe (2000) also shares Yeoman’s emphasis on examining intertextual links made by children. In this study, he located such connections made during the storybook read-aloud sessions in three primary classrooms (one kindergarten and two first/second grade combination), with the goal of identifying the functions of the between-text associations. The significance of his research lies in that it has been the first one which focused on the responses of young children instead of older ones and also started to applied imaginative literature as texts for those child participants rather than nonfictional works. Four reasons within two major purposes (hermeneutic/interpretive and aesthetic) for children to make intertextual links, intentionally or not, have been deduced from the data he collected so as to serve as a systematic way to categorize types of such connections.

Two more up-to-date studies about exploring children’s responses to fairy tales targeted younger children aged seven to eight and focused the analysis of different variants of a single tale in the respective research (Sipe, 2001; Al-Jafar and Buzzelli, 2004). Different from past research in this aspect, both researchers no longer emphasized solely the issue of gender in their inquiries. Continuing his research focus on children’s intertextual connections while discussing imaginative literature, Sipe (2001) chose to let his research participants respond to five variants of “Rapunzel” and examined the various intertextual links among the stories. From the children’s responses, he identified seven types of intertextual connections under three conceptual categories9 and further

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9 The three conceptual categories Sipes differentiated are “personal,” (life-to-text or text-to-life), “text-to-text,” and “schema-building” connections. The seven types of intertextual connections are the sub-
consolidated his findings into “a ground theory of young children’s schema-building for
traditional stories” (p. 333). All except one (Petrosinella: A Neapolitan Rapunzel, Diane
Stanley, 1995) of the chosen texts are based on the classic version of the Rapunzel tale,
with little variations in plot and narrative scheme; the Stanley variant, on the other hand,
departs significantly from the plot. Although the mixture of four traditional stories and
only one disruptive text may seem to be imbalanced and accidental, Sipe’s further built-
up typology of intertextual connections is worth of being borrowed and applied in future
similar research.

Also using different variants of the same tale, Ali Al-Jafar and Cary A. Buzzelli
(2004) chose two versions of “Cinderella,” one was a “familiar” version and the other
was a Kuwaiti version (“On My Mother The Fish,” Wells and Al-Batini, 1987) for their
research participants to respond to. The unique choice of the Kuwaiti version may reflect
the “autobiographical roots” of one of the researchers, Al-Jafar (Seidman, 2006, p. 32).
The major purpose of showing children multicultural versions of the same fairy tale is to
promote world peace, that is, using the variants to develop children’s understanding and
appreciation of other cultures: “By connecting different versions of the same tale from
different parts of the world, the tales become the starting point for a dialogue between
nations and between the children in those nations” (p. 42).

More recently, Carina Coulacoglou (2008), a child psychologist and test developer,
has collected several studies conducted by her fellow researchers on studying children’s
mental development with various personal backgrounds through the “fairy tale test” (FTT)
in her book Exploring the Child’s Personality: Developmental, Clinical and Cross-
categories under each conceptual category.
Cultural Applications of the Fairy Tale Test. Positioned under the paradigm of empiricism/positivism, the series of studies present various data about children’s psychology through the practice of a standardized FTT on a considerable number of children as research subjects. For example, there are chapters on clinical applications of the FTT on children with mental disorders (learning disabilities), children with mild mental retardation and children with psychotic symptoms. Additionally, the FTT were also taken by children from different cultural backgrounds such as Russian, Chinese, Greek, Indian and Turkish. Such a cross-cultural avenue serves as another attempt to broaden fairy tale studies on children’s responses, but the studies themselves tend to have a more clinical orientation. Like Davies and Kasama’s ethnographical study in Japan, Coulacoglou et al also discover that cultural background lays heavy influence upon the result of FIT taken by children.

Different from the quantitative approach applied by Coulacoglou et al, the action research of an elementary school teacher, Ryan T. Bourke (2008), with the goal of enhancing children’s ability of critical thinking and further changing the view with which they perceive literature as well as the world around them, serves as a qualitative study about exploring the relationship between children and fairy tales. He conducted a series of classroom activities to challenge the assumptions of a group of first graders toward the genre of fairy tales. For instance, after his read-aloud of “Three Billy Goats Gruff,” he asked his students to put themselves in the Troll’s shoe in order to reconsider the “face value” dynamic of good and evil forces presented in the story (p. 306). In addition, he also detected a tendency of having color stereotypes, that is, to associate dark colors as evil, from his students’ responses to two renditions of “Little Red Riding Hood.” While
engaging himself in the discussion with his students, Bourke tried to teach them to argue with texts so as to equip them with a critical lens:

I wanted them to ‘stay from the path,’ so to speak, to break the association of darkness with evil, of beauty with whiteness, and to begin considering alternative possibilities in which a character who is ugly could be good, and a character who is dark could be beautiful (p. 308).

Moreover, using the tale of “Jack and the Beanstalk,” he posed the question “Could things have happened differently?” to his students and asked them to create alternative plots for their “self-authored fairy tales” (pp. 309-10). By demonstrating how to practice these activities, Bourke urges other educators to “consider their classrooms the critical landscape in which to continue this story—a story that, with their contribution, has potential to live on happily ever after” (p. 311).

After conducting a literature review of current research on studying contemporary disruptive fairy tale variants and children’s responses toward such texts, I now present my theoretical framework in the following section.

**Theoretical Framework**

Compared with contemporary disruptive variants of fairy tales, the classic versions may appear to form a body of the grand narrative which serves as the source of dominance and authority. From a new historical perspective, such a powerful source can be resolved by granting the existence of “a plurality of voices” so as to ensure the “master narrative—a narrative told from a single cultural point of view that, nevertheless, presumes to offer the only accurate version of history—will no longer control our historical understanding” (Tyson, 2006, p. 287). However, in my opinion, these old versions of fairy tales may as well be treated as one type of voice among many others. As
mentioned above, thanks to the advanced development of mass media and popular culture, the impressions of modern children towards the genre of fairy tales are mainly built upon those media-based adaptations, such as those animated productions of the Disney studios, which may seem to be the real source of controlling force. Introducing these young readers to both the traditional versions of fairy tales and their various disruptive variants, therefore, can lead them to recognize the existence of “a plurality of voices” in the field of fairy tales and further challenge the original knowledge they hold and internalize in mind.

The various types of contemporary disruptive fairy-tale retellings, doubtlessly, contribute to the formation of “a plurality of voices.” For instance, variants retold from an unexpected role in the primary tale such as the villains like the big bad wolf, the stepmother/stepsister and the witch, or any minor characters like the pea under the twenty layers of bed cloths, the rat transformed back from one of the white horses drawing the pumpkin coach and the seventh dwarf in the forest, all present a surprising aspect of the primary fairy tale. The originally silenced voices are also given an opportunity to speak out for themselves. Besides, new stories presenting the prequel or sequel of the original tale also add to the body of plural voices. These imaginative extensions of fairy tales hence serve as the proof of a new historical notion that there is no monolithic discourse and “adequate totalizing explanation of history (an explanation that provides a single key to all aspects of a given culture). There is, instead, a dynamic, unstable interplay among discourses; they are always in a state of flux, overlapping and competing with one another. . . no discourse is permanent” (Tyson, 2006, p. 285).
Furthermore, considering the issue of gender has always been a target of discussion in the fairy tale studies, a poststructuralist feminist point of view can better illustrate what I want to point out about the fluidity and changeability of the concept of gender in both the ancient versions of fairy tales and the modern feminist ones. The classic fairy tales have been recognized for their imposition of a rigid and male-dominant construction of gender identity in the socialization process of children for a number of years; as a result, various feminist fairy tales were written as a subversive force against such an imposition. However, the position of poststructuralist feminist theory to break the binary opposition of gender structure can help us examine both types of texts more closely: there may be images of strong females found in the traditional fairy tales while contemporary feminist versions can still involve and reinforce certain biased gender representations.

As noted by Davies (1989), one of the assumptions of poststructuralist feminist theory is that “maleness and femaleness do no have to be discursively structured in the way that they currently are. Genitals do not have to be linked to feminine or masculine subjectivities unless we constitute them that way” (p. 12). Hence, texts which provide most possibilities and multiplicity of gender structure can serve the best to the purpose of encouraging young readers to “take up a range of both masculine and feminine positionings” (Davies, 1989, p. 12). On the other hand, the juxtaposition of classic fairy tales and modern disruptive variants may stimulate children to reflect on their prior positioning imposed by their gender, social/cultural background and past experiences. Since the juxtaposed reading method I propose involves two types of texts—traditional versions of fairy tales and their contemporary disruptive retellings, the term “literary allusion” (both overt and covert) is naturally recalled during any attempt of
comparison between these types of texts due to the fact that the latter type is built upon
the former one. According to Ziva Ben-Porat (1976), literary allusion can be defined as:

- a device for **the simultaneous activation of two texts**. The activation is
  achieved through the manipulation of a special signal, a sign (simple or
  complex) in a given text characterized by an additional larger “referent.” This
  referent is always an independent text. The simultaneous activation of the
  two texts thus connected results in the formation of **intertextual patterns**
  whose nature cannot be predetermined. (pp. 107-08, my italic emphases)

The literary allusions embedded in the modern retellings can be associated with
another term—“intertextuality”—each new text as a “mosaic of quotations” (Kristeva,
1980, p. 66), which means an author’s borrowing and transformation of a prior text.

While intentional literary allusions may appear to be somewhat contradictory to
Kristeva’s idea of intertextuality which simply means that “no text, much as it might like
to appear so, is original and unique-in-itself; rather it is a tissue of inevitable, and to an
extent unwitting, references to and quotations from other texts” (Allen, 2005), there is
still a certain common ground both concepts share enabling me to illuminate the
phenomenon of a reader’s attempt to reference one text in reading another. Such a
juxtaposition of fairy tales should create a potentially intertextually rich context so as to
provide the four children involved in my research with a chance of developing their
capacity to respond to literary allusions, that is, making them sense “the simultaneous
activation of two texts.” Thus, in their responses to the chosen texts, the formation of
intertextual links should be easily detected.

While there may be intertextual connections made by each of my research
participants, the social/cultural differences among these young readers may in a certain
way affect their responses to literary allusions. Douglas K. Hartman (1995) points out that intertextuality in people’s responses has to do with “linking texts” (523). Reading both traditional versions and contemporary variants, readers will make intertextual connections not only between the two kinds of tales but also between the tales and their knowledge and past experiences, as a form of “text,” too. Due to the fact that the repertoire of individual reader’s prior “texts” can be drastically dissimilar from one another because of the differences of his/her gender, social/cultural background and lived experiences, the way he/she responds to literary allusion should be different as well.

Such an assumption may resonate with the reader response theory of Louise Rosenblatt. Rosenblatt (1938/1976) was one of the earliest scholars who emphasized the crucial role of the reader in the process of constructing meaning from a given literary work (or “poem,” as she later called it in her book *The Reader, the Text, the Poem* published in 1978). According to Rosenblatt, the production of literature exists only in the interaction of reader and text; this is also the so-called “transactional theory” of the literary work. Such a transaction is contingent upon the reader’s culture, attitudes, values, customs, relationships, expectations, and interactions. In other words, the meaning of a particular text may vary, depending on how the reader perceives it. As Lee Galda and Richard Beach (2001) claim in their article “Response to Literature as a Cultural Activity,” “[r]eaders have expectations for how people ought to behave, expectations that are shaped by the cultures in which they live and work. These expectations hold true for characters’ behaviors, as well, as many readers treat characters as people regardless of the fact that they exist only in literary transaction” (65). Although readers here most probably refer to adults, I believe this concept works to young readers as well. A person’s
“lived-through experience” (Rosenblatt’s term) shapes greatly his/her perception of the world, and of course, of literary works.

As manifested in the title of my dissertation, the ultimate goal for leading children to have a juxtaposed reading of old and new versions of fairy tales is to provoke their capacity of responding to texts critically, challenging their schemata toward the genre while making use of their intertextual knowledge under the influence of their unique personal background. Encouraging readers to actively analyze texts and offer strategies for uncovering underlying messages lies behind the pedagogical approach of “critical literacy,” which stems from critical social theory. According to Paulo Freire (1972), critical literacy can be regarded as a means of empowering the unempowered populations against oppression and exploitation. The term “praxis,” first introduced in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972), refers to an ongoing process of reflection and action in order to be able to step into the shoes of the oppressed and help the oppressed transform oppressors. Another term created by him is “conscientization,” which means “self-determination,” the development of a consciousness recognized as having the power to change reality. Although Freire may have mainly referred to “the unempowered populations” as the cultural minority who have been unrepresented, I think children can be considered one group belonging to this category. It is commonly assumed that children tend to accept whatever concept or knowledge is imposed upon them due to their vulnerability and impressionability; thus, in a sense, they can be regarded as a group being psychologically and cognitively oppressed and controlled. As Beverly Kingston, Bob Regoli and John D. Hewitt (2002) point out, “[b]ecause children lack power due to their age, size, and lack of resources, they are easy targets for adult oppression. Children
are exposed to different levels and types of oppression that vary depending on their age, level of development, socioeconomic class, race, and the beliefs and perceptions of their parents” (p. 237). Hence, encouraging children to emerge in the “praxis” with the instructional approach of critical literacy therefore can empower them through “conscientization” and make them become critical thinkers to examine the powerful influence of their former education and personal background upon their perception of the world and further make possible changes of the present situation. Moreover, through such an effort of promoting critical literacy of children, adults can have an opportunity to evaluate their primary assumptions about children’s vulnerability and conformability so as to get a sense of children’s ability to go against the grain.

Margaret C. Hagood (2002) states that “[c]ritical literacy, then, is about making students more knowledgeable and aware of the texts that surround them and ones they choose” (248). While presenting an overview of critical literacy, Hagood in the same article also summarizes the ideas of Allan Luke and Peter Freebody (1997): “critical literacy is a means for analyzing how powerful institutional contexts (such as formal schooling) act as regulating institutions for knowledge and resources” (248). We may consider such “powerful institutional contexts” monopolizing children’s impressions toward fairy tales are mainly media-based adaptations nowadays, led by the Disney productions. As a result, providing children an access to a series of alternatives including early classic versions as well as recent disruptive retellings of fairy tales and teaching them to question the normative practices and ideologies in these texts may achieve the function of broadening their general view of the genre and further releasing themselves from the ideological impositions. Thus, the result of my research can function to justify
the inclusion of a juxtaposed reading of old and new fairy tales into the curriculum of elementary school education.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The literature review presented in Chapter 2 indicates that most previous research analyzing children’s responses to fairy tales or literature in general were conducted through small group discussions with children instead of showing individual child’s reactions to literary works and comparing among cases. Hence, I decided to apply this different approach as the major way to distinguish my research from former related studies with the goal of adding to the body of literature body on this topic.

Research Structure and Methods

For my research intending to understand children’s individual responses to the juxtaposed reading of classic and modern fairy-tale versions mentioned earlier, I decided to apply the research method of “case study,” treating one single child as the unit of analysis. As Sharon Merriam (2002) points out, qualitative case studies possess the features of “the search for meaning and understanding, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, an inductive investigative strategy, and the end product being richly descriptive” (p. 179). Thus, as the principal investigator, I am able to discover how children’s reactions to fairy tales influence the development of their critical literacy and present my findings in a “richly descriptive” fashion through the research method of case study.

Moreover, to broaden the range of my research, more than one case was explored and studied; thus, the structure was in fact a multiple case study. Robert E. Stake (2006) provides a description about the definition and nature of a multiple case study:
The multicase study is a special effort to examine something having lots of cases, parts, or members. . . One small collection of people, activities, policies, strengths, problems, or relationships is studied in detail. Each case to be studied has its own problems and relationships. The cases have their stories to tell, and some of them are included in the multicase report, but the official interest is in the collection of these cases or in the phenomenon exhibited in those cases. . . The unique life of the case is interesting for what it can reveal about the quintain. (“the whole”) (vi)

Stakes’ description illustrates a similar goal which my own research constructed as a multiple case study intended to achieve. While I collected data through separate interviews with each of my research participants, my analysis covered both the one within a single case and cross cases so as to present what each case revealed about the main issue of critical literacy.

For selecting the research participants, according to Merriam (2002), “the process of conducting a case study begins with the selection of the ‘case.’ The selection [should be] done purposefully, not randomly… bounded system is selected because it exhibits characteristics of interest to the researcher” (p. 179). Therefore, I employed the technique of “purposeful maximal sampling” (Creswell, 2007) in order to achieve the aim of “maximum variation” (Patton, 2001), that is, to select cases that both reflect my research interest and show different perspectives on my research problem. Such a sampling approach, according to Irving Seidman (2006), “provides the most effective basic strategy for selecting participants for interview studies” (p. 52).

Due to my own Chinese cultural background, I am most interested in studying how children coming from American culture will react similarly or differently to fairy tales
from children sharing the same cultural background as mine.\textsuperscript{10} Thus, I chose two Chinese and two American children—Li-Kwen, Ning-Ning, Rafiki and Wendy.\textsuperscript{11} In addition, in order to be able to examine how the factor of gender influenced the participants’ responses to the texts, I decided to make an equal gender distribution for each cultural group which contained one boy and one girl. These four children all shared a similar age of eight or nine years old, being either second or third graders.

Within the structure of a multiple case study, the major way of data collection I employed in my research was interviewing. David Silverman (2006) listed several benefits of such method, based on Tim Rapley’s suggestions in his book chapter in \textit{Qualitative Research Practice} (2004): first, qualitative interviewing requires no special skills; it demands simply trying to interact with interviewee(s), trying to comprehend their opinions, experience and thoughts. Furthermore, interviews are “collaboratively produced” by both interviewer and interviewee(s). The interviewee does not merely provide his/her experience in a passive manner; through interacting with the interviewer and answering other various questions, more truths emerge. In this sense, the interviewer can be regarded as an “active participant” who still has a certain level of control, opening and closing different conversational topics. (p. 112) If the interviewer happens to be the same person as the researcher (the one who analyze the data), like in my case, I am able to play an even more active role of processing the information obtained from the interviews and offering my interpretation.

\textsuperscript{10} Such a decision may serve as the proof of my effort as a researcher to identify my “autobiographical roots” of my interest in my topic “in order to sustain the energy needed to do the research well” (Seidman, 2006, p. 32).

\textsuperscript{11} These pseudonyms all share the same first letters of my research participants’ real names and are intended to reflect the gender and cultural background of each child.
Bridget Byrne (2004) also confirms the positive effect of using interviews as the way to collect qualitative data:

…qualitative interviewing is particularly useful as a research method for accessing individuals’ attitudes and values—things that cannot necessarily be observed or accommodated in a formal questionnaire. Open-ended and flexible questions are likely to get a more considered response that closed questions and therefore provide better access to interviewees’ views, interpretation of events, understandings, experiences and opinions… [It] is able to achieve a level of depth and complexity that is not available to other, particularly survey-based, approaches. (p. 182)

As well, Seidman (2006) in his book *Interviewing as Qualitative Research* mentions that “[i]nterviewing provides access to the context of people’s behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior” (p. 10). Since the main purpose of my study is to obtain the “subjective understanding” of what children make out of their experience of reading chosen literary texts, interviewing appeared to be the most efficient avenue of inquiry for me.

In addition, interviewing can be divided into one-on-one and within a focus group in terms of the number of interviewee(s) participating simultaneously in one interview. I decided to carry out the former type because the advantage of this approach was that I could let each individual participant take his/her time constructing what he/she wanted to describe and hear separately how each of the four participants made sense of his/her experiences of reading the selected texts, without worrying about possible interruptions from other participants, as in the setting of a small group discussion. Additionally, the series of one-on-one interviews conducted with each participant in my research constructed the basic formation for understanding each specific case.
Research Procedures

Before formally beginning the process of the series of one-on-one interviews, I made a pre-interview contact with each of my participants during which I arranged some “warm-up” activities to probe his/her primary impressions toward the genre of fairy tales. The first activity was to have a brief discussion about what he/she thought to be a fairy tale and what indispensible elements it should contain. Then I asked him/her to draw a picture to reflect his/her mental image of a fairy tale immediately coming to mind. These two ventures aimed to gain a general view of their initial knowledge of fairy tales and trace the major sources upon which these children built their prior impressions of the genre.

As the third way to explore my participants’ opinions about fairy tales, I asked each of them to choose among three categories of photos/pictures of characters—princess, princes and witches— the most proper ones to match with his/her mental images of what these characters should look like. Such an identification exercise was performed so as to get a general understanding of their internalized perceptions toward common fairy-tale figures. The pictures I selected for this activity included both “conventional” and “unconventional” images from books, animated films and the real world in order to provide the most variety to the children.

Besides engaging my research participants in the activities mentioned above during this pre-interview visit, I also had a brief talk with the child’s mother, for the

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12 I selected twenty pictures to be included in each category, letting my participants respond to sixty images in total in this activity.
13 “Conventional” images of fairy-tale characters refer to the ones which fit the general impressions toward a certain type of figures while “unconventional” ones tend to range beyond common expectations. For instance, the pictures of “Disney Princesses” may be most likely be categorized as the former group while “Princess Fiona” in the ogress form from the movie “Shrek” may belong to the latter.
purpose of getting more background information about the child participant’s prior knowledge of fairy tales, that is, the major sources which he/she has been exposed so far. These conversations were not recorded, but I kept some fieldnotes to note down all the points helpful for my further analysis. Although the ideas or opinions of the parents were not the focus of my research, they offered the function of triangulation for my interpretation, especially the aspect of how their cultural background and family education laid influence upon the responses of my participants.

With each of the children, I conducted three formal interviews, using different tales and texts every time.\(^{14}\) The choices of classic fairy tales I made were mainly based on the high level of their popularity and children’s familiarity with them.\(^{15}\) According to the pre-research investigation conducted by Coulacoglou (2008) for her collaborative clinical studies on the FTT applications on children, out of the most popular fairy tales, three tales are translated in most languages—“Little Red Riding Hood,” “Snow White,” and “Cinderella,” and thus are relatively familiar among children cross-culturally (Preface, xi). Hence, these three tales were included. Besides, I also chose tales which have media-based adaptations like the Disney productions well-known and well-accessed to children nowadays in general.

Moreover, as shown in the typology I listed in my research proposition in Chapter one, there are several types of contemporary disruptive retellings of fairy tales. For the series of one-on-one interviews with my four participants, along with the earlier versions

\(^{14}\) Despite the fact that the images chosen for the picture identification activity ranged beyond printed works, I made a decision to limit the sphere of texts I applied for formal interviews to only stories/books in the printed format.

\(^{15}\) The popularity of tales means that they have most adaptations, compared with other ones. Children’s familiarity mentioned here refers to a higher level of acceptance of these tales among children through any types of adaptations, not necessarily the traditional versions of them.
by Charles Perrault or Brothers Grimm, I selected texts from mainly three disruptive types (Type 1~Type 3) which form a systematic and organized way to introduce the texts and to challenge children’s original thoughts toward the genre of fairy tales. I chose one type for each interview. In my future continuing studies, I expect that I can continue exploring children’s responses to the juxtaposition of traditional fairy tales and other types of modern retellings listed in my typology presented in Chapter 1.

In order to save time for a more in-depth question and answer section, I asked my research participants to read the assigned classic versions of the chosen tales prior to every one-on-one interview. Right after every one-on-one interview began, each child was requested to draw a picture based on his/her strongest impression toward the tale(s) at that time. For some, they were free drawings with no assigned topics but for others, there were specific topics. These drawings served as a way to collect their visual responses to the chosen texts. Jon Prosser (1998) suggests a similar direction to enlarge the study scale of contemporary qualitative research by pointing out that “the one unifying theme of Image-based Research is the belief that research should be more visual (p. 109, my italic emphasis). Although my research is not entirely “image-based,” the inclusion of children’s drawings as data can be beneficial in broadening its range as well as functioning as one of the methods to achieve triangulation. As Rob Walker (1993) states, “[h]ow can we use language as a basis from which to develop a degree of reflexivity about our use of language? One possibility is to find forms of communication

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16 Ch. 4 provides an introduction and textual analysis for the texts I used in this research.
17 For some tales, I assigned a special topic for them to draw, such as the “true story” of the designated tale they thought to be, the image of the “witch” in “Hansel and Gretel” and the “ending” of “The Frog Prince,” in order to limit the choices of elements to be included in the drawings so that I could make comparisons with specific emphasis.
that offer the possibility of triangulation on the use of language itself. I believe that still photographs hold this promise” (p. 73). Despite the fact that the “images” mentioned by Walker are “still photographs,” I consider the drawings by children can lead to a similar effect of serving as a triangular element to validate the research result.

After the drawing period, I asked each participant to share his/her likes and dislikes about the traditional versions of chosen fairy tales and to compare whether there was anything new he/she found from them. Open-ended questions were asked in order to examine how similar/different these two aspects are, concerning the comparison between the traditional versions and their original knowledge about the tales. Following the discussion on the classic versions, I shared with the children the selected contemporary disruptive variants through either reading-aloud or private reading and observed their immediate reactions toward them. I kept my observations in the fieldnotes as another type of data for the triangulation of my analysis later. Building linkages and making comparisons/contrasts between the classic versions and the contemporary ones was the next task for me to assign my child participants. I mainly made use of the “three sharings” approach proposed by Aidan Chambers (1996) in Tell Me: Children, Reading & Talk during this process.

After the question and answer period, another chance to create visual texts as a reaction to the same tale(s) was offered to see if there was any change of thoughts taking place after each participant had been exposed to the new versions. All the one-on-one interviews were audio-recorded. The interview questions kept a consistency across cases,

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18 The three sharings refer to sharing with children their enthusiasm (likes & dislikes) for the story, puzzles they have about the story and patterns they find in the story through talk.
according to the suggestion made by Robert Yin (2003) that the multiple case study design should use the logic of replication, in which the inquirer replicates the procedures for each case.

One more thing is important to mention. While interviewing the Chinese girl about her thoughts to the chosen texts, the main language in the conversation switched to Mandarin, which is the native tongue of the participant. This way I felt I was able to obtain the most genuine and direct reactions from her without being concerned about a language barrier. Subsequently, the interview recordings with the participant were both transcribed and translated into English.

Means of Data Analysis

After conducting a series of one-on-one interviews with each of my research subjects, I retrieved data for my analysis from multiple sources of information—observation fieldnotes, records of their choices of pictures/photos, children’s own drawings, result of questionnaires as well as audio files recording all the oral responses to the selected tales within the format of question and answer. These conversations during the interviews were transcribed accordingly into verbal texts after the data collection period and then a short follow-up meeting was conducted with each participant for the purpose of asking him/her to clarify or explain certain confusing parts. The transcripts as well as the children’s drawings functioned as the major materials for my qualitative data analysis. The other forms of data, on the other hand, served mainly as the supplementary resources as references for my analysis.

For interpreting the transcripts, the analytic strategy I applied was to identify issues within each case and then look for any emerging common patterns which transcended the
cases (Yin, 2003; Riessman, 2008). This is related to the aspect of critical literacy, especially to factors causing the transformations of children’s opinions toward the given fairy tale(s) and how this proof indicates an increase of their critical thinking ability. Then I combined and categorized related patterns into various themes and used different colors to code these emerging themes. The method of “thematic analysis” was employed to examine the data.19 (Aronson, 1994)

In addition, I also made an effort to keep to the principles of “thick description” mentioned by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz in his *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973). Geertz develops this method based on the study of the philosopher Gilbert Ryle (1949), who talks about two boys contracting the eyelids of their right eyes rapidly. The simple act of eyelid-contracting can be sometimes merely an involuntary “twitch” but it can also mean a socially charged “wink.” To determine if it is the former or latter, a researcher needs to put the context of an experience into consideration and further state the intentions and meanings behind the experience. Hence, the technique of a “thick description” is able to analyze the cultural meaning of an act, for it “describes and probes the intentions, motives, meanings, contexts, situations and circumstances of action” as opposed to a “thin description” which offers the bare reporting of a fact (Denzin, 1989, p. 39).

Adrian Holliday (2002) has listed several important criteria for the collected data and the analysis of it in order to achieve the effective application of thick description:

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19 “Thematic analysis” is a general method for qualitative analysis of transcripts or other similar text data sources; its major approach is to display and analyze data by identifiable theme/patterns.
An important criterion for good data is the degree to which it provides the potential for thick description by revealing different, deeper aspects of the phenomenon being studied. Another essential criterion is what the researcher does with the data, the sense that she makes of it, and how well she communicates this sense. Thick description can be achieved in both large and small studies. In the latter it may be sufficient to describe instances of social action which illuminate and add to a large picture when set beside other studies. Another criterion for good data is that the researcher sees the familiar as strange and does not see things as taken for granted... (p. 97)

During the process of my analysis, these principles proposed by Holliday served as guidelines to lead me to make sense of the data I collected from the pre-interview meetings as well as the series of formal interviews.

Moreover, the method of thick description is further elucidated by Yvonna Lincoln and Egon Guba (1985) as a way to reach a type of external validity. By describing a phenomenon in adequate detail, one can start to evaluate the extent to which the conclusions drawn are transferable to other time periods, geographical settings, social situations and people. Such an attempt in fact coincided with the effect brought by the basic structure of my research as a multiple case study. Despite the fact that the scope of my research appeared to be limited for having included only four children as cases, the reader of my data analysis can actually learn vicariously from an encounter with the case(s) through the narrative accounts of the researcher (Stake, 2000; Merriam, 2002). The rich and colorful description about a case can create an image in the reader’s mind. In addition, Frederick Erickson (1986) brings forth the concept how “the general lies in the particular, what we learn in a particular case can be transferred to similar situations. It
is the reader, not the researcher, who determines what can apply to his or her context” (Merriam, p. 179). Thus, the value of a case study/multiple case study is for the researcher to pass along to the reader some of his/her interpretations of events or relationships so that the reader is able to “add and subtract, invent and shape—reconstructing the knowledge… to be personally useful” (Stake, 2000, p. 442, my italic emphasis).

For my “reading” of the children’s visual responses to the selected fairy tales, I chose to focus on examining “the precision of replication, the extension or the elaboration of the drawings” when compared to the verbal descriptions in the selected classic as well as contemporary fairy tales and also analyzing “the characters or plot events represented in the children’s work” (Pantaleo, 2005). Christine Thompson (2003) articulates a concept that children’s drawings can be heavily influenced by their direct experiences with people, places and things. These life experiences shape their knowledge of the world and further materialize on the drawing page (p. 135). From children’s artwork, then we can detect an integration of their past lived experiences. Furthermore, the children’s drawings collected in the qualitative study by Evelyn Arizpe and Morag Styles (2003) revealed the children’s knowledge and emotional responses to the picture books as well as understandings that the children were unable to express verbally (p. 225).

In addition, as suggested by Kathy Short et al (2000), children are able to “take what they understand through language as they read and talk about literature and transform those understandings by expressing their ideas in art…” (p. 160). The drawings of children can be considered to be an effective tool for them to make initial aesthetic responses, critical reflections and analysis as well as make intertextual connections to
literary works within the format of an alternative sign system along with talking or writing about the texts. (Short et al, 2000, p. 161). As a result, I treated my participants’ drawings as part of the main data analyzed for my research and looked for possible indications in them of the influence of their prior knowledge of fairy tales as well as the effect of the new exposure to the texts chosen for this study.

The method of “content analysis,” another common way to interpret recorded transcripts of interviews with the participants, was also applied in my data analysis, especially the part where I discussed the children’s responses to the images chosen for the activity of identifying fairy-tale characters. The most distinguishing characteristic of such a method is the act of counting occurrences of the same words or phrases appearing in the textual data so it can be sometimes linked with the concepts of linguistics and discourse analysis. However, in order to avoid the criticism of Michael Billig (1988) toward content analysis about its danger of leading to misleading conclusions by merely counting words without taking the context into consideration, the specific words I counted to suit my research purpose were all the ones in the children’s responses I interpreted precisely in the context in which they occurred. In other words, I followed the suggestion made by Andrew Wilson (1993) in his article “Towards an Integration of Content Analysis and Discourse Analysis,” “What is needed, therefore, is a level of relational content analysis where the relationships between words can be defined and those relationships, in addition to the counts on individual words or categories, may be classified and counted” (p. 1, his boldface emphasis).

Moreover, my interpretation of the data collected from this qualitative research was intended to share with both my child participants and their parents throughout the process
of analysis so as to achieve a further effect of triangulation. As Stake (2006) states, “during the cross-site procedure, there should have been continuing discussions with team members, colleagues, and other people close by. Triangulation also requires going further afield, checking with people… we need to get almost as many of them as we can find time for to have them read all or parts of our manuscript, urging them to find fault…” (p. 77).

Last but not the least, while interpreting the data I collected for this research, I tried to maintain an attitude suggested by Alfred Schutz (1970) of being like a stranger approaching a new culture. “Like the stranger learning culture, the qualitative researcher as writer should see every part of what she had done in the field as a fresh phenomenon” (Holliday, 2002, p. 12). In spite of a phenomenological notion of “bracketing,” I still assumed such a research position in my multiple case study to set aside my prior judgments, hold up details for scrutiny and account for every component in the data so as to achieve a dependable research result.
CHAPTER 4

LITERARY TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

As mentioned in the previous chapter, three formal interviews were conducted after my pre-interview meeting with each research participant. For every interview, I chose both the classic versions and the new disruptive variants of two to three well-known fairy tales as the texts for discussion. For instance, “Cinderella” and “Sleeping Beauty” were selected as the focused tales in the first interview, due to the fact that they both have modern feminist variants (Type 1A & 1B). Furthermore, “Little Red Riding Hood,” “Three Little Pigs,” and “Snow White” were applied in the second interview since all three of them have reworked versions from the viewpoint of either the villain or a minor character in the respective story (Type 2). Finally, in the third interview, both “Hansel and Gretel” and “The Frog Prince” were put into use to pair with their contemporary rewritings in the format of either a prequel or sequel to the original fairy tale (Type 3).

In order to familiarize the reader of my research with these chosen texts, this chapter provided an introduction to the plot and textual analysis of each story I decided to include in my research as a venue to offer detailed background information and present my assumptions as a researcher and adult. The format of the selected stories is either picture book or short story, with the obvious reasons of achieving the reading efficiency and matching with the proper attention span of these young children during the three interviews.

20 The standard of selection I followed to decide which classic fairy tales to be included in my study was mentioned in Chapter 3.
Interview 1—“Cinderella” and “Sleeping Beauty”

For my first formal interview, the two fairy tales I chose to focus on were “Cinderella” and “Sleeping Beauty.” On the side of classic versions, both the Perrault and the Grimms versions of the two tales were applied; on the side of contemporary variants, four children’s books were selected—two of them reworked versions of “Cinderella” and two of “Sleeping Beauty.” These contemporary disruptive variants all belong to Type 1 in my typology, with two books (Prince Cinders and Sleeping Bobby) being Type 1A and the other two (Cinderella Bigfoot and Sleeping Ugly) being Type 1B. All four books with their purposeful attempt to subvert the gender structure or overturn the beauty standards established in the classic versions can be regarded as feminist fairy tales. The table below presents the texts and the type of the modern versions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classic fairy tales</th>
<th>Contemporary disruptive variants</th>
<th>Types of contemporary disruptive variants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Cinderella”:</td>
<td>A. Prince Cinders (Babette Cole, 1987)</td>
<td>Retellings which present an intention to subvert the original gender structure in the classic versions (Type 1A &amp; 1B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. Cinderella Bigfoot (Mike Thaler and Jared Lee, 1997)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A. “Cendrillon, or the Little Glass Slipper” (Perrault, 1697)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. “Cinderella” (Grimms, 1812)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Sleeping Beauty”:</td>
<td>A. Sleeping Bobby (Will Osborne, Mary Pope Osborn and Giselle Potter, 2005)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. Sleeping Ugly (Jane Yolen and Diane Stanley, 1981)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A. “The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood” (Perrault, 1697)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. “Briar Rose” (Grimms, 1812)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2-Texts Used for the First Formal Interview
“Cinderella”

Classified as ATU 510A\textsuperscript{21}, “Cinderella” contains episodes like “the two stepsisters, the stepdaughter at the grave of her own mother, who helps her,” “three-fold visit to church/dance” and “slipper test.” With the theme of transforming a female underdog into a lady of higher rank through an unequally-matched marriage, this tale reflects certain commonly recognized gender ideologies such as submission of women as a virtue to gain happiness, pretty looks as an inevitable element to attract men and ensure true love, and marrying wealthy men as the final reward for women with “good performances.”

According to Bottigheimer (2002, 2009), this tale is generally categorized as a “rise fairy tale,” which involves a dirt-poor protagonist who suffers from poverty and experienced tests, tasks, and trials until magic interferes and then provides a bridge to a marriage to royalty and a happy accession to great fortune.

Such a “rag-to-riches” theme, according to Modonna Kolbenschlag (1979), induces the tale’s equal popularity among both boys and girls; it is perhaps the old tale which has the most amounts of documented variations (at least 345) and other unrecorded versions. Kolbenschlag also mentions the “conic focus of the tale on the lost slipper and Cinderella’s ‘perfect fit’ suggests that the story may have originated in the Orient where the erotic significance of tiny feet has been a popular myth since ancient times” (p. 71).

However, the earlier versions of this tale most widely known today are those of Charles Perrault and the Grimm Brothers (Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm) for their immense

\textsuperscript{21} Aarne–Thompson index, the classification system for international folk tales in The Types of the Folktales developed and first published in 1910 by the Finnish folklorist Antti Aarne and later enlarged by the American researcher of folklore Stith Thompson in 1928. In 2004, the German literary scholar Hans-Jörg Uther proposed the “ATU Catalogue” as an expansion of the original system in his The Types of International Folktales.
popularity in Western culture. Neil Philip (1989) states that Perrault’s tale, as the first documented version, has actually been deemed as “the archetype, the ‘correct’ story” because “our literary culture has valued the written words so much more than the spoken one” (pp. 1-2). Linda T. Parsons (2004) suggests another reason to explain the vast acceptance of Perrault’s version: “In contemporary Western culture, ‘Cinderella’ has become synonymous with Perrault’s ‘Cendrillon,’ in large part because it is the version on which the 1950 Disney animated movie was based” (p. 143).

As for the Grimm Brothers, due to the fact that beautifully illustrated editions of their tales can be found in bookstores everywhere (Mieder, 1987, p. 1), their “Cinderella” also has its considerable share of recognition to people of the computer age. Pam Gilbert (1994) discusses the phenomenon of certain versions’ dominance over others. She says “some readings of cultural stories become dominant and authorized because they are constantly repeated. These dominant readings form the major storying paradigms and are often ‘naturalized’ as the common-sense lore of our culture. The other ‘quieter’ stories are more difficult to hear: more difficult to find” (p. 138, my italic emphasis). Doubtless to say, the versions of both Charles Perrault and the Grimms are qualified as the so-called canon of the Cinderella tale; as a result, the classic versions I used for the first interview and the following ones were mainly written by them.

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22 There are some extra elements added to the new version such as talking animals (a trademark of the Disney animations) like mice and birds which make her a dress and help her pass through the maltreatment of her stepmother and stepsisters. In addition, at the end of the Disney animation, instead of marrying to lords of the court, the stepsisters are only “left behind,” without either rewards or punishment. As usual, the wedding of Cinderella and the prince indicating a happily-ever-after life is presented as the end of the story in the Disney version.

23 All the classic fairy tales I chose were written by either Perrault or the Grimms, except for “The Three Little Pigs,” since it was originally written by Joseph Jacobs at a later period of time.
“Cendrillon, or The Little Glass Slipper” (Perrault)

Perrault’s “Cendrillon,” collected in his *Contes de ma mère l’Oye* (*Tales of My Mother Goose*) firstly published in 1697, according to Philip (1989), serves as “the basis of countless retellings” (p. 9) and many fundamental elements we generally associate with this tale, such as the fairy godmother and pumpkin coach, come from Perrault’s literary imagination. In this version, Cinderella is portrayed as an extraordinarily kind-hearted girl who is good at various types of household chores and while facing the teasing of her stepsisters, still fixes their hair well before they head to the Ball, without messing it: “Anyone else but Cinderella would have tangled their hair, but she was good, and she did it to perfection” (Perrault, p. 61). At the end of the story, when she becomes a queen, she even forgives her stepsisters “with all her heart” and grants them to live in the palace and marry to two great lords of the court (Perrault, p. 68).

In Perrault’s tale, Cinderella’s tameness and passivity can actually be regarded as positive qualities which a good woman should possess. Furthermore, Cinderella’s exceedingly beautiful appearance is also presented as an indispensible factor to her final glory and fame. In Perrault’s tale, Cinderella is described as a girl who “in her rags was still a hundred times prettier than her sisters for all their sumptuous clothes” (Perrault, p. 61). The good looks of Cinderella naturally guarantee her reward later, in spite of her previous sufferings.

From a feminist perspective\(^{24}\), the descriptions about how females should act and look like in order to be deemed as good in Perrault’s tale have been largely treated as

\(^{24}\)The perspective mentioned here mainly refers to the liberal feminism developed and blossomed in the 1970s.
harmful for the development of female agency and independence. Karen Rowe (1979, 2009) mentions the negative influence of such a depiction of the “ideal female” upon the readers, especially women:

Although many readers discount obvious fantasy elements, they may still fall prey to more subtle paradigms through identification with the heroine. Thus, subconsciously women may transfer from fairy tales into real life cultural norms which exalt passivity, dependency and self-sacrifice as a female’s cardinal virtues. In short, fairy tales perpetuate the patriarchal status quo by making female subordination seem a romantically desirable, indeed an inescapable fate. (p. 342)

However, if we take into consideration the social context in which this tale was produced, we can find that such standards for female behaviors are related highly to the social norms and regulations for women in Europe in the seventeenth century. Yolen (1977) also mentions that “Perrault’s ‘Cendrillon’ demonstrated the seventeenth-century female traits of gentility, grace, and selflessness, even to the point of graciously forgiving her wicked stepsisters and finding them noble husbands” (p. 21).

Under such a consideration, the quality of “charm” which Perrault emphasized may be considered a particular way for females in the upper class to obtain something they aspire for; as a result, such a quality can be regarded as a form of female capacity which, although unlike the physical strength carried by males, still indicates that women are able to achieve their goal by themselves. Therefore, the patriarchal purpose of “reforming” females in this tale may just be a simple reflection of the pervasive cultural atmosphere at that time for modern people like us to have a glimpse of the historical trend during
In 1812, the Grimm Brothers published a collection of 86 German fairy tales in a volume titled *Kinder- und Hausmärchen (Children's and Household Tales)*, with the tale of “Aschenputtel” (“Cinderella”) included. In their retelling of this tale sharing a similar storyline with Perrault’s tale, Cinderella is portrayed as a poor girl mistreated by her stepmother and stepsisters. The concept that women need to maintain/improve their physical attractiveness in order to fit the patriarchal beauty standard is still conveyed in the Grimms’ version. Like the Perrault’s version, Cinderella in the Grimms’ tale is picked by the prince because of her appearance and small feet, but unlike Perrault, the Grimms made her stepsisters bear the pain of having either their toe or heel cut off in order to fit in the tiny shoe at the end of their story. “Small feet” thus becomes a beauty standard indicated by Cinderella’s tiny slipper and only women meeting this standard can be granted a higher rank. As a result, the stereotype that every woman should pursue good looks (even painfully) in order to please men is also reinforced through the Grimms’ version.

In addition, Cinderella in the Grimms’ version, sharing the “good fortune” with her equivalent in Perrault’s tale, is eventually found by a prince and lives with him happily ever after. Such a common ending is exactly what Roberta Seelinger Trites (1997) calls a central problem which feminists face: “the marriage plot often signals an ending of the heroine’s independent ways” (p. 14). Hence, Cinderella in the Grimms’ version, like that in Perrault’s, is still imprisoned under the spell of patriarchal values. However, we can
detect differences between the two heroines sharing the same name. For instance, in the Perrault’s version, the fairy godmother provides her with a pair of slippers made of glass, a material commonly assumed to be fragile and easily breakable. Such an arrangement doubtlessly forms quite an obstacle for women to perform intense physical motions. On the other hand, Cinderella in the Grimms’ version is bestowed with a pair of slippers made of gold instead, following the tradition of the earliest version of this tale. This relatively sturdier material clearly offers women more freedom of moving around.

Moreover, Grimms’ Cinderella is also more active in seeking her own happiness: “she begged her stepmother to give her leave to go” and then “went out to her mother’s grave under the hazel tree and cried: ‘Shiver and shake, dear little tree, Gold and silver shower on me’” (pp. 155 & 156). Contrary to such activeness, the passive Cinderella in Perrault’s version, while being asked by her stepsisters if she would like to go to the Ball, she sighs and answers “You’re making fun of me, ladies, that’s not my place” (p. 61).

Bottigheimer (1987) also points out such a difference between the two old versions, stating that “each implies a radically different pattern of female behavior” (p. 36).

Parsons (2004), on the other hand, mentions certain “commendable characteristics” exhibited by the prince in the Grimms’ version (p. 146)—“The prince danced with her alone, and if someone asked her to dance, he would say: ‘She is my partner’” (Grimms, p. 157, my italic emphasis). Despite the fact that the prince here refers to Cinderella as his

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25 Although some said that Cinderella’s famous foot wear is a result of mistranslation from French to English—pantoufle de vair (fur slippers) being mistaken as pantoufle de verre (glass slippers) while translated, it has been proved that the phrase “pantoufle de verre” does appear in Perrault’s original text and “vair,” a medieval word, was already out of date in Perrault’s time; therefore, the claim of mistranslation is actually challenged and questioned. (source: http://www.snopes.com/language/misxlate/slippers.asp)

26 The Cinderella tale is generally considered to be of Oriental origin, with its oldest known version from China in the ninth century. In that version, the slippers are made of gold.
dance partner, the connotation of the word “partner” still suggests a sense of equality between them and hence provides a relatively positive portrayal of gender relationship in this version. In other words, the presentations of both female agency and gender structure in the Grimms’ tale are healthier than Perrault’s; this may indicate a favorable transformation of social value system for women in the nineteenth century.

Prince Cinders (Cole)

Cole’s picture book *Prince Cinders* switches the original female underdog with her male counterpart. Reversing the common image of princes in traditional fairy tales as big, handsome and strong, Prince Cinders is described in Cole’s story as “small, spotty, scruffy and skinny.” He is always left behind by his elder “big and hairy” brothers and cleans up the mess after them. The characteristics of submissiveness and passiveness which seldom appear in male characters of fairy tales are possessed by him. Besides, Prince Cinders is good at all the housekeeping work which is commonly deemed as a feminine skill. As a result, the traditional concepts of what a man should be and do are revised and presently alternatively in this book. As Hilary S. Crew (2002) states about some stories with unconventional male protagonists, they are usually “presented as loving and compassionate” (p. 83); Prince Cinders is certainly one of such unusual heroes to pose a challenge to Western patriarchal stereotypes of masculinity. He is nothing like the standard prince who is handsome, physically strong and powerful; however, his timidity and weakness lead him to gain happiness.

At the end of the story when the Princess Lovelypenny puts out a proclamation to find the owner of the trousers which Prince Cinders leaves at the bus stop, all the other princes travel for miles to try to squeeze themselves into the trousers. The replacement of
the glass slipper with a pair of jeans without doubt forms a hilarious reversal of the original gendered relationship presented in the classic versions. Princess Lovelypenny holds the authoritative position of choosing among the princes; after Prince Cinders at last gets the chance to try on the trousers after his brothers and fitted in them, she immediately proposes to him. Such a twist overturns the fixed concept of women as the weak and passive one who receives the rewards and men as the giver of fame and glory so as to present another form of gender structure.

Nevertheless, examples which emphasize men’s superiority over women can be still found in this book containing a male Cinderella, for the princess in it is again the rescued one and prince as the rescuer. Princess Lovelypenny thinks Prince Cinders has saved her by frightening away “the big hairy monkey” which the clumsy fairy turns Prince Cinders into. Eventually when she finds her rescuer Prince Cinders through his lost trousers, she marries him without hesitation. Moreover, in the illustration showing the “happy” and “luxurious” life Prince Cinders lives after marrying Princess Lovelypenny, he is the one who lies on the couch while she stands beside him, handing a cluster of grapes to him. Hence, although the princess is shown to be the one who holds the wealth and power, she still yields to her husband in her marriage.

Thus, while the feminists attempt to emancipate women behind such a twist is worth of encouragement, we need to be aware that such an intention may even reinforce the old stereotypes being fought against. As Vanessa Joosen (2005) points out, “Emancipatory feminists have reacted against the lessons that the Grimms’ or Disney’s fairy tales teach, but they do not usually react against their didactic potential or use as
such. Instead, many feminists have taken advantage of the didactic potential in the narrative to convey their own ideology” (p. 130).

*Cinderella Bigfoot* (Thaler and Lee)

*Cinderella Bigfoot* is one of the books from the Happily Ever Laughter series published by Scholastic Inc. in 1997. Other than this book, the series contains other titles such as *Schmoe White and the Seven Dorfs, The Princess and the Pea-Ano* and *Hansel and Pretzel*, all serving as funny and sarcastic adaptations of the fairy tales (“Snow White and the Seven Dawrfs,” “The Princess and the Pea,” and “Hansel and Gretel.”) familiar to children nowadays.

In this contemporary reworked version of “Cinderella,” instead of being a girl with a beautiful appearance and tiny feet, the heroine bearing the same name has “the funniest” looks and a pair of big feet making her appear to be “like a seaplane” (Thaler and Lee). Her supposedly evil and ugly stepmother and stepsisters, on the contrary, are beautiful, along with their “beautiful stepcat, stepdog and stepladder.” Thus, the source of “evilness” in the original tale to complicate the plot and make Cinderella’s life miserable is removed and replaced with the problem created by her own big feet—“The size of Cinderella’s feet caused her many problems… the giant, smelly shoes would block doorways, stop traffic, and take up four parking spaces at the mall” (Thaler and Lee). The “safety hazard” even makes the King and Queen of the Land of Make Believe change their mind and decide not to invite her to the dance party.

Eventually, Cinderella gets to attend the ball (although she is not too interested at the beginning), through the help of Elsie, her “Dairy Godmother” who gives her a pair of glass sneakers—“size 87, triple A” along with “a glamorous, glittering gown” (Thaler
and Lee). In spite of being stepped on quite a few times, the funny-looking Prince Smeldred still makes effort finding Cinderella after she abruptly fled from the ball and left a huge glass sneaker behind. All the other girls can only “sit in” the shoe and needless to say, only Cinderella is able to fit into it. Therefore, at the end, Prince Smeldred and Cinderella Bigfoot “rush out the door to live happily ever after” (Thaler and Lee).

From just the title of the book, we can feel a sense of subversion, for almost every Cinderella in each of the numerous versions known to us has a pair of tiny feet in order to allow her fit into the small slipper and marry to the prince. However, this Cinderella has enormous feet, a believably unpleasant physical feature of women, but still manages to attract the prince and become a member of royal family. As a result, such an arrangement may overturn the deeply-rooted concept the original Cinderella tales such as the Perrault’s or Grimms’ versions established about having tiny feet so as to ensure a happy life for women. In other words, the myth of small feet is questioned and may become not so convincing anymore.

Nonetheless, despite that Cinderella Bigfoot’s huge feet form the cause to enable the prince to find her through her enormous glass sneaker and bring her a happy life with him, such a feature is described as a disaster-like physical characteristic instead of one being praised or envied. As mentioned above, the “problem” of the story is actually switched to her having big feet instead the maltreatment of the evil stepmother and stepsisters. Hence, the purposeful/unpurposeful intension to challenge the common beauty standard of small feet is consequently shaken and even failed. Having big feet can lead to a lot of trouble.
“Sleeping Beauty”

The Sleeping Beauty tale is classified as ATU 410. Unlike Cinderella, she is from a royal origin instead of being a commoner. Through magic power, Cinderella gets to become what she wants to be and obtain what she hopes for; however, for Sleeping Beauty, her miserable fate is imposed by magic power of the uninvited fairy. In comparison, she can be considered more passive than Cinderella, since she sleeps halfway through the action in most versions, waiting for the rescue of the right prince. Even though being bestowed with lots of positive characteristics and talents as birth gifts, she has to suffer from a long slumber of a hundred years, only lesser than real death. Her curiosity is implied as the fatal cause of her misfortune, for even though she has been casted a curse, she would not fall into the deep sleep if she were not curious enough to climb up the tower.

As the tale ”Cinderella,” the better known classic versions are Perrault’s and Grimms’, with slight differences between them. The most familiar version to children today may be the 1959 Disney animated movie in which the princess is named as Aurora and the evil fairy reappears in the form of a fire breathing dragon to fight with the prince who comes to rescue her.

“The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood” (Perrault)

“La Belle au Bois Dormant” (“The Beauty asleep in the wood”) was the first tale in Perrault’s Contes de ma Mère l’Oye (Tales of Mother Goose) published in 1697. Perrault’s version contains most of the general elements of this tale such as the princess’ birthday party, the fairies’ various good wishes as gifts, the sudden arrival of the uninvited fairy and her curse, and the princess’ falling into a long slumber to wait for the
coming of the right prince. One plot which may be discordant to the commonly known
version of “Sleeping Beauty” in Perrault’s tale is that the prince actually does not use his
kiss to awaken her: “On the bed was a princess, a young girl of fifteen or sixteen, whose
untarnished beauty seemed to shine with an unearthly radiance. He approached in
trembling admiration and fell on his knees before her. And so, as the spell had now been
broken, the princess woke” (p. 22). The prince also does not need to do much effort like
the one in the Disney version, except showing up in the right place at the right moment:
“As soon as he entered the wood all those great trees, and the interlaced brambles and
thorns, separated to let him pass” (p. 21). Nevertheless, he still plays the role of a savior
to Sleeping Beauty.

In addition, Perrault’s version can even be regarded as two separate tales, with the
familiar part of Sleeping Beauty cursed and sleeping for a hundred years and the prince
coming to wake her up and the relatively unfamiliar part where the prince marries her,
has two children named Day and Dawn, and only decides to take them back to his
kingdom after his father king died; the prince’s mother queen, who is actually an ogress,
tries to eat the two children and Sleeping Beauty after the prince goes away at war. The
latter half of Perrault’s version is hence reminiscent of another tale “Snow White” by the
Grimms in which an evil queen asks a hunter to kill Snow White and bring back her
lungs and liver. Luckily, Snow White flees from such a tragic fate due to the kindness of
the hunter and Sleeping Beauty and her two children also escapes from the dreadful
destiny of being eaten, likely, also through the help of a softhearted chef who’s been told
by the ogress queen to cook them: “The poor man, realizing that it was folly to mess with
an ogress, took his carving knife and went up to Little Dawn’s room. . . He began to cry,
the knife fell from his hands, and he went down into the yard and cut a lamb’s throat” (Perrault, p. 26). Fooling her with his deceptively excellent cooking skills, the chef protects Sleeping Beauty and her two children from the harm of the ogress queen.

The ending of the tale is predictable; the ogress queen gets punished and Sleeping Beauty gets to live happily ever after with her husband and children. The added details after the prince meets Sleeping Beauty certainly increase the complexity and entertaining effect to Perrault’s tale. However, Sleeping Beauty in this part of story still remains passive and is unable to change her misfortune by herself, just like the former half of the story in which she is spell bound. Rescue by men, either from the prince or the chef, becomes her only way out of the tragic destiny. Assuming her two children are already dead while they are in fact hidden by the chef in a safe place, she does not think of revenge, only surrendering herself when the chef comes to kill her under the ogress’ order: “‘Do what you must,’ she said, offering him her throat. ‘Carry out the order you have been given. I will see my children again, my poor children that I loved so much” (Perrault, p. 27).

However, it may be due to such a passive perseverance either through the form of both a long slumber and easygoing acceptance of fate which leads to her happy life afterwards, just as the moral of Perrault implies—“This story will allay your fears, if Love’s a waiting game for you; But to sleep away a hundred years is too much to expect a girl to do” (Perrault, p. 29).

“Briar Rose” (Grimms)

Along with “Cinderella,” the Grimms also included this tale about a sleeping princess in their collection of fairy tales, Kinder- und Hausmärchen (Children's and Household Tales) published in 1812. However, unlike other folklorists who rewrote the
“Sleeping Beauty” tale, Brothers Grimm chose to name their version “Briar Rose,” the same name as their heroine. In a certain degree, this title conveys the ability of self-defense, due to the fact that the thorns of briar hedge may hurt any intruder who attempts to get through it: “And from time to time princes came and tried to force a way through the hedge into the castle. They found it impossible; for the thorns, as though they had hands, held them fast, and the princes remained caught in them without being able to free themselves. And so they died a miserable death” (Grimms, p. 103). Compared with the Grimms’ title, the commonly used “Sleeping Beauty” appears to imply more submissiveness and lack of agency, implying the inability to resist invasion or control one’s own fate.

Different from the version by Perrault in which seven fairies are invited, there are twelve of thirteen fairies invited to the great feast for the newborn princess, for the king only has only twelve golden plates to serve them. The arrangement of having thirteen fairies in the kingdom and the thirteenth uninvited one casting the death curse may induce an association with “triskaidekaphobia” (fear of number thirteen). The number of fairies in Grimms’ story is the highest among the many versions of the tale while the Disney rendition cuts down to only three good fairies and an evil one. Nevertheless, both well-known versions share the plot of the prince kissing Sleeping Beauty in order to wake her up, distinct from Perrault’s narrative. The two versions also end similarly with the beginning of a happy life shared by the prince and Briar Rose/Aurora: “Then the wedding of the Prince and Briar Rose was celebrated with all splendor, and they lived happily till they died” (Grimms, p. 105).
Sleeping Bobby (Osborne, Osborne and Potter)

Osborne, Osborne and Potter’s Sleeping Bobby preserves almost every important element included in the Grimms version such as the frog’s prophetic words, thirteen fairies (Wise Women), twelve plates (china), the pricking of the finger on a spindle, a deep sleep of a hundred years to replace death, the thorn hedge, a kiss to awaken the sleeping one and a wedding celebration followed by the happily-ever-after life afterwards. In this new rendition, it’s the king who is told about having a baby boy by the frog while taking a bath instead of the queen. In addition to this change, there is the switching of gender between the prince and Sleeping Beauty—Sleeping Beauty is replaced with Sleeping Bobby, the newborn prince named Bob by the royal couple and his rescuer becomes a “kind, clever, modest, and very lovely princess” riding a horse (Osborne, Osborne and Potter).

Such a gender twist, besides presenting a delightful humor, can be regarded as a feminist approach to subvert the gender structure constructed in the older versions of this tale. In this gender-bent reworking, the passive one who’s waiting for the deliverance of someone is a prince while the one who’s making effort to save him is a princess. Being submissive and incapable to control one’s own fate is no more the trademark of the princess of this tale; a princess can ride a horse and save the prince. On the other hand, a prince can have reckless curiosity (as Sleeping Beauty in the original tales and also the newly wedded wife of Bluebeard) which could put him in danger and he can do nothing but wait for the rescue by a female. Such a simple and humorous inversion of the power relations between genders established in the older versions of the tale broadens our prior
repertoire of gender relationship could be like. The male counterpart of Sleeping Beauty hence functions similarly as that of Cinderella in Cole’s *Prince Cinders*.

Nevertheless, from Potter’s illustration of the princess, we can sense a contradictory effect on such a feminist attempt. In the pictures portraying her, we still see a girl wearing a long dress and extremely long hair almost reminding us of Rapunzel. While riding a horse; she needs to put both of her legs on one side of the horse instead of sitting with a stride, a more natural and common posture for horse-riding. While entering the palace where Sleeping Bobby sleeps, she needs to carefully pull up both sides of her long dress so that she can cross over the people sleeping on the floor. Her long dress in a sense limits her freedom to reach what she wants. Such images, therefore, are still under the common expectations of what a princess should dress and behave and therefore undermine the subversive intention of feminism.

*Sleeping Ugly* (Yolen and Stanley)

Yolen and Stanley’s *Sleeping Ugly* is a fairy-tale rendition vaguely based on the Sleeping Beauty tale with a loose similarity of girls/women falling into slumber and a kiss from a prince waking them up. In this reworked version, the beautiful princess named Miserella is portrayed as a spoiled brat: “She liked stepping on dogs. She kicked kittens. She threw pies in the cook’s face. And she never—not even once—said thank you or please. And besides, she told lies” (Yolen and Stanley, pp. 8-9). Even her name conveys a negative connotation with its resemblance with the word “misery.” In contrast, Plain Jane, a poor orphan with no physically attractive features, is kind-hearted and well-mannered.
After Princess Miserella loses her horse in the woods, she meets an old fairy in disguise so she rudely asks the fairy to take her home. Instead, the fairy takes Miserella to Plain Jane’s place. Plain Jane’s good manner wins three wishes from the fairy but she uses two on helping Miserella recover from the fairy’s curses cast on her due to her insulting behavior. Finally, the fairy gets irritated by Miserella and accidentally put all three of them into a long slumber: “It was one of those famous hundred-year-naps that need a prince and a kiss to end them” (Yolen and Stanley, p. 44). Like most of the Sleeping Beauty adaptations, there is a prince showing up to deliver his saving kiss but this Prince Jojo makes a rather unusual decision of not kissing the beautiful princess after waking up both the old fairy and Plain Jane with his practicing kisses.

From the first glimpse, the representations of the princess and prince in this book are quite different from what we commonly assume. In spite of having appealing looks, Princess Miserella certainly does not have an attractive personality like most princesses in classic fairy tales. This is also why Prince Jojo chooses Plain Jane over her:

The Prince looked at Miserella, who was having a bad dream and enjoying it. Even frowning she was beautiful. But Jojo knew that kind of princess. He had three cousins just like her. Pretty on the outside. Ugly within. He remembered the smell of wild flowers and turned back to Jane. ‘I love you,’ he said. (Yolen and Stanley, pp. 58-59)

Hence, in this story, inner beauty counts more in gaining a marriage and external appearance is no more a guarantee for getting love. Like Cinderella Bigfoot, Plain Jane also has unpleasant physical features; however, both of them get to marry to the prince

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27 The plot of granting three wishes here can be considered to be another intertextual connection with the tale “The Three Wishes.” In addition, one of the curses Miserella gets is throwing up toads from her mouth; this may be yet another intertextual association with “Diamonds and Toads” (French title: “Les Fées”) by Perrault.
and live happily ever after. On the other hand, the prince in this story, Prince Jojo who, being “the youngest son of a youngest son,” has no money, property or really prestigious status, also overturns our general impression that a prince is the source and path for a fairy tale heroine to gain fame, power and wealth (Yolen and Stanley, p. 50). Comparing this book with the well-known feminist piece in the 1970s, Joosen (2005) also points out the effort this new story makes to portray the ideology of feminism: “The overlap of ideas between Marcia Lieberman’s “Some Day My Prince Will Come” and Jane Yolen’s *Sleeping Ugly* shows that fairy-tale retellings can and have been used to convey feminist fairy-tale criticism and ideology to young readers” (p. 134).

However, reexamining the plot of this story, we may still find that there are certain problematic elements that actually go against its intention to convey ideas of feminism. First, on the surface, we may reckon that Prince Jojo’s choice is based on one’s internal quality instead of outward characteristic so he chooses Plain Jane over Miserella; however, according to the story, he actually does not have time to talk with Plain Jane in order to understand her better before he claims that he loves her. The reason he chooses her is because she smells like wild flowers, a feature which is still exterior. Moreover, the fact that Plain Jane, like all the other fairy tale beautiful princesses, agrees to marry the prince without hesitation after he shows his affection for her is also questionable. In a sense, she still presents the temperament of naivety and submissiveness and lacks of female agency to actively seek what she wants. In other words, she is actually not too much dissimilar to Sleeping Beauty waiting for the rescue of a prince in the older version(s).
Interview 2—“Little Red Riding Hood,” “Three Little Pigs” and “Snow White”

My second formal interview focused on the variation of narrative viewpoints presented through new fairy tales such as the villain’s or any minor character’s perspectives (Type 2). Such shift of points of view usually produces a surprising effect in terms of influencing our former understanding of the specific fairy tales. From the perspective of new historical criticism, “a plurality of voices, including an equal representation of historical narratives from all groups, helps ensure that a master narrative—a narrative told from a single cultural point of view . . . will no longer control our historical understanding” (Tyson, 2006, p. 287). Michel Foucault (1969) has also argued in *The Archaeology of Knowledge & the Discourse on Language* that instead of presenting a monolithic version of a given period, we must show how any given historical period reveals “several pasts, several forms of connexion, several hierarchies of importance, several networks of determination, several teleologies, for one and the same science, as its present undergoes change: thus historical descriptions are necessarily ordered by the present state of knowledge, they increase with every transformation and never cease, in turn, to break with themselves” (p. 5, my italic emphases). To avoid the imposition of a “master narrative” in the field of fairy tales, it is better for us to consider the accounts presented by the classic versions of fairy tales to be only one among “a plurality of voices,” along with other possible versions of tales coexisting with it and voicing the narratives through the marginalized characters’ perspectives.

The table below shows the texts and the type of the modern versions applied in this interview: on the side of classic versions, four fairy tales were selected: Perrault’s and Grimms’ “Little Red Riding Hood,” Jacobs’ “The Three Little Pigs” and Grimms’ “Snow
White and the Seven Dwarf.” As for the contemporary side, three stories were chosen to match with the three specific classic tales.

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<td><em>The Wolf’s Story: What Really Happens to Little Red Riding Hood</em> (Toby Forward and Izhar Cohen, 2005)</td>
<td>Stories which are narrated from the perspective of a villain or a minor character in the primary versions (Type 2)</td>
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<td>B. “Little Red Cap” (Grimms, 1812)</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Three Little Pigs”:</td>
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<tr>
<td>“The Story of Three Little Pigs” (Joseph Jacobs, 1890)</td>
<td><em>The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs by A. Wolf</em> (Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith, 1989)</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Snow White”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Snow White” (Grimms, 1812)</td>
<td>“The Seventh Dwarf” from <em>Spells of Enchantment</em> (Franz Hessel, 1926)</td>
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Table 3-Texts Used for the Second Formal Interview

**“Little Red Riding Hood”**

In the Aarne-Thompson-Uther Index, “Little Red Riding Hood” is categorized as 333, with the theme that the wolf or other kind of monster devours humans until all of them are rescued alive from his belly. The story can be often divided into two major parts: the former part is the wolf’s feast in which the wolf swallows the grandmother and then pretends as the grandmother to trick the little girl (Little Red Riding Hood) and eats her

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28 Even though the publication date for this story is a lot earlier than the 1980s, I included it as a lesser-known old text in my study for its obvious disruptive elements similar to other contemporary variants.
as well; the latter part is the rescue in which a hunter/woodcutter appears to cut open the wolf and saves the victims. The wolf’s belly is sewed with a lot of stones inside and so he drops dead afterwards. Such a plot may be the most familiar one to children nowadays and it almost coincides with that in Grimms’ adaptation; however, in the even earlier versions such as Perrault’s, there is only the first part being kept and described.

Whether the devoured ones are rescued or not, it is without doubt that the reader tends to identify with Little Red Riding Hood and considers the wolf to be the evil character through the way the tale is narrated. In other words, the wolf is always the one to blame, despite the fact that he may just follow his instincts of hunting so as to satisfy his physical needs, like humans do to other animals. However, is it possible that the reader could actually be encouraged to sympathize with the wolf instead, if the major narrative viewpoint is shifted to him? The wolf’s voice may change the way the reader perceives this story.

“Little Red Riding Hood” (Perrault)

Also included in his 1697 *Contes de ma Mère l’Oye (Tales of Mother Goose)*, Perrault’s “Le Petit Chaperon Rouge” (“Little Red Riding Hood”) has a relatively concise plot for not having arranging a savior to the rescue at the end, but it still keeps the familiar dialogue between the wolf and Little Red Riding Hood in which she naively asks for the reason why he looks so different from her impression for the granny near the end of the tale:

‘Grandmother! What big ears you have!’ ‘All the better to hear you with, my dear!’ ‘Grandmother! What big eyes you have!’ ‘All the better to see you with, my dear!’ ‘Grandmother! What big teeth you have!’ ‘All the better to
And with these words, that wicked wolf leapt upon Little Red Riding Hood and ate her. (p. 33)

And this is the ending of Perrault’s tale; in his rendition, both the grandmother and the girl are eaten but never saved alive by anyone. In addition, there is no indication of any sort of punishment for the wolf who devours them; he just gets away with the cruel deed.

Examining this tale from the aspect of upholding justice in fairy tales, we may say that it definitely has failed; however, as a cautionary tale, it achieves the function of warning its target reader, the young girls in the period when Perrault wrote this story. The moral gives an explicit explanation of his purpose: “Young children, as we clearly see, pretty girls, especially, innocent of all life’s dangers, shouldn’t stop and chat with strangers… And this warning take, I beg: Not every wolf runs on four legs” (Perrault, p. 34). Tatar (1999) once quoted from Bettelheim to describe Little Red Riding Hood in Perrault’s story as “a fallen woman,” no longer playing the role of a “trickster who survives through her powers of improvisation” but becoming “either a dimwit or a complicit victim” (p. 5). As for the wolf, Perrault’s moral also implies him to be “a metaphor, a stand-in for make seducers who lure young women into their beds” (Tatar, 1999, p. 5). Such an interpretation, despite the fact that it may not be comprehended by child readers, still suggests a serious consequence of ignoring warnings which one needs to take full responsibility of.

“Little Red Cap” (Grimms)

“Rotkäppchen” (“Little Red Cap”) is another fairy tale from *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (*Children's and Household Tales*) published in 1812 by Brothers Grimm.

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29 The undressing request by the wolf to Little Red Riding Hood before jumping to the bed with him serves as a solid proof for such an interpretation.
As mentioned earlier, Grimms’ version contains not only the part where Little Red Riding Hood (or Little Red Cap) and her granny are devoured by the wicked wolf but also a happy ending in which the huntsman/woodcutter comes to rescue the victims alive and the wolf gets punished as he deserves. The former part of the tale is almost consistent with Perrault’s adaptation, with only slight differences. One of them is that the Grimms replaced “a loaf of bread and a pot of butter” in Perrault’s tale, the things the girl’s mother asks her to bring to her granny, with “some cakes and a bottle of wine.” Tatar’s notes in *The Annotated Brothers Grimm* (2004) suggests a religious implication behind such an arrangement: “The cakes and wine have been seen as representing the Christian Communion and form a counterpart to the flesh and blood that the wolf leaves on the Grandmother’s house for Little Red Riding Hood”\(^{30}\) (p. 143).

Compared with Perrault’s tale, the Grimms expressed a more explicit attempt to convey the spirit of Christianity and the chance to get a final redemption. “[B]oth Perrault and Brothers Grimm remained intent on sending a moral message, and they did so by making the heroine responsible for the violence to which she is subjected” (Tatar, 1999, p. 6). However, bringing the “Christian Communion” to see the granny, Little Red Riding Hood in the Grimms’ version appears to be more angelic and blessed; this may be also why she could be saved (get a final redemption) after she falls into the wolf’s trap instead of being condemned forever like in Perrault’s. On the other hand, the huntsman/woodcutter also acts like a saint figure when he finds the wolf lying fast asleep on the granny’s bed by saying “Do I find you here, you old sinner!” (Grimms, p. 239).

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\(^{30}\) The plot of the wolf’s putting the flesh and blood of the granny on the shelf for Little Red Riding Hood is from “The Story of Grandmother” (1885), “a presumably more faithful version to an oral tradition predating Perrault” (Tatar, 1999, p. 4). Both Perrault and the Grimms removed this part from their renditions of the tale.
Moreover, Little Red Riding Hood indeed shows more caution and alertness than the one in Perrault’s version, despite the fact that she is coaxed by the wolf to wander around on the way. When she arrived at her granny’s house in the woods, she “was astonished… to find the door open, and when she entered the room everything seemed so strange. She felt quite frightened but she did not know why” (Grimms, p. 238). Moreover, after she was rescued by the huntsman/woodcutter, she’s the one “who brought some big stones with which they filled the wolf…” (Grimms, pp. 239-40). Hence, it is as if she experiences a process of transformation after in and out of the wolf’ belly, from an innocent and gullible child to a strong and powerful person who can exact vengeance.

*The Wolf’s Story: What Really Happened to Little Red Riding Hood* (Forward and Cohen)

Forward and Cohen’s book presents the account of the same incident described in the Grimms’ version from the wolf’s point of view. From the beginning, narrating in the first person, the wolf tries to convince the reader to believe him and claims his innocence: “NO, PLEASE. Look at me. Would I LIE to you? It was the old woman who started it. I did *nothing* wrong. . . Would you like to come and sit a little closer while I tell you about the kid? I don’t bite” (Forward and Cohen). Positioning himself as a “versatile” (Forward and Cohen) helper to Grandma and “a new wolf” who specializes in vegetarian cuisine, he gives a self-portrait with a harmless image totally different from the impression the child reader gets from the primary tale.

On the other hand, the kid wearing a red cape (Little Red Riding Hood) becomes the one to blame because she took a big basket of toffee to ruin her grandma’s false teeth. Feeling left out by the intimacy between Little Red Riding Hood and Grandma each time of the girl’s visit, the wolf reveals his jealousy toward her, crying “But they just ignored
me” (Forward and Cohen). When he confronts Little Red Riding Hood in the forest, her obedience to her mother’s warning is described as an arrogant attitude toward the wolf: “But she pretended not to know me and hurried on. That’s the sort of kid she is” (Forward and Cohen). At the end of the story, the wolf has a close escape from the ax of a woodsman, “the size of a tree,” with only part of his tail cut off instead of having a miserable death like the wolf in the older tales (Forward and Cohen).

The interesting reversal of the position of Little Red Riding Hood as the oppressor with the potential of toffee to ruin one’s teeth and the wolf as the oppressed of being ignored and having the tail cut off bestows this reworked version with a fresh atmosphere and further changes our primary impression constructed in the “master narrative” toward the characters in this tale. This account from the wolf’s point of view certainly evokes the reader’s sympathy for him and transforms him from an evil character to a good and innocent one. As for the woodsman who is supposedly a life savior in Grimms’ version, due to our unconscious empathy with the wolf, he becomes another oppressor exerting violence to abuse the sinless one, making him far away from being the saint figure to the rescue in the earlier tale. Hence, through such an elaborate shift of narrative viewpoint, the original power relationship has also been altered.

Nevertheless, even though this wolf’s narration provides a plausible account of his own side of the story, the reliability is still questionable and thus presents the features of uncertainty and unpredictability of language. Despite the fact that the title of this book contains the word “really” to enhance the accountability of his tale, the illustrations show a contradictory story. The wolf is portrayed in the pictures as one with big, yellow eyes, pointed ears, a large, red mouth and sharp teeth. Thus, our impression of the wolf
established through the illustrations in the book is still similar to what is commonly assumed—forceful and threatening. Moreover, during the confrontation between Little Red Riding Hood and the wolf in bed, pretending to be the Granny, there are three sequential frames of pictures show respectively the reflection of Little Red Riding Hood in the wolf’s huge eyes, the mountain-like ears contrary to the relatively small size of the girl as well as the perspective enabling the reader to see the girl through the wolf’s scarlet mouth with sharp teeth. These images obviously demonstrate the frightening side of the wolf and hence suggest the untrustworthiness of his account.

“Three Little Pigs”

“Three Little Pigs” was put into Type 124 by the Aarne-Thompson-Uther classification system for having wild and domestic animals in the tale. Like “Little Red Riding Hood,” it is also a story featuring talking animals and has a “big bad” wolf who devours weaklings. Almost every rendition of this tale, like in “Little Red Riding Hood,” keeps a familiar dialogue between each pig and the wolf: “‘Little pig, little pig, let me in!’ ‘Not by the hair on my chinny-chin-chin!’ ‘Then I’ll huff, and I’ll puff, and I’ll blow your house down!’” This dialogue also becomes a trademark and key ingredient of the tale.

“Three Little Pigs” was included in *Nursery Rhymes and Nursery Tales* by James Orchard Halliwell-Phillipps, published in 1843 but the best known version appeared in Joseph Jacobs’ *English Fairy Tale* (1890), which has been commonly assumed to the representative of the classic version of this tale. However, to modern children, the most familiar adaptation may be in the award-winning 1933 Disney animated shorts series “Silly Symphony” in which the title characters were cast as Fifer Pig, Fiddler Pig, and Practical Pig. Such a layout of naming already reveals the relatively higher level of
diligence of the third little pig than the first two. In this media-based adaptation, the attempt of white-washing violent and bloody elements is explicit: the first two pigs escape from being eaten by the wicked wolf; the wolf is not killed or cooked either like in the other older versions but instead burns his behind and runs away howling.

“The Story of the Three Little Pigs” (Jacobs)

In Jacobs’ version of the tale, the wolf is portrayed being large in size, ample in strength and evil in mind for breaking into the houses of the first two little pigs and eating them. The concise description shows even more strongly his cruelty and cold-bloodedness when he devours each little pig without any hesitation: “So he huffed, and he puffed, and he blew his house in, and ate up the little pig” (Jacobs, p. 70). Besides being violent and forceful, he is also described to have a cunning temperament. When the wolf finds out that he is not able to blow down the third little pig’s brick house, he immediately comes up with another plan: “When he found that he could not, with all his huffing and puffing, blow the house down, he said: ‘Little pig, I know where there is a nice field of turnips” (Jacobs, p. 71). Nevertheless, in addition to being diligent with using bricks to build his house, the third little pig is also intelligent enough to outsmart the insidious wolf three times in a row and finally eats him for supper.

Although the tale is narrated through an omniscient point of view, the reader is again encouraged to identify with the third little pig and rejoices when the wolf gets eaten by the pig, a punishment assumed to be well deserved. In a sense, the ending might appear to be a little extravagant to modern readers since the pigs are usually not deemed as predators of any sort. For a pig to eat a wolf as supper seems to be beyond the common sense. Hence, a more important message behind such an arrangement may be for
following the principle of an eye for an eye. The reader may find the wolf’s predatory behavior to be extremely detestable but consider the same act conducted by the third little pig well justified.

_The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs! By A. Wolf_ (Scieszka and Smith)

Sharing the same luck of the wolf in Forward and Cohen’s book, the wolf in this book written by Scieszka and illustrated by Smith is also given a chance to provide an explanation favored to him. Also narrating in the first person to reveal “a little secret” (Scieszka and Smith), he starts his account by introducing himself and shows his attempt to correct the false image of a wolf established before: “I’m the wolf. Alexander T. Wolf. You can call me Al. I don’t know how this whole Big Bad Wolf thing got started, but it’s all wrong” (Scieszka and Smith). By possessing a “name,” this wolf is bestowed with a touch of humanness, like the wolf in _The Wolf’s Story_ is for being talented with all sorts of house chores.

Furthermore, the diet of a wolf to eat “cute animals” (Scieszka and Smith) is justified as normal, just like cheeseburgers for human beings. The wolf’s bloodthirsty behavior to blow down the houses and gobble the pigs in the original version has been replaced with an excuse of borrowing a cup of sugar under the condition of a sneezing cold. Thus, the collapse of both the straw and stick houses is merely an accidental result of his sneeze: “I huffed, and I snuffed. And I tried to cover my mouth, but I sneezed a great sneeze. And you’re not going to believe it. But this guy’s house fell down just like his brother’s” (Scieszka and Smith). The attempt of trying to cover his mouth reveals that the wolf does not intentionally ruin the houses of the pigs. Moreover, when the houses fall down, the two pigs are found “dead as a doornail” (Scieszka and Smith). In order not
to spoil the “food” lying there, the wolf takes the “necessary” measure of eating them as dinner. As a result, everything which was used to describe as the wolf’s cruel and murderous action is now depicted to be “accidental.”

On the other hand, contrary to the wolf’s civilized behaviors such as knocking on the door and calling the pigs as “Mr. Pig” (Scieszka and Smith), those of the pigs are portrayed to be mean, rude and unthoughtful. In one of the illustrations, the third pig is rendered to have malicious looks talking to the wolf through a small window of his brick house. He also shows his extreme unwelcoming behavior to the wolf by saying “Get out of here, Wolf. Don’t bother me again” (Scieszka and Smith). Besides, the second pig yells at the wolf when he rings the bell: “Go away wolf. You can’t come in. I’m shaving the hairs on my chinny chin chin” (Scieszka and Smith). These lines obviously form a familiar but slightly different parallel to what the pigs said in Jacobs’ version: “‘Little pig, little pig, Let me come in.’ To which the pig answered, ‘No, no, by the hair of my chiny chin chin’” (Jacobs, p. 69). Such a parallel establishes a hilarious and ironic link between Scieszka’s retelling and the earlier tale by Jacobs. Different from the original ending of the tale in which the wolf is boiled and eaten by the third pig, Al the wolf in Scieszka and Smith’s book is caught into jail in the end due to his uncontrollably sneezing as well as attempt of breaking down the third pig’s house for the pig’s insult to the wolf’s granny. This story, therefore, provides another solid account like The Wolf’s Story, not only proving the wolf’s innocence and harmlessness but also subverting the “false” myth of the Big, Bad Wolf.

However, like in The Wolf’s Story: What Really Happened to Little Red Riding Hood, the title of this book also contains the word “true” to emphasize the
trustworthiness of Al’s account. Such an emphasis creates a contrary effect of raising
doubt from the reader as well as an ironic atmosphere like it does in Forward and
Cohen’s book. Furthermore, Smith’s illustrations also reveal aspects which may be
contradictory to what Al the wolf claims. First, in the hamburger and batter of the cake,
we can find parts of small animals like bunny’s ears, frog’s legs and a rat’s tail. These
details express the cruelty and bloodthirstiness of the wolf, similar to the depiction about
him in the classic versions like Jacobs. On the other hand, the design of putting a pig’s
hoof holding newspaper on the cover of Scieszka and Smith’s book positions the reader
as a pig reading news about the wolf and the three pigs. Such a layout implies that if the
reader were to believe the story, he or she would be stupid as a pig.

In addition, taking a close looking at the illustrations in this book, we can find that
there are body parts of little animals such as mouse’s tail or rabbit’s ears inside the burger
as well as the cake batter of Al. This indicates that Al can be very threatening and scary
to other animals which may easily become his prey. On the wall of Al’s kitchen, there is
a portrait of Al’s “dear old granny,” (Scieszka and Smith) presenting an obvious allusion
of another fairy tale “Little Red Riding Hood” in which the wolf puts on the pajamas of
Little Red’s granny and pretends to be her. Such a small insertion further implies a family
tradition of wolves to be predators of weaklings. When the Second Little Pig is “dead as a
door nail” in the ashes of his fallen stick house (Scieszka and Smith), the pattern of the
sticks beside him shapes just as a set of cutlery with a spoon, a knife and two forks. This
image also suggests the message of the pig as a “meal” for Al the wolf. As a result, the
images of this book reveal the unreliability of the wolf’s story which might be as “true”
as we are told.
“Snow White”

The tale of “Snow White” is typed as ATU 709. According to the index, the key elements include “Snow-White and her Stepmother,” “Snow-White’s Rescue” by the hunter and the dwarfs (robbers), “The Poisoning” by means of poisoned lace, a poisoned comb and a poisoned apple, “Help of the Dwarfs” and “Her Revival.” The best known classic version of this tale was collected by the Grimm Brothers, which contained all the aspects mentioned above and also brought the name “Snow White” into being.

Nevertheless, to many children nowadays, the knowledge of this story may be mainly based upon the 1937 Disney animated feature with the title of “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.” As Tatar (1999) points out, “Walt Disney’s ‘Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs’ has so eclipsed other versions of the story that it is easy to forget that hundreds of variants have been collected over the past century in Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas” (p. 74). In this popular version, Snow White is depicted as a princess who gets along with small animals well and has lots of animal friends, like the heroine in “Cinderella” by Disney.

Additionally, Disney’s tale is also “the only version of ‘Snow White’ that presents the dwarfs as individualized figures” by giving names which portray their personal characteristics like Doc, Grumpy, Happy, Sleepy, Bashful, Sneezy, and Dopey (Tatar, 1999, p. 79). Moreover, the wicked queen’s attempt to kill Snow White has been cut down to only one with a poisoned apple colored in red, mixing with other green and

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31 These elements are listed in the excerpt from The Types of Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography printed in Tatar’s Classic Fairy Tales and are generally regarded as must-have ingredients of the Snow White tale.

32 Grimms were the first one who named their heroine Snow White. In the versions precedent to theirs, no heroine had been given this name.
yellow ones in her basket. The stepmother still gets punished at the end, but not in the form of stepping on the red-hot iron shoes and dancing to her death as described in the Grimms version; she falls from the cliff while the seven dwarfs are chasing after her. Such an attempt to move the violence off stage may serve as another proof of whitewashing traditional fairy tales like the Grimms’ by Disney.

Furthermore, the Disney rendition of this tale also establishes a romantic myth of “love conquers all,” even the strongest magic power. Near the end of this version, when Snow White lies in the glass coffin, she is encountered by the prince she has met earlier in the story. Seeing the girl he has fallen in love with, the prince could not help kissing her on her deathbed. This kiss eventually works like a charm as in the Grimms’ “Sleeping Beauty,” wakes up Snow White, and further validates the role of the prince as the real savior of Snow White, both from the poisoned apple and the poor condition of being abandoned from her past royal life. The famous feature song “Some Day My Prince Will Come” also reinforces the concept of marrying to a rich man is the ultimate salvation for women.

“Snow White” (Grimms)

Published in Kinder- und Hausmärchen (Children's and Household Tales) in 1812, “Snow White” of Brothers Grimm was actually influenced by the earliest known written version “The Young Slave” published in Italy in 1634 by Giambattista Basile in his The Pentamerone. Despite the fact that Grimms’ tale had also been cleaned up for publication

33 In the cartoon, the queen’s death is only implied, instead of being shown to the audience while in Grimms’ version, it is pointed out directly: “For they had ready red-hot iron shoes, in which she had to dance until she fell down dead” (p. 173).
34 The encounter scene between Snow White and the prince is another episode exclusively appearing in the Disney adaptation.
and edited to emphasize the good Christian values held by them as they did to “Little Red Riding Hood,” “[e]lements from the story can be traced back to the oldest oral tales of antiquity” (Windling, 2007, p. 1). Therefore, their “Snow White” remains the most famous classic version passed down for generations and the most accessible one to modern children.

Grimms’ Snow White tale is obviously a darker story than the Disney animation. This older version lacks the joyous, festive singing, whistling and dancing chorus of small animals as well as dwarfs and keeps some scary plots such as three consecutive murderous attempts of the wicked queen to kill Snow White and the severe punishment the queen gets at the end of the story. Moreover, the exact reason for the awakening of Snow White is not related to anything romantic; she wakes up because the prince’s servants stumble: “Now it happened that as they were going along they stumbled over a bush, and with the shaking the bit of poisoned apple flew out of her throat” (Grimms, p. 172). Nevertheless, it’s the prince’s demand for keeping the glass coffin which leads to such a result: “But he said, I beseech you to give to me, for I cannot live without looking upon Snow-White. If you consent, I will bring you to great honor and care for you as if you were my brethren” (Grimms, p. 172). Thus, although Snow White’s awakening is not directly induced by a kiss from the prince, as shown in the Disney animation, the concept of the prince as her ultimate savior has still been established in Grimms’ adaptation.

35 Mieder (1987) has pointed out the immense popularity of the Grimms’ tales to people of the computer age (p.1).
36 From such a description, the prince is almost depicted as a person with necrophilia, so Snow White is destined to wake up in order to avoid such an impression and keeps the image of “Prince Charming” intact.
“The Seventh Dwarf” (Hessel)

As mentioned above, both the Grimms and Disney versions suggest that the prince is the savior of Snow White to the reader. In other words, the prince plays the most important role in terms of helping her get away from the threatening of her evil stepmother in the tale. However, what about the seven dwarfs who have kindly offered her a place to live in the woods after she escaped from queen’s harm, saved her from the previous two murdering attempts by the queen (in the Grimms’) and sought revenge from the queen for her (in the Disney’s)? The voice from one of the dwarfs (a minor character in the Snow White tale) presented in Hessel’s short story reveals another kind of possibility.

At the beginning of the story, we are introduced with this particular dwarf and reminded of our common ignorance of his presence in the past: “I’m the seventh dwarf. You all know that Snow White stayed with us and what happened. But nobody knows me” (Hessel, p. 613). According to his side of the tale, from the beginning of Snow White’s “exile” from the palace, he is the one who makes sacrifices to fulfill her needs by lending his own bed to her and gradually develops a passion for her: “But beautiful Snow White, she was something else…. I remember how she threw us kisses when we went to work on the first morning! I was the last one out the door. My heart pounded furiously like a silver hammer” (Hessel, p. 613).

In addition to showing the reader his seemingly “unfitting” affection towards Snow White, he also claims he’s the one who saves her from all the malignant assassinations of her stepmother: “It was I who pulled the wicked queen’s poison comb from Snow White’s hair, which completely covered me as I did it. It was I who loosened the corset
that would have strangled her. Yes, I was the first of the seven dwarfs to discover the witch’s trick with the corset” (Hessel, pp. 613-14). He even has something to do with causing the handsome prince’s coffin bearers to stumble, for he eagerly wants to see her one more time.

Hessel clearly based his retelling on the Grimms version of the tale to tell a reworked tale from the seventh dwarf’s point of view. To a certain degree, it can be even combined with Grimms’ tale to make both stories valid. Although Hessel’s tale may not totally turn the traditional Snow White tale upside down like The Wolf’s Story or The True Story of the Three Little Pigs which are told from the villain’s perspective, it still has its significance of presenting another side of the tale from the viewpoint of a minor and unexpected character, who has been silenced in the older narratives. Moreover, this story overturns our usual impression of the prince as the real rescuer of Snow White; an apparently unimportant role can actually be the key to influence the story.

**Interview 3—“Hansel and Gretel” and “The Frog Prince”**

For my third formal interview, I chose to focus on two more tales of the Grimms, “Hansel and Gretel” and “The Frog Prince.” To pair with these two classic versions, a short story from a recently published fairy tale collection Trolls’s Eye View: A Book of Villainous Tales and a picturebook with the same author of The True Story of the Three Little Pigs were picked to introduce my research participants. The feature which these two modern versions share is that they both extend the original tales by describing plots happening before the beginning or after the end, the so-called prequel or sequel (Type 3). By lengthening the original compressed versions, the prequels provide reasons or explanations for the seemingly far-fetched incidents depicted in their continuing tales. On
the other hand, for the older tales with abrupt or simple endings, sequels offer a space to expand and complicate them, fulfilling the reader’s desire of wanting to know more.

The features of prequels and sequels do not just limit to stretching the earlier tales; the extra plots brought forth by them sometimes can even change our prior impressions established through the originals. The reasons or explanations presented in prequels can justify the motivations behind certain characters’ behaviors and make us perceive the primary stories in a different way. As for sequels, the extended parts can invert the common assumptions we hold through only reading the older stories, such as the happily-ever-after endings. For the same fairy tale, the simultaneous existence of different versions of prequels or sequels also fits the idea suggested by the theory New Historicism about the possibility of multiple histories instead of just one History which forms the dominant narrative. The table below shows the texts and the type of the modern versions applied in this interview:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classic fairy tales</th>
<th>Contemporary disruptive variants</th>
<th>Types of contemporary disruptive variants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Hansel and Gretel”:</td>
<td>“A Delicate Architecture” from</td>
<td>Variants which provide a prequel or sequel of the original versions (Type 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Hansel and Gretel” (Grimms, 1812)</td>
<td><em>Troll’s Eye View</em> (Catherynne M. Valente, 2009)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Frog Prince”:</td>
<td><em>The Frog Prince Continued</em> (Jon Scieszka and Steve Johnson, 1991)</td>
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<tr>
<td>“The Frog Prince” (Grimms, 1812 &amp; 1857)</td>
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Table 4-Texts Used for the Third Formal Interview
“Hansel and Gretel”

“Hansel and Gretel” (Grimms)

Recorded by Brothers Grimm in *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (*Children's and Household Tales*) published in 1812, the title of their version reveals its Germanic origin. This fairy tale is categorized as ATU 327 A with the elements of parents’ abandonment of children in the woods, the gingerbread house, the boy fattened and the witch thrown into the oven. Compared with the earliest German version in which the mother is not wicked and the children get lost accidentally after being sent out to gather strawberries, Grimms’ tale is definitely closer to the description in the Aarne-Thompson-Uther system and also appears to be darker, for the children need to face the threatening of both starvation and cannibalism (Tatar, 1999, p. 179). Nevertheless, this dark version shows certain disruptive aspects which distinguish it from other fairy tales.

In addition to the mother/stepmother who plays the evil role of suggesting to leave behind the children in the forest, the witch in the Grimm’s tale is commonly considered to be more heartless for her cannibalistic attempt to eat the children. However, examining her in contrast to the mother/stepmother, we can find that she is actually described in a positive light at the beginning:

> While the stepmother at home was intent on starving the children, providing neither food nor nurturing care, the witch in the forest initially appears to be a splendidly bountiful figure, offering the children a supper of pancakes with sugar, apples, and nuts and putting them in beds so comfortable that they feel as if they are ‘in heaven.’ (Tatar, 1999, p. 181)

Without doubt, later in the story, the true intention behind such appeared maternal benevolence is revealed, but her temporary kind treatment to the children leads to an
ambiguous impression toward her and thus breaks the strict and extreme good-evil opposition commonly seen in fairy tales.

Moreover, despite the fact that Hansel is the one who finds the way back home through the pebbles thrown on the path, the final downfall of the witch is caused by the smart alertness and courageous push of Gretel:

She [the witch] meant, when Gretel had gone in, to shut the door and roast her, but Gretel saw her intention and said, ‘I don’t know how to get in. How am I to manage it?’ ‘Stupid goose!’ cried the witch. ‘The opening is big enough. You can see that I could get into it myself.’ She hobbled up and stuck her head into the oven. But Gretel gave her a push which sent the witch right in, and then she banged the door and bolted it. (Grimms, pp. 328-29)

Significantly, the children can only escape from the fate of being eaten and get back home safely due to the girl’s effort. The boy is locked in the cage and can do nothing about it. Hence, we can consider the unyieldingness of Gretel a representation of feminist spirit in this tale, drastically different from other submissive fairy-tale heroines waiting for the rescue of a prince.

“A Delicate Architecture” (Valente)

Selected in the reworked fairy-tale collection *Troll’s Eye View: A Book of Villainous Tales* published in 2009, Valente’s story presents a prequel to Grimms’ “Hansel and Gretel.” In this story, the reader is introduced with the life the “witch” lives before she becomes a notorious child-catcher and child-eater. With a father who used to be a confectioner for the emperor and empress in Vienna but discharged due to the emperor’s doubt of his affair with the empress, the “witch” has been taught to hold a serious attitude toward candy making and to produce the best quality of candy since she
was young: “When I asked my father why I should taste these bones along with the sweetness of the candied plums, he told me very seriously that I must always remember that sugar was once alive” (Valente, p. 145).

During the middle of the story, the reader gets to know that she is actually made of candy by the confectioner when he makes her as a sacrifice to the king and queen in order to resume his past position: “But she is not my child! She is not the empress’s child! She is the greatest thing I have ever created, the greatest of all things I have baked in my oven… If you will let me come back to the city, to my home” (Valente, p. 151). Therefore, she is deserted by the man who she considers to be the father and starts her miserable life to be hung up on the kitchen wall and provide sugar to the royal family. The reader can be easily touched by the descriptions about the pain she suffers: “Every day a cook would clip my fingernails to sweeten the emperor’s coffee, or cut off a curl of my scarlet hair to spice the Easter cakes of the empress’s first child—a boy with brown eyes like my father’s” (Valente, p. 153). Apparently, we can also consider that she is being used by the confectioner in order to regain the trust of the emperor for continuing his secret affair with the empress and even having a child with her (by the implication that her first child’s eyes bear a resemblance with his).

Gradually aging on the wall, she finally escapes from the palace and hides herself in the deep forest. When it comes to the time that she needs a house to stay, she cannot think of anything but candy so a “delicate architecture” is made of all kinds of candies and sweets—“a foundation of caramel,” “thick, brown gingerbread walls,” “hard-crack windows,” “a smoking licorice chimney,” “stairs of peanut brittle and carpets of red taffy” and “a peppermint bathtub” (Valente, p. 156). The sensory details about the candy
house definitely create a more vivid image in the reader’s mind than those in the original
tale do and also switch our impression of the house from a murderous place where
children are imprisoned and slaughtered to an exquisitely-built refuge in which a poor
woman with a tragic past seeks protection and comfort from.

Due to her previous sufferings, it is not nonsensical that she finally becomes a
solitary and witch-like figure. The final paragraph of Valente’s story discloses a
connection with Grimms’ tale:

And one morning, when it was very bright, and the light came through the
window like a viola playing something very sweet and sad, I heard footsteps
coming up my molasses path. Children: a boy and a girl. They laughed, and
over their heads blackbirds cawed hungrily. I was hungry, too (Valente, p.
157).

In a word, such an antecedent account provides a solid explanation on why the “witch” in
“Hansel and Gretel” chooses to build her house with candy and her initial motive of
doing so is merely to use the only skills she knows to give herself a shelter instead of an
evil intention to attract any children astray. Longing for something alive in her house, her
maternal benevolence to the children can be actually deemed as a kind gesture instead of
a pretending trap. However, the demand to fulfill her desire for living things may be the
reason for her to give in and also justify her attempted cannibalism later. As a result, the
prequel functions not only to provide a sensible explanation of the witch’s act but also to
vary our prior perception toward it. What used to be regarded as wicked and unacceptable
can transform to be something done out of no other choice.

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37 Becoming old and weak, the “witch” is not able to catch anything alive in the forest: But I never caught a
sparrow for my plums. They are so very quick. I was always hungry for them, for something living and
salty and sweet amid all my sugar” (Valente, p. 157).
“The Frog Prince”

“The Frog King or Iron Heinrich” (Grimms)

Also named as “The Frog King” or “Iron Heinrich,” this fairy tale is mostly recognized and called as “The Frog Prince.” It is classified to be ATU 440, sharing certain similarities with the beast/bridegroom narratives, and the most famous classic version was written by Brothers Grimm who included it as the first tale in their 1812 collection Kinder- und Hausmärchen (Children's and Household Tales).38

Grimms’ tale features a spoiled princess who is unwilling to befriend a frog who helps her retrieve her golden ball from a well. Later under the stern demand of the king, “a severe father figure who represents the moral code of the Grimms” (Zipes, 2008, p. 113), she is forced to keep her promise with the frog. Near the end of the tale, she could not bear the repulsiveness of the frog any longer and throws it against the wall; however, such a violent treatment releases him from the enchantment:

Then she felt beside herself with rage and, picking him up, she threw him with all her strength against the wall, crying, ‘Now will you be quiet, you horrid frog?’ But as he fell he ceased to be a frog, and became all at once a prince with beautiful kind eyes. And it came to pass that with her father’s consent they became bride and bridegroom. (Grimms, p. 88)

The princess’s cruelty to the frog definitely does not convey any romantic message and it may demonstrate the specific cultural context in which the tale was recorded: “During the period in which the Grimms lived, mating and marriage were not based on love. Women, particularly those from the upper classes, were often forced to marry men for whom they did not care” (Zipes, 2008, p. 115). As a result, the abominable frog may represent some

38 The final edition was published in 1857 after the Grimms changed and included various elements in it. This version was also the one I shared with my participants this research.
old and deformed patrician the father imposes upon his daughter to achieve more fame and wealth.

Despite the fact that the princess’s harshness toward the frog is well justified by Grmms’ purpose of conveying symbolic meaning, it may make the change of her perception toward him from extreme loath to affection enough to granting her hand to him seem abrupt to modern people. Maybe this is why in most recent retellings of this tale, the princess’s kiss invariably replaces the angry physical abuse, despite the fact that it may be a reluctant one. Through kissing the frog instead of throwing him against the wall, the princess appears to be more accommodating and obedient (under the patriarchal authority represented through the king) and the female force represented through her has thus been oppressed and decreased.  

Nevertheless, the kissing scene forms the major impression of most children nowadays for this tale. Through various forms of popular culture such as printed books, toys, songs, films and hypertexts on websites, this tale is replicated so as to develop “a fatal attraction” to young persons today and further encourage them to mimic the plot. Zipes (2008) talks about its effect of enculturation upon the human behavior of mating: “In the case of ‘The Frog Prince,’ the information conveyed by the narrative, symbols, and icons is related to particular cultural transformations that have modified our innate mating behavior” (p. 111).

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39 The kissing scene is generally considered to be the ending of the Frog Prince tale. However, besides that the princess in Grimms’ version actually throws the frog against the wall so as to change him back to human form, their tale in fact ends with a portrayal of the prince’s loyal servant showing his true happiness for his master’s deliverance. This extra part, according to Zipes (2008), reflects Grimms’ attempt to “moralize mating” (p. 122).
The latest 2009 Disney animation “The Princess and the Frog,” which is loosely based on the fairy tale, in spite of its variation of transforming the “princess” into a frog after her kissing act, still emphasizes the romantic myth of “love conquers all” and hence serves as a good example. According to The U. K. Daily Express on February, 1st, 2010, there had been fifty American youngsters becoming sick with Salmonella because of emulating the heroine in Disney’s latest film, “The Princess and the Frog” since its release in the theaters on December, 11st, 2009. Such news may be traced back to the Disney productions’ generally enormous impact on young minds, but it can be also due to the strong force of assimilation carried by this fairy tale. In other words, those “whitewashed” retellings of “The Frog Prince” which depict the magical power of kiss and thus switch the focus to establishing a romantic myth may be the ones to blame for such a phenomenon.

The Frog Prince Continued (Scieszka and Johnson)

Kissing or throwing the frog against the wall, the princess still ends up marrying the frog prince and therefore leads the tale to a typical ending of “happily-ever-after.”

Beginning from such an ending where the frog prince and princess supposedly live a happy life together, Scieszka and Johnson’s book presents a sequel to the tale to describe what happens afterwards. In this reworked version, the frog prince starts to feel

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40 This recent media-based adaptation is actually based on a fantasy novel The Frog Princess by E. D. Baker (2002) which was inspired by the Grimms’ fairy tale. The main setting of the movie is New Orleans LA in 1926. The name of the heroine is Tiana, who, in stead of being a royal member, is in fact a hard-working commoner girl striving to save up money for her dream of opening a restaurant of her own. The twitch of transforming the girl into a frog after the kiss rather than the other way around (making the boy-a real prince but gets broken change back into human form) is “corrected” at the end of the movie when both frogs kiss each other again after getting married due to that the “frog girl” possesses the identity of a princess.

41 Among the fifty youngsters, most were under ten years old and more than half were girls.
discontent with his life with the princess and miss the one he used to have while being a frog. Therefore, off he goes to find a witch in the forest who is able to change him back to a frog. After his not-so-happy adventure, he realizes what matters most to him is the princess’s love for him so he returns to the palace, kissing her. This story ends with a surprising twist: “The Prince kissed the Princess. They both turned into frogs. And they hopped off happily ever after” (Scieszka and Johnson).

Through a humorous and light-hearted tone, this sequel to “The Frog Prince” challenges the prototypal “happily-ever-after” ending commonly seen in fairy tales. The generally-assumed joy in the marriage of the prince and princess may turn out to be “miserable.” By putting this fictional couple into a context similar to the regular marriages in the real life we live, Scieszka portrays them having some common problems which ordinary couples may face. Because of missing the frog life he used to have, the prince starts to act like a frog by sticking out his tongue or hopping around on the furniture. On the other hand, the prince senses certain negative changes of his nagging wife by whining “… How come you never want to go down to the pond anymore?” (Scieszka and Johnson). It creates a great irony when the frog prince rereads the ending of his book and it states “They lived happily ever after. The End” (Scieszka and Johnson). The ordinary marriage boredom after the splendid ending of finding true love in the earlier versions forms a solid account of their unhappy life and further encourages the reader to question the “happily-ever-after” cliché.

Moreover, the traditional image a fairy-tale prince should possess is also mocked and overturned in this new tale when the princess says to the frog prince: “And it might be nice if you got out of the castle once in a while to slay a dragon or giant or whatever”
(Scieszka and Johnson). The “normal” behaviors of regular princes or expectations inflicted upon them are overturned by the frog prince’s reluctance of “going out and slaying anything” (Scieszka and Johnson).

The sense of disruption of this book against conventional fairy-tale narratives can be also found in the intentional intertextuality presented through both verbal and visual texts. During the prince’s search for the witch in the forest, he actually meets several witches instead of just one. The famous witches or fairies include the one from “Sleeping Beauty” holding a remote control of nasty spells, the one from “Snow White reading the magazine named “Hague” and handing him a bitten poisoned apple, the one from “Hansel and Gretel” planting ice cream and popsicles in her garden and later researching a recipe called “Roast Prince” and even the fairy godmother on her way to rescue Cinderella who accidentally cast a wrong spell and made the prince a carriage. The intertextual references with other fairy tales let the reader with prior knowledge of all the referred tales enjoy this sequel of “The Frog Prince” more and the combination of these fairy-tale magical characters with present-day/everyday allusions like TV remote controls, fashion magazines, gardening and cookbooks makes them even more easily accepted and entertaining to modern children.

Although Scieszka and Johnson’s stretched account of “The Frog Prince” introduces various subversive elements to orthodox fairy-tale recounts, it still conveys parts which may on the contrary reinforce dominant values. For instance, this sequel not only starts with the kissing scene most well-known: “The Princess kissed the frog. He

42 The title shows an implication related to both the words “hag” and “Vogue,” a contemporary fashion magazine.
turned into a prince. And they lived happily ever after” (Scieszka and Johnson) but also
ends with the same scene. Presenting the scene twice, this modern variant obviously
intensifies the “magical” effect of kissing and the necessity for fairy tales to maintain the
illusion of affection instead of casting a challenge. Secondly, although the incidents
happening after the typical happily-ever-after ending provide the reader a chance to
question it, the book still ends with another happily-ever-after closure, which in a sense
contributes to the ascendant ideology.

A Juxtaposition of Old and New Fairy-Tale Texts

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the major purpose of introducing children with a
juxtaposed reading of classic fairy tales and their contemporary disruptive variants is to
present them with a broader idea toward the genre of fairy tales and also serve as a way to
reflect on their primary impressions toward it and raise questions or cast challenges. In
other words, such a method is intended to make children become aware of the dominant
ideology or stereotypes they already internalized and also other possibilities concerning
characterization, narration, and plots within the same set of fairy tales. Nodelman and
Reimer (2003) hold a similar viewpoint, stating that “[f]airy tales can be a richly
satisfying form of literary pleasure. Not only will children exposed to a wide variety of
new and old stories have access to a variety of enjoyable experiences, but also, they
aren’t likely to be indoctrinated into the values of any one of them. They will have a large
menu from which to choose and thus more possibility of determining their own values.”
(p. 313)

The classic versions have been passed down for generations now; however, they
have also experienced the procedures of sugarcoating and whitewashing, being removed
certain violent/erotic details according to adults’ assumptions. As a result, the so-called “fairy tales” children claim to be acquainted with nowadays may be a lot different from the earlier versions recorded centuries ago. Furthermore, those adaptations which are heavily media-based and immensely popular like the Disney retellings of fairy tales dominate youngsters’ prior knowledge toward those tales, making them deem those adaptations to be the “true” or “authentic” stories. Therefore, the (re)familiarization of classic versions can help young ones expand their understanding of fairy tales, provide a more solid foundation for them to examine their primary ideas and also evaluate the ideology/stereotypes conveyed in the tales.

On the other hand, contemporary disruptive fairy-tale retellings establish a parallel to their ancestors; accustoming children with such a parallel gives them an opportunity to compare and locate intertextual references. The sense of disruptiveness and subversion presented through different strategies and forms in these retellings urges them to dispute their previous beliefs and hence promote the development of their critical ability. For all that, such overthrowing reworked versions can sometimes contain elements which display dominant ideology and thus in contrast reinforce mainstream values. Applying their critical thinking capacity, children reading such stories can have chances to think deeper and read against the grain.
CHAPTER 5

QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS (PART I)

Background Information of My Research Participants

As brought up in Chapter 3, I recruited four child participants to join my qualitative research and share their thoughts to the selected old and new fairy-tale texts analyzed in Chapter 4. Before I start my analysis of the data I collected from the one on one interviews, I would like to provide a brief introduction to each of my research participants.

Participant 1: Li-Kwen

My first participant, Li-Kwen, is an eight-year-old boy in his second grade. Both of his parents came from China and the language they use at home is Mandarin (the official spoken language in China). Despite the fact that Li-Kwen was born in China, he was brought to the States when he was three, so his school life experience has been all American throughout the preschool to the primary grades. He can communicate in English well and read picturebooks or short stories (including the texts I chose) without difficulties.43 Because Li-Kwen is fluent in English, we discussed the fairy-tale texts in English during the one-on-one interviews.

From talking with his mother, I found that the main reading materials he has been given at home were mainly westernized stories purchased here in the States instead of tales from China. He also watches plenty of American films or cartoons in DVD or on

43 Although Li-Kwen can read the classic fairy-tale versions I chose on his own, his mother still helped with reading aloud with him.
TV. Among the Disney fairy-tale adaptations, he only saw “Cinderella” before. Nevertheless, the information he has received in terms of folktales/fairy tales is mainly American or European based. Thus, his Chinese ethnic background may relatively form less influence (if any) upon his responses to texts. However, since his parents were both raised in China and received education there, it can be assumed the family education of Li-Kwen has still been somewhat related to the Chinese culture.

**Participant 2: Ning-Ning**

My second participant Ning-Ning is my elder daughter, a third grader who is nine years old now. She came to the States with me to start her primary school study when she was seven. Before that, she attended kindergarten for three years in Taiwan so her experience of receiving school education so far covered two cultures. She generally speaks Mandarin at home instead of English, but she can use English to communicate with her classmates and teachers at her American elementary school without difficulties. Although she could read and comprehend English picturebooks on her own, it still formed a challenge for her to read the classic fairy-tale versions and Valente’s short story based on “Hanse and Gretel” I selected. Hence, when I shared those stories with her through a read-aloud form, I also used Mandarin to explain the meanings to her. Moreover, due to that the language used for communication in our family is Mandarin, I also chose to use it during one-on-one interviews with her, for the purpose of making her feel free to talk about her ideas toward the texts without the problem of language barriers. In addition, she expressed having fun drawing pictures when asked.

Her reading materials contain both Chinese and English ones. At home, she has access to Chinese folktales or stories based on Chinese culture like “Aunt Tigress” while
at school, the materials she reads are all English. Like Li-Kwen, she also watches many DVDs of American films and animations or TV programs, including various Disney fairy-tale adaptations like “Cinderella,” “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,” “Sleeping Beauty,” “Beauty and the Beast,” “Mulan,” and the most recent “The Princess and the Frog.” Besides, she also read some picturebooks based on these Disney fairy tales. As for other sources of knowledge about fairy tales, she read illustrated stories adapted from Perrault, the Grimms and Andersen and translated into Chinese.

Interviewing one’s own children, like I did with Ning-Ning, could actually form a challenge for the parent-researcher to complete the entire process of conducting a series of interviews. Due to the close parent-child relationship between the interviewee and the interviewer, the process tends to be easily interrupted by the trivial round of daily life so that it may not go as smoothly as the ones with other child participants. In fact, the duration of the whole process of interviewing Ning-Ning was the longest—my data collection period started from the first interview with her but also ended with the last interview with her.

**Participant 3: Rafiki**

Rafiki was my third research participant. Like Ning-Ning, he is also a nine-year-old third grader and one of her classmates at school. He was born in America but has a multicultural background for having an African father and American mother. The major and only language he speaks presently is English, both at school and home. The school life experience of his has been wholly within an American context, in spite of his multicultural ethnic background.
He loves reading all sorts of books and his reading ability is above the average level of third graders. Therefore, the classic versions of fairy tales and the variants in the format of picturebook or short story chosen for my research formed no challenge to him. Besides reading books, Rafiki also has the habit of watching films and cartoons on TV or through DVDs. According to his mother, he actually saw several of the Disney fairy-tale movies before but he seemed to show less interest and not have a strong impression of them. He has also read some retellings of fairy tales within a picturebook or illustrated book format in the past.

**Participant 4: Wendy**

The last research participant of mine was an eight-year-old girl in her second grade. Her ethnic background is purely Caucasian with both parents being white. Born in the States, the school education she has received so far is also entirely within an America context like Rafiki. She also speaks only English. Her mother told me that two of her favorite things are reading and drawing so she would enjoy participating my research. She did. She read all the texts selected for this study totally on her own and spending the most time of all the children drawing the pictures I asked for as her visual responses toward those stories.

Regarding fairy tales, Wendy read a number of retellings within a picturebook or illustrated book format as Rafiki, with some of them being reworked and disruptive versions like *The Stinky Cheese Man*, in which she showed great interest and preference. On the other hand, she also watched almost every Disney fairy-tale adaptations and is

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44 Like Li-Kwen, Rafiki’s mother also helped with reading aloud the classic versions with him.
familiar with all the so-called Disney princesses well such as Cinderella, Snow White, Aurora, Belle, Ariel, etc, as Ning-Ning is.

In a word, all of my four participants had never been formally introduced to the classic versions of fairy tales by Perrault or the Grimms until my research, so their prior knowledge of fairy tales were mainly based on the book or movie adaptations\textsuperscript{45} they read or watched in the past. As for the contemporary disruptive variants, the participants all have read a few of the books (especially in the format of picture book); however, they have not been introduced to these reworked versions systematically, as listed in my typology in Chapter 1.

**Children’s Prior Knowledge of Fairy Tales**

**Defining the Genre of Fairy Tales**

As I mentioned in Chapter 3, I conducted a pre-interview meeting with each of my four participants with the purpose to probe their prior knowledge about fairy tales. From the transcripts, firstly, a rough idea of what they considered to be a fairy tale and what kind of characters they thought should be included in it was presented. In the following extract, my first research participant, Li-Kwen, talked about what he thought to be fairy tales and the common characters appearing in them:

Winnie: Li-Kwen, could you share with me your ideas about fairy tales?

Li-Kwen: Okay. I think fairy tales are like, to entertain children, or like to read when there is nothing to do, and fun to read, I think, like that.

Winnie: Okay. So what are fairy tales?

\textsuperscript{45} Among the movie adaptations previously watched by them, productions of Disney occupied a dominant and major position.
Li-Kwen: Fairy tales are made of characters, like princesses like Cinderella. They are like to make believe. And they are mostly written into a book or a movie.

Winnie: Okay. So what’s your favorite fairy tale?

Li-Kwen: Hmm, I don’t know.,, I think it’s maybe “Cinderella,” or “Gingerbread Man.”

Winnie: I see. You mentioned princesses. What other characters do you usually find in fairy tales?

Li-Kwen: Hmm, like princes, or like royal people, or like kids, like Goldilocks or like any animals.

Winnie: What about bad characters, like evil ones? Can you think of any?

Li-Kwen: Oh, like the evil stepmother and Goldilocks.

Winnie: Goldilocks? Is she evil?

Li-Kwen: Not evil but a little bad, to break into a house.

Winnie: Okay. What else?

Li-Kwen: Or like the rat, in a book *Three Cool Kids*.

Li-Kwen pointed out that an important function of fairy tales is “to entertain” so they should bring fun to their readers. They are make-believe stories with royal characters and people get to know about them from books or movies. Besides “royal people,” other fairy tale characters he thought to be commonly seen included children and animals, taking “Goldilocks and Three Bears” as an instance. The drawing of his initial fairy-tale impression also reflected the elements from the tales he mentioned such as a glass slipper, a gingerbread man and one of the bears from “Goldilocks and the Three Bears”:

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46 This book is a modern fractured tale of “Three Billy Goats Gruff” published in 1995. The three cool kids are three goats and the troll in the original story is replaced by a big rat in the sewer.

47 When asked which bear he drew in this picture, Li-Kwen firstly corrected me by saying it’s actually a “panda” instead of a bear (despite the fact that he did not portray any specific feature of pandas in his picture). This may reflect a glimpse of his family cultural background of China, in which pandas are native to.
Interestingly, he mentioned Cinderella as the example to refer to a fairy-tale princess. This seems to match with his major impression of her came mainly from the Disney animation then\textsuperscript{48} while it should be relatively reasonable to consider her to be a commoner, at least during the most part of the tale. Such an influence was also reflected through his strong recognition of “the stepmother” as the representative of fairy-tale villains.

As for the second participant, Ning-Ning, like Li-Kwen, her dominant impression about fairy tale characters was also princesses but she added “beautiful” to provide a more specific description:

Winnie: Ning-Ning, can you share your ideas about fairy tales with me?
Ning-Ning: I think… I am interested in fairy tales because I like beautiful princesses. Although they are old, I still like them.
Winnie: What did you mean by saying they are old?
Ning-Ning: I meant they are stories from long time ago. ‘Cause there are usually many magical things in them which only happened in the

\textsuperscript{48} The Disney industry create a group of the so-called Disney Princesses composed of the heroines from different fairy tales like Cinderella, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, etc.
past or people at that time believed. Such stories are called fairy tales.

Winnie: I see. Besides beautiful princesses you just mentioned, what other characters can we usually find in fairy tales?

Ning-Ning: There are villains.

Winnie: What kind of villains?

Ning-Ning: Well, like in “Snow White,” the villain is her stepmother, the wicked queen.

Winnie: Right. What else?

Ning-Ning: Hmm… like in “Cinderella,” there are two evil stepsisters and one evil stepmother. They treat Cinderella very badly.

Winnie: Are there any other fairy tale characters you can think of?

Ning-Ning: Some good characters. Like in “Sleeping Beauty,” there are three fairy godmothers; they all hope that Sleeping Beauty is able to wake up from her long sleep.

“Beautiful princesses” were obviously the first thing coming to Ning-Ning’s mind while thinking of fairy tales and her examples of fairy tales later all contained one. The drawing her fairy-tale impression (see Figure 1) also contained a similar theme with a pretty princess, also an animal lover, sitting on the grass in front of a magnificent castle:
Besides, she also pointed out the quality of agedness of this genre by saying they are “stories from long time ago.” However, such an assumption, as she explained right after, was based on the featured element of “magic” in this genre instead of anything related to the classic versions written centuries ago. In other words, the far-fetched sequence of events involved in or resulted from magic in fairy tales made her connect them with the genre’s antiquity.

Her most impressive fairy-tale villain, like Li-Kwen, was also the stepmother (or the stepsisters as in “Cinderella”). The “good” characters mentioned after the bad ones matched with one of the important “good vs. evil” characteristic of the genre. Moreover, the influence of Disney could also be traced through the number of fairies appearing in the tale “Sleeping Beauty,” as there are also three of them in the Disney adaptation.

While being asked to define fairy tales, unlike the other participants, Rafiki firstly expressed his doubt about the naming of this genre:

Winnie: Rafiki, can you talk about your general ideas toward fairy tales?
Rafiki: I don’t know why they are called fairy tales because not all the tales actually have fairies, but I do know they are called tales because they are tales, like stories about different things, like make-believe stories. And fairy tales are usually magic; there is usually a lot of different magic.

Winnie: Right. And what are the common characters you can think of in fairy tales?

Rafiki: Usually there are some good people and some bad people.

Winnie: Okay. And what are other things you can think of about fairy tales?

Rafiki: They are like stories people like to tell because they are magic and they are neat to tell because there are a lot of different things and you can make up your own version of fairy tales because there is magic and you can do whatever you want.

Rafiki’s doubt showed his awareness of the extensive range of fairy tales which does not merely confine within tales containing fairies. He also pointed out the “make-believe” quality of the genre and the inclusion of magical elements. As for the figures commonly seen in fairy tales, by specifying the appearance of both “good” and “bad” people, he expressed his acknowledgment of the polarizing characterization often applied in this genre—characters are either good or bad, instead of being both kind and evil. Like Li-Kwen’s drawing, Rafiki also decided to draw elements from two different tales, “Hansel and Gretel” and “Three Little Pigs,” instead of focusing on a specific one:

49 According to Rafiki’s description about this drawing of his, there was “a witch with a cape” from “Hansel and Gretel” on the left, and the bottom right was “the witch’s house with lots of candy and the candy walkway leading into the house.” And the third picture was from “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” and it was the dwarfs’ house. There seemed to be quite a similarity on the aspect of layout between Rafiki’s drawing and Li-Kwen’s, both composed of various elements from different tales, that is, intertextual drawings, rather than one depicting only one story/setting like the girls did.
In addition, Rafiki’s final statement in this extract raised a significant point—fairy tales’ feature of adaptability. The authors of fairy tales do not only limit to the folklorists or fairy-tale collectors; everybody can create a version and write whatever he/she wants.

Wendy was the other girl involved in this research. During the “probe” meeting, she also shared her opinions about fairy tales:

Winnie: Wendy, can you describe what a fairy tale is?
Wendy: A fairy tale is like a magical tale, and a tale is like a story that’s been spread across the world and told a lot of different times.
Winnie: And what are the common fairy tale characters can you think of?
Wendy: Sometimes fairies, sometimes giants, and like the Gingerbread Man and like the three little pigs, and the big bad wolf, and the Little Red Riding Hood.
Winnie: Is there any fairy tale villain you can think of? You mentioned the big bad wolf. Who else?
Wendy: Sometimes the giant is really bad, like in “Jack and the Beanstalk.” In most of the giant tales, the giant is the bad one.
Winnie: Hmm. Who else? How about witches?
Wendy: Witches are bad, but not always. There are good witches too.
Like the other participants, she mentioned the general insertion of “magic” in the genre of fairy tales. Besides, as a complement to Ning-Ning’s statement about the agedness of this genre, she suggested both its geographical widespread coverage and its long history of oral tradition. In other words, she pointed out in her responses fairy tales’ unique feature of having a universal appeal. Wendy also demonstrated her broader knowledge about common fairy-tale characters by stating a variety of examples, some of them generally deemed as bad ones. This answer of hers revealed an interesting contrast from Ning-Ning’s strong identification with princesses in fairy tales with most of her examples being male instead female. Among them, the character “giant” seemed to form the weightiest impression since she brought it up twice. She also chose to draw this tale as her impression toward fairy tales with the giant standing beside the beanstalk and holding Jack in his right hand (see Figure 2). However, what she drew was based on one of the contemporary reworked versions instead of the traditional ones50:

50 Wendy chose to draw “Jack’s story” from *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales* by Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith, which is generally considered a postmodern picturebook containing a collection of subversive fairy-tale retellings. In this disruptive version, the narrator Jack tells a story about his encounter with a giant; to avoid the giant to kill him, he told a story about his encounter with a giant, so the narration keeps going on and on repetitively and the fonts are getting smaller and smaller.
Finally, her comment on witches about the existence of “good” witches indicated a tendency of building up a less stereotypical image of such a fairy-tale character in her mind.

Comparing across the four cases, I found that the most general and strongest perception toward the genre of fairy tales shared by all four participants was the indispensible element of magic. Fairy tales were naturally associated with stories with magical figures and creatures or appearance of supernatural power in any form. Moreover, other characteristics of this genre such as its extensiveness in terms of both history and geography and its inclusion of various good and bad figures were also mentioned by more than one of them.

Despite the fact that certain rigid assumption to the genre as well as the influence of the Disney fairy-tale adaptations could be traced through the responses, especially toward the disneyfied fairy tales, it was pleasing to know that indications of an extended source to understand fairy tales or non-stereotypical thoughts could still be found. For instance, Li-Kwen provided an intertextual reference of a reworked version of “Three
Billy Goats Gruff” while being required to offer examples of fairy-tale villains. Instead
of the troll in the classic version of the tale, he chose to mention the “rat” in a
contemporary one. Moreover, when Wendy was asked to draw a picture to depict her
impression of the genre, she chose to base it on one of the fractured tales with subversive
elements such as change of fonts and a repetitive plot instead of a familiar version of
“Jack and the Beanstalk.” In a word, the responses collected from the pre-interview
meetings revealed not only an expected demonstration of some stereotypical impressions
but also a positive phenomenon that children are starting to establish a broader sense of
knowledge for fairy tales.

Identifying Fairy-Tale Characters

In addition to having a brief talk with each of my participants about his/her prior
knowledge about fairy tales, I prepared three categories of pictures—princesses, princes
and witches, to let him/her decide whether or not the images accord with his/her mental
one for each type of characters. From the pictures every participant agreed upon,
certain general qualities of the particular type of fairy-tale characters could be
discovered and further compose the mental impression of his/hers toward it.

Princesses

Li-Kwen used the word “fancy” eight times in the section of princesses to
describe their outfits/accessories and the settings/background where they are. It seemed
that he thought females wearing a fancy dress and/or a fancy crown/tierra can be
identified as princesses. Besides, images with females sitting on a fancy throne or being

See Appendix A for the selected pictures applied in this activity. All the images listed in the appendix are
the ones I discussed the children’s responses toward them across cases in my analysis.
in/ in front of a fancy house or castle were also deemed as princess pictures. He described characters in some pictures as “beautiful” or “pretty” a couple of times but the face/body figure/age might play a relatively minor role to affect his decision. For instance, he considered all of the following characters to be princesses: Princess Fiona in the ogress form52 (“I know it’s ‘Shrek’ but I don’t know her name. She has a crown and her clothes are fancy.”), an overweight girl (“Cause she wears a crown and has servants to get like a cake. And her house is real fancy. A fat princess is still a princess.”), Princess Justina Albertina53 (“She looks like an angry princess. She has a crown but she looks mad. Princess can be mad, can be angry,”), and Princess Anne (“The background is like, her house is fancy. I think old women in fancy clothes, with a crown can still be princesses.”).

Although Li-Kwen has a relatively wider range to include fairy-tale princess images, there was one kind he was particularly reluctant to recognize as one, that is, females dressing in armor, holding sword and riding horses. His reaction toward the first image containing such a character (A boyish-dressed girl holding a sword and riding a horse to fight against monsters) showed his doubt to consider her to be a princess: “That looks like a prince. Mostly princesses don’t go on this kind of, like adventure; mostly only princes do.” However, while encountering a similar figure (a princess knight)54 for

52 Princess Fiona is the heroine from the American animated film series “Shrek” produced by DreamWorks in 2001. She has been cursed to be in the form of a pretty princess in the daytime and an ogress after sunset. To release her from such a curse, she needs to find someone who truly loves her and gives her a kiss. At the end of the first movie, after receiving the “true-love” kiss from Shrek, she is released from the curse but remains to be an ogress. This movie intentionally subverts the common image of fairy-tale princesses which are beautiful and graceful with a monster-like one, being capable of Kung-fu.

53 Princess Justina Albertina is the main character from a children’s picture book titled Princess Justina Albertina: A Cautionary Tale (2007) written by Ellen Dee Davidson and illustrated by Michael Chesworth. In the story, she is a spoiled princess with ugly looks and being angry all the time.

54 This picture was the cover image of the picture book Princess Knight (2004) by Cornelia Funke and
the second time, he showed a deeper consideration and changed his primary impression: “She looked like a prince at the beginning but when I looked closely, I noticed that she has long hair.” The change of impression was based on the fact that he had traced certain female quality in that figure, “long hair,” in this case.

Ning-Ning’s impression toward a fairy-tale princess also depended on whether she dresses in a fancy way, with a crown and a long gown; she also needs to have fancy hair, so Mulan cannot be regarded as one\(^5\). In Ning-Ning’s responses toward the images in the princess section, she also mentioned that a princess should live in a castle and be an animal lover.\(^5\) Furthermore, “good manner” is also one important factor to decide whether if the character could be a princess. For instance, on an image with a woman sitting on a throne with a slouching posture, she commented that “princesses usually live in the castle and their sitting posture is usually good, unlike this woman sitting this way.” Another instance would be that she considered Princess Justina Albertina not to be like a princess because of her bad attitude and annoying temper.

For the pictures containing a knight-like girl/woman dressed in armor, like Li-Kwen, she also needed to find certain female physical features to determine if it is a princess or not. If such a character, in spite of her armor and sword, possesses any quality girlish, she can be considered to be a princess. For example, Ning-Ning

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\(^5\) Mulan here refers to the heroine in one of the 1998 Disney animated movies with the same title. Ning-Ning excluded the image of Mulan to be one of the princesses not only because she does not have fancy hair but also because she is not one of the popular Disney princesses (“I sort of forget the story because Pocahontas and Mulan are seldom included in the Disney princesses.”). Mulan Hua is actually a famous Chinese female figure from a commoner family who disguises herself to be a male and joins the army in replacement of her father.

\(^5\) This “animal lover” concept accords with her initial drawing of fairy-tale impression and it is also another proof of the influence of Disney upon her—“Because like in ‘Pocahontas’ and ‘Snow White,’ the princesses usually have lots of animal friends.”
identified the image of Princess Knight as a princess because the knight princess wears a “pink” cape. Moreover, contrary to Li-Kwen, Ning-Ning seemed to think there should be an age limit for princesses so she excluded the photo of Princess Anne as one (“Because she looks more like a queen to me; her age seems to be older than princesses.”). As for the picture of an overweight girl wearing a crown, she regarded it as a princess, as Li-Kwen (“I think she’s a princess but she likes eating too much so she is very fat. She’s like a rich princess and many princes want to marry her. Or like the kings want to marry their sons to her but the princes don’t like her ‘cause she loves eating too much and they are afraid she will eat them as well. She’s not like a beautiful princess but she can be a fat and rich one.”). Thus, “body figure” played a less important factor to influence Ning-Ning’s decision; a plus-sized girl wearing fancy outfit or accessories can still be a princess.

Rafiki’s responses to the images in the princess section also revealed a strong emphasis on the outfits/accessories a princess should wear or the place she should be. Words like “jewelry,” “dress,” “big gown” repetitively appeared in his comments on the pictures and he also pointed out settings like a castle or palace in the images. “Fancy” was applied three times to describe either the outfit or the setting, interchangeably with other words such as “sparkling” or “expensive.” Furthermore, he made his decisions on whether the characters look “well taken care of” because he thought princesses should be all served nicely.

It’s interesting to note that he intensely counted out the images displaying a female dressed in armor, holding a sword and fighting against others. While

57 In Ning-Ning’s mind, the color “pink” is usually considered to be for girls instead of boys.
encountering such an image, he explained his reason why he did not consider it to be a princess: “Because she’s fighting and that’s not really a usual role for a princess.” Even on the cover picture of Princess Knight which both Li-Kwen and Ning-Ning traced certain female quality in it and decided it to be a princess, Rafiki still put it out of the category: “Because she’s riding a horse and she’s dressed up in armor.” Thus, a stronger opposition to deem such an image as a fairy-tale princess could be discerned in Rafiki’s reaction.

In addition, like Ning-Ning, he also showed a disagreement at Princess Justina Albertina’s ill temper or bad attitude, so he counted her out as well. However, he made the same decision as Li-Kwen’s to regard the photo of aged Princess Anne as a princess picture, saying “it looks like she’s standing in a castle and she’s wearing like jewelry and stuff like dress up, except for her, it would be like every day stuff.” Besides old princesses, he also had a wider acceptance for overweight ones. On the image with a heavyset girl wearing a crown, he commented “I think she’s a princess because the clothes she’s wearing are special and she’s wearing like gloves and she’s wearing a little blue crown on her head but it looks like she’s been eating a lot and I think that’s strange for a princess ‘cause it’s not a usual character of a princess.” “I still think she’s a princess even though she’s a bit overweight.” Although he mentioned his doubt for the “strangeness” for a princess to overeat, he still decided to count it as one.

Of all the participants, Wendy was the one who applied the word “fancy” the most number of times (sixteen) to describe the hair, the crown, the dress or the castle of the characters whom she considered to be princesses. As for the images she decided to exclude, “weird” was the most-applied adjective (four times) to describe them. It seemed
that the standard she held to judge if a character looks like a princess or not was very strict and depended highly on their looks, outfits and the place where they appear; anything beyond would be treated as abnormal, that is, weird. Therefore, she excluded most images out of the twenty: Princess Anne looked too old to be one (“It looks like an old woman dressing up and she doesn’t look too much like a princess to me”); Princess Knight was counted out for her armor (“Because the person is wearing lots of armor and this hat armor thing (helmet), it looks really weird with a feather on it.”) and Princess Justina Albertina was not one either (“Princesses are not usually mad all the time so it doesn’t really look like a princess.”).

As for the heavyset girl wearing a crown, Wendy excluded her not because of her body shape, but because her bad manner: “I don’t’ think she’s a princess because if princesses would, like, be eating something, I guess she would be, they usually be at a fancy table instead of sitting on the ground and the cake on the ground without a plate.” Therefore, like Ning-Ning, she also emphasized on what princesses should behave and deal with daily matters.

Princes

In the picture id section of princes, Li-Kwen also tended to use the word “fancy” to describe the outfit/accessories of the characters he considered to be princes. The type of ornaments he regarded to be worn by fairy-tale princes included crowns, shoulder straps, royal robes and golden belts. In his opinion, princes should also sit on thrones or ride horses. From the range of clothing he set as the standard “equipment” for princes, I got a sense that he seemed to limit the concept of “princes” to the ancient period instead of modern era. Upon the evaluation of a photo of Prince Charles wearing a formal
business suit, he determined it’s not a prince (“He looks more like a president than a prince. He is like giving a speech and ‘cause of the suit. Most princes don’t wear like that.”).

In addition to confining the concept of “princes” to the archaic timeframe, Li-Kwen also expressed his opposition to relating any “female qualities” to them. Seeing the picture of Prince Charming from the animated film “Shrek,” he claimed that the character did not look like a prince at all because of his red cheeks, long hair and skirt-like outfit—“It looks more like a princess than a prince ‘cause of his long hair and his face looks like a girl, too. The outfit looks like a princess’ too; it looks like a skirt.” However, he disregarded the element of age while making decisions. An aged figure wearing a fancy crown and fancy clothes were deemed as princes to Li-Kwen—“He looks like he’s wearing fancy clothes and has like a crown. He could be an old prince.”

Like Li-Kwen, “fancy” was the adjective used a lot in Ning-Ning’s responses to the images in the prince section. A “crown” was also a must-have item for princes in her opinion. Besides the proper outfits, she also judged the characters in the pictures by their appearance; “good-looking” was the phrase she used often to describe her choices. Furthermore, she also pointed out that princes should possess the quality of being able to protect. Upon seeing an image of a boy wearing a crown and surrounded by animals, she commented that “I think he could be a prince because princes need to be not only good-looking but also able to protect stuff, like this prince, he is a good friend with animals and insects.” It was obvious that in Ning-Ning’s mind, both princes and princesses should be animal lovers and close to nature.
Additionally, Ning-Ning tended to hold a looser standard for the issue of age limit while making judgments for princes than princesses. She accepted that a prince can look “a bit old” but not too old. The photo of Prince Charles wearing grey hair and sitting on a throne, for instance, looked “too old to be a prince” for her.

Rafiki also employed the word “fancy” to describe the clothes/ornaments of the characters he chose as princes, along with other words like “nice,” “new,” “special,” and “sparkly.” However, the most-applied word in his responses was “gold” (eight times), in order to suggest the high value of the royal family members’ outfits58 (“Because his sword looks like gold and part of his sleeves look like gold. And he looks like special because he of all his clothes he’s wearing”) (my italic emphases). Besides, the phrase “well taken care of” was repeatedly used as he did for the princess’ images (“I picked yes ‘cause he’s wearing a crown and he’s riding a horse and it looks like the horse was well taken care of and he looks like he’s well taken care of) (my italic emphases).

The reason why Rafiki would exclude an image from the prince category was often due to its “ordinariness.” As opposed to describing the qualified figures as “fancy,” he categorized other images as “regular” (six times): “Princes would have different armor and it looks like just a regular knight to me” (my italic emphasis). On the other hand, in Rafiki’s mind, princes usually dress differently from common people: “I think he’s a prince because he’s wearing like a really nice crown and his clothes are not something regular, like an every day person would wear” (my italic emphasis). However, unlike Li-Kwen, Rafiki recognized Prince Charles wearing a business suit as “a modern

58 Rafiki used the word “gold” to describe the ornaments of the characters in the pictures; however, it was employed not only limited to princes but also the figures he considered to be kings.
prince.” Since a business suit can actually be worn by ordinary people as well, this may imply a contradictory impression of Rafiki toward princes. Finally, like Ning-Ning, he also accepted that a prince could be “a little old” but not too old.

In Wendy’s responses, “fancy” was also the word she used quite much (four times) to describe the outfits/accessories of the figures she regarded as princes. The items identified by her to be associated with princes included crowns, royal robes, armors and swords. Like Rafiki, she also deemed princes different from common people; for example, upon the photo of Prince Charles wearing a business suit, she commented “I don’t think he’s a prince because princes would all be like wearing fancy clothes and that one, it’s not too fancy; it’s what a normal man would usually wear, like a tie, pretty normal too. Sometimes princes have long armor ‘cause they do fight a lot and they don’t usually wear ties” (my italic emphases). Hence, to Wendy, the concept of princes is opposite to being “normal,” like ordinary persons.

Besides, like Li-Kwen, Wendy also held a belief that princes should live in ancient periods instead of modern era. Everything a prince wears should not be connected with current times; in one of her comments, she stated that “it looks like someone dressing up ‘cause it looks like a pretty modern person wearing a wig and the crown doesn’t look too real” (my italic emphasis). Thus, even someone dresses up and even wears a crown, she would still consider him not to be a prince if he by any means reminds her of the present day. Therefore, the concept of a modern prince seemed relatively remote to Wendy. Moreover, concerning the issue of age limit, while other participants all held a less definite standard for princes, she still claimed the necessity for princes to look young instead of old: “They wouldn’t really be a prince at that age, with
what they look like. They look like they are lot older than a prince would be.” “’Cause the age would be pretty old for a prince. The outfit looks kind of like it but the age makes me think that wouldn’t be a prince.”

**Witches**

Li-Kwen’s reactions toward the characters he recognized as witches involved a distinct exclusion of anything looking “normal” or “regular”; for instance, while seeing the image of Kiki from the 1989 Japanese animated film “Kiki’s Delivery Service” by Hayao Miyazaki, he counted it out for the reason that “she looks like a normal kid” (my italic emphasis). In his opinion, almost all witches should look “creepy” (four times). Moreover, both “evil” and “old” were also the adjectives he tended to use to describe the qualified figures. The must-have “accessories” for witches he pointed out included “broomsticks,” “magic wands,” and “black cats or crows.” Images containing those things usually appeared more convincing to him to count as witch pictures.

Other than “creepy,” another strong impression Ning-Ning had for witches in fairy tales was “scary” (five times):“Because the horns on her head looks very scary and she has a crow with her and where she is looks creepy.” Besides, upon seeing the picture of the wicked queen transforming to an old hag from the Disney animation “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,” Ning-Ning counted the image as one because of the hag’s facial expression (“smirking”). Like Li-Kwen, Ning-Ning also brought up certain necessary “equipment” or clothing for witches like “broomsticks,” “black

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59 This Japanese animated film features a young and kind-hearted apprentice witch named Kiki who leaves her hometown and starts to make a living by providing delivery service in a European big city for the sake of completing her training as a witch.

60 The image Ning-Ning referred to here was the evil character from the Disney animation “Sleeping Beauty.”
cats/crows” and “black robes.” Most of the witches in her mind seemed to relate to darkness and evilness. However, she also acknowledged the possible existence of “good witches.” Having seen the Japanese animation “Kiki’s Delivery Service,” she recognized the image of the main character Kiki as not only a witch but a good one. Therefore, the experience of having been exposed to such a film featuring a good witch made Ning-Ning broaden her view toward witches.

Besides calling attention to the ornaments/accessories witches usually have such as “pointy hats,” “magic wands” and “black cats/crows,” Rafiki put focus on describing the physical features of what he thought to be witches’ like their “long noses” and “bony fingers.” Like Ning-Ning, he also suggested the particular facial expressions witches may have; upon evaluating the Disney’s image of Cinderella’s evil stepmother, although he excluded it due to the fact that he had seen the film and known the story, he commented “but her face looks like a witch because witches don’t usually smile. They usually smirk or frown.” Moreover, having also seen the Japanese animation “‘Kiki’s Delivery Service,” he knew about her witch identity and stated that “In the movie, she’s a good witch.” “Because she’s like doing good things, she’s not…a lot of witches do bad things to certain people but she’s doing good things to other people. “There can be good witches and there can be bad witches ‘cause not all witches are bad.” Therefore, like Ning-Ning, he also showed his acceptance that there can be good witches, along with bad ones.

Wendy emphasized a lot the quality of witches to be able to “disguise” themselves. The word “disguised” were applied for six times in her responses to the images in the witch section. For example, contemplating the witch’s image from the
picture book *Hansel and Gretel* by Rika Lesser and Paul Zelinsky (1984), Wendy noted that “she looks more like an old lady but I would say she’s probably disguised because witches are usually disguised.” Like Rafiki, Wendy also mentioned some physical features she thought a witch would possess like “pointy noses” and “sharp and long nails.” In addition to pointing out “broomsticks” as one of the witches’ common accessories, she also applied the phrase “witch clothing” to refer to the clothes witches usually wear, including a “dark and long dress.”

As Li-Kwen, Wendy excluded anything “normal” from what she thought to be the characteristics of witches; while reflecting on images, Wendy provided comments like “’cause she’s only wearing the normal clothes that you would usually have to wear” to express her decision to count out the particular image (my italic emphasis). As for the image of Kiki, Wendy showed a disagreement of the apprentice witch’s resemblance to her mental impression of what a witch should look like, but she still counted it as one, due to the fact that she saw the film before: “She looks like a modern girl but I know the story so she is a witch, or she is partly witch ‘cause she’s still on her training” (my italic emphasis). Again, like her reflections on the images in the prince section, she implicitly expressed her opinion of associating the concept of witches with ancient period instead of modern era.

*Previous Mental Images of Fairy-Tale Characters*

This picture id pre-interview activity helped me grasp a sense of all my four research participants’ previous mental images of the three familiar types of fairy-tale

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61 This picture book was first published in 1984 and a Caldecott Honor book in 1985. In Zelinsky’s illustrations, the witch appears to be a gnarled old woman with a crookback and in an ordinary European country dress.
characters constituted by their impressions from the stories they read before. Examining their responses toward the various images in a whole, I found that their respective prior knowledge to those types of characters actually shares something in common.

First, the most important factor for each of them to determine if the image fits the common expectations for the specific type of fairy-tale character was the clothing/accessories which the characters wear. For instance, both princesses and princes should look “fancy” by wearing all types of extravagant clothing and ornaments implying their royal identity or stay in a “fancy” place like a castle or palace. On the other hand, witches were often associated with darkness, dressing dark-colored “witch clothing,” possessing small “gadgets” like broomsticks, and accompanied by black animals like cats. Therefore, there seemed to be a special “dress code” for each type of the characters established in the children’s mind; anything violating the dress code so as to be deemed “weird” (like Wendy’s reaction to a female dressed in armor) or considered to be “normal”/“regular” (like Li-Kwen’s reaction to pictures with female figures dressed unlike witches) would result in being excluded from the particular category.

Furthermore, the general idea of what every specific type of fairy-tale character should behave like could be also traced in the reflections on the images. It is necessary for princesses to act properly, such as having an upright sitting posture or eating at a table; as for princes, they are allowed to dress in special armor and fight but they are not permitted to kiss another prince.\textsuperscript{62} In addition, the usual behaviors of witches include

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{62} While reflecting the final illustration of the Dutch picture book \textit{King and King} by Linda de Haan and Stern Nijland (2003) in which there are two princes kissing on the lips of each other, all of my four
\end{footnotesize}
flying on a broomstick or frowning/smirking to make mischief and do harm to the innocent.

Sometimes having been told or read a certain tale would influence their decisions as well. For example, upon seeing a cartoonish frog wearing a crown and lying on a lily pad in a pond, although the image of a frog is usually not related to that of a prince, all four children naturally built intertextual links between the image and the fairy tale “The Frog Prince” and further considered it could be a prince: “I know the story of “the prince frog” so it is a prince who had a spell on him and then… he’s really a prince” (Wendy’s comment). Another example would be a non-Disney picture of the scene in which the wicked queen stands outside the window and tries to coax Snow White to eat her poisoned apple. Due to possessing the prior knowledge of the tale, the participants all identified the woman as a witch, even though she actually does not dress like one.\(^{63}\)

Therefore, exposing children to a more extensive repertoire of stories in a certain degree helps broaden their acknowledgement of fairy-tale characters and further enhances their critical thinking ability. The Japanese animated film “Kiki’s Delivery Service,” for instance, provides a sample of “good witch” so as to break the stereotype people usually hold for witches. Among my four participants, to the children who have seen it (Ning-Ning, Rafiki and Wendy), Kiki’s image not only served as a choice for them to include into the witch category but also made them reflect on/examine their primary “false” impression that all witches are wicked or do bad things.

\(^{63}\) In the picture, the witch is dressed in a Middle-Eastern styled long blue robe and white head scarf.
The multicultural images chosen for this activity served as another example to illustrate this point. Taking the picture of “Aunt Tigress,” the evil character from a well-known Chinese folktale bearing the same title\cite{aunt-tigress} as an instance, both children having been influenced by Chinese culture reckoned her as a witch: “‘Cause she has the hair of an old woman and face like a tiger” (Li-Kwen’s comment); “She’s Aunt Tigress so she’s a witch” (Ning-Ning’s comment), while both children with the American cultural background firmly claimed it’s not a witch: “It looks more like a cat to me” (Rafiki’s comment) “That doesn’t look like a witch because it’s a cat instead looking like a witch but just a cat with a hat so it doesn’t look like a witch at all”(Wendy’s comment). Due to their multicultural background which granted them an access to an alternative witch image, Li-Kwen and Ning-Ning have incorporated a figure without wearing a witch hat or flying on a broomstick into their “mental collection” for this type of fairy-tale characters. In other words, stories providing various representations of characterization help children not stick to the rigid impressions and further challenge the dominant values.

\cite{aunt-tigress} “Aunt Tigress” is a Chinese version of “Little Red Riding Hood.” It is also named “Granny Wolf” in which the villain is switched to a wolf instead of a tiger. The 1990 Caldecott Medal winner, *Lon Po Po* by Ed Young (1989), is often regarded as the most familiar rendition of this tale to American children.
CHAPTER 6

QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS (PART II)

Children’s Perceptions toward Classic Versions of Fairy Tales

In my series of interviews following the pre-interview contact, I included both classic versions of fairy tales and their modern disruptive variants with the purpose of introducing a systematic variety of fairy-tale renditions to my research participants and getting their opinions toward each story. As I mentioned in their background information earlier, all four children had seldom been exposed to the earlier versions of fairy tales like Perrault’s or Brothers Grimm’s before participating this study; their strongest former impression to the selected fairy tales (if they claimed that they have heard or read the particular tales before) mostly came from the adapted books or movies of the tales. Therefore, the first set of texts (the classic versions) I applied in this study can be treated as an instrument to make them examine what they already knew about the tales and further gain a broader understanding of how the stories were told in the earlier versions.

Fresh Aspects of Classic Fairy-Tale Versions

From their first contact with the classic versions of fairy tales chosen for this research, all of my four participants have found some aspects which they did not know or were unfamiliar with before. These undiscovered aspects of the tales in a certain degree help to vary the fixed prior knowledge of the children toward each tale so that their impressions could be reshaped.

Li-Kwen’s former understanding of “Cinderella” was mainly based on the Disney animation of the fairy tale. During the interview, he stated that the movie actually shared
a lot of similarities with the Perrault’s version such as the appearance of a fairy
godmother, but there were also differences between the two which could undermine his
previous recognition. While asked if there is anything different, Li-Kwen firstly brought
up the powerful feature of animal personification in the Disney rendition:

Winnie: So how did you know about the tale?
Li-Kwen: I watched the movie before.
Winnie: The Disney movie?
Li-Kwen: Yeah.
Winnie: I see. So what’s the major difference between this Perrault version
and the movie?
Li-Kwen: Oh, I know there are rats in it (the movie), like making clothes and
the stuff.
Winnie: Besides the rats, anything else?
Li-Kwen: Let’s see.. That one (the movie) doesn’t have any lizards and the
mice are not in the mouse trap; they are everywhere, not in the
mouse trap.

In Perrault’s tale, although there are small animals (“lizards and mice”) involved in
assisting the heroine to attend the prince’s ball, they are passively doing so by being
trapped or caught. The unique plot of the Disney film in which the rats running around
“everywhere” and helping Cinderella “make clothes” was obviously one of Li-Kwen’s
strongest impression of the Cinderella tale; however, through setting Perrault’s tale side
by side with the film, Li-Kwen could get a sense that the feature of animal
personification was not innate to the fairy tale itself and further alter such a misled
comprehension.

Another example that the new aspect presented in classic versions varied or
enlarged Li-Kwen’s fixed concept narrowed by the Disney animation of fairy tales
concerned how Snow White is awakened from her false death caused by the poisoned apple. In the Grimms’ version of the tale, Snow White woke up because the prince’s servant tripped while carrying her away in the glass coffin away so as to make the piece of apple dislodge from her throat; on the other hand, in the movie, it is the prince’s kiss which saves her from the curse. While asked how Snow White woke up during the interview, Li-Kwen based his answer from the Disney rendition without hesitation:

Winnie: I see. And tell me how Snow White woke up from the glass coffin.
Li-Kwen: A prince kissed her.
Winnie: I think that’s in the Disney version. In the Grimms version, it’s actually the prince’s servants stumbled so that the piece of apple dislodged from Snow White’s throat. Right?
Li-Kwen: Oh, yeah.
Winnie: So which plot do you like better?
Li-Kwen: I like that in the Grimms version. It seems more reasonable than the Disney one.

Having established his strong impression toward the tale from the animated film, it was understandable that Li-Kwen’s reply was heavily “disneyfied.” However, being aware of the different arrangement in the original provided him a chance to reevaluate his formal perception and be able to hold a critical attitude toward it.

Even when without possessing any prior knowledge about the fairy tale, certain “extra” elements could still raise children’s interest in them. While discussing the Sleeping Beauty tale, Li-Kwen pointed out his enjoyment in reading the extended part of Perrault’ rendition which begins at a common ending with the prince waking up Sleeping Beauty:

Winnie: Can you tell me which earlier version you like better?
Li-Kwen: I like the Perrault version better because it tells what happened afterwards, like after the prince and the princess like got married. The Grimms one like stopped when they got married but this one like went on.

Winnie: Oh, so the Perrault one is your favorite?
Li-Kwen: Yeah. Because it tells more details so it’s more interesting.

While being juxtaposed with the Grimms’ version, the additional fragment in Perrault’s tale describing how Sleeping Beauty marries the prince, has two children, is threatened by his ogress mother and finally reaches to the second happy ending serves as a fresh aspect to be added to Li-Kwen’s repertoire of this fairy tale.

As for Ning-Ning, her encounter with Grimms’ “The Frog Prince” varied the former understanding she used to have in terms of how the frog turns back to a prince. In her drawing depicting the ending of this tale (see Figure 5), she drew the scene in which the princess kisses the frog as her primary impression. Yet, while contrasting the same scene in the Grimms’ version, she expressed her preference for the arrangement made by the Grimms:

Winnie: So you drew the ending of “The Frog Prince.” Can you describe it for me?
Ning-Ning: I drew that the princess kissed the frog and it turned back to a prince.
Winnie: So what is this ending you drew based on?
Ning-Ning: I think it’s a version I read before.
Winnie: And you also read the Grimms’ version. How is your picture different from what’s described in the Grimms’ version?
Ning-Ning: Mmm… the princess didn’t kiss the frog. She threw it to the wall and it turned back to a prince.
Winnie: So which ending do you like better?
Ning-Ning: I like that the princess threw the frog to the wall.
Winnie: I see. So how come you chose to draw your picture like that, like the princess kissed the frog?
Ning-Ning: That’s the one I used to know, but actually I like that the princess threw the frog to the wall better. ‘Cause if I were the princess, I wouldn’t want to kiss on the slimy lips of the frog. It would be nice if I could just throw him to the wall and he turned back to a prince. Then I can kiss the prince’s lips instead.

Figure 5-Ning-Ning’s Drawing of the Ending of “The Frog Prince”

As one of the classic versions of this tale, Grimms’ story added another possibility to Ning-Ning’s repertoire and helped reconstruct her previous schemata toward it.

Reflecting the identical part of Grimms’ “The Frog Prince,” Rafiki drew a picture of a princess throwing the frog against the wall (see Figure 6) and stated how such a plot seemed novel and “funny” to him:

Winnie: I see. So do you like such an ending?
Rafiki: Yeah, ‘cause it’s funny. It’s a different way because in some stories, like the prince… probably the princess would have to kiss other person or do something else. This is a different way.

Winnie: So which way do you like better? Between the princess kissing the frog or throwing him against the wall.

Rafiki: Throwing the frog. Because it’s funnier than a lot of other stories or fairy tales.

Figure 6-Rafiki’s Drawing of the Ending of “The Frog Prince”

Different from Ning-Ning, Rafiki had never been exposed to any other version of this tale before, so he chose to base his picture upon the Grimms’. However, in his responses, he still suggested how this interesting arrangement in this classic version overturned his previous general perception toward “some stories.”

Like all the other participants of my research, Wendy also experienced an unfamiliar aspect of classic versions and this was Jacobs’ “The Story of the Three Little Pigs.” When she was asked to recount the story, her description presented that her prior understanding was from one of the “sanitized” versions which removed violent plots from the story:

Winnie: Could you describe the story a little for me?
Wendy: The little pigs built houses; the first one straws, the second one sticks and the last one bricks. And the wolf came to blow down the first little pig’s house. And after he blew down, the first pig ran to the second little pig’s house. And then he blew down that house and they ran to the third little pig’s house. And he couldn’t blow it down and then he went down the chimney and he got his bottom on fire. 
Not on fire but he burned his bottom in a pot of hot boiling water.
And he ran away and never came back since then.

Winnie: Is this the Jacobs version you read?
Wendy: That’s the normal one that I know.

Winnie: Oh, I see. Like the version you used to know. Right. So can you tell me what happened to the first and second little pigs in the Jacobs version?

Wendy: They… they got eaten.

Winnie: Yes. And what about the wolf? Remember? Let’s take a look. He firstly tried to coax the third little pig with some things but every time the pig outsmarted him. And then finally the wolf came up with a plan to get into the house from the chimney. Then he fell into a pot of hot water, got boiled and eaten by the third little pig. Do you think the wolf deserved to be eaten?

Wendy: Yeah, ‘cause he ate the other pigs.

The story Wendy memorized and told in fact matched with the plot of the 1933 Disney adaptation in the “Silly Symphony” animated shorts collection and it was clearly the firmest impression Wendy held toward the fairy tale. However, by being introduced with an “unprocessed” traditional version like Jacobs’, she could have an alternative mental image formed in her mind. The brutal scenes which had been foreign to her in a certain degree helped to diversify her perception toward the tale limited and monopolized by the Disney rendition.
Violence and Justice in Classic Fairy-Tale Versions

The less popularity of and censored access to classic versions among modern children are often due to the disturbing and bloodthirsty elements contained in the tales. One of my research participants, Wendy, shared her experience of being “protected” from Grimms’ “Hansel and Gretel” during her third interview:

Winnie: So before this interview, did you read Grimms’ “Hansel and Gretel”?  
Wendy: No, because my mom... she thought I was too young for it before. She thought it would be kind of scary because the witch got cooked.  
Winnie: So what do you think about this story now? Is it scary to you?  
Wendy: No.  
Winnie: I see. So do you like this story?  
Wendy: Yeah. I like how they could trick the witch and get out.

Like most parents/teachers/adults, Wendy’s mother held a belief that the “scary” plot would be unbearable to children’s fragile and developing mind; such a common concern usually results in severe censorship of traditional versions of fairy tales. Nevertheless, as a second grader, Wendy showed her ability to cope with the supposedly terrifying and hence harmful detail and even interpret it positively as the children’s strength to save themselves out of trouble in the tale.

Similar episodes indicating children’s capability to deal with violent or frightening elements in classic versions (especially Grimms’) could actually be found all over the children’s responses collected for this research. While discussing the generally assumed disturbing scene at the end of Grimms’ “Snow White” in which the wicked queen is forced to step on the red hot iron shoes and dance to her death, Li-Kwen expressed no fear caused by the description:
Winnie: And what about the evil queen in the Grimms version?
Li-Kwen: She got like to wear kind of shoes and like burned and she fell on the floor and died.
Winnie: Yeah, like red hot iron shoes, right? Do you think it’s cruel for them to make the queen to step on the hot iron shoes?
Li-Kwen: No, because the queen’s like trying to kill Snow White.
Winnie: I see. And do you think this ending is a bit scary to you?
Li-Kwen: No.
Winnie: Okay. And which ending do you like better?65
Li-Kwen: I like the queen stepped on hot iron shoes better.

Not only Li-Kwen was not frightened by such an eerie plot, he also showed his preference for it and even became an advocate for the bitter treatment imposed upon the queen. In other words, he was able to put up with the fearful element and further justify its application in this classic version.

Getting to know about the daunting plot in which the stepsisters of Cinderella have part of their feet cut off to fit the tiny slipper as well as their eyes poke out by the doves, Ning-Ning offered a reaction which illustrated another instance of children’s competence to channel the possible resulted fear and further rationalize such an arrangement:

Winnie: Is there anything you noticed to be different?
Ning-Ning: In the Grimms version, the stepsisters cut off part of their feet in order to fit the shoe. And at the end, the stepsisters went to attend Cinderella’s wedding. And their eyes were poked out by the doves so they became blind. But in the Perrault version, they didn’t cut off their feet. And they said sorry to Cinderella so they got married to two great lords on the same day of Cinderella’s
wedding. And in the Disney version, nothing happened to the stepsisters at the end of the story.

Winnie: So which ending do you prefer?

Ning-Ning: I kind of like the Grimms one because I think the stepsisters should be punished for treating Cinderella badly, though the ending is a bit scary to me.

In her responses, she distinguished different endings among the three variants of the Cinderella tale—Grimms’, Perrault’s and Disney’s. Although she mentioned her scare caused by the epilogue designed by the Grimms, she still preferred it to the other two versions and supported its usage of violence for carrying out justice, that is, to get the evil characters punished.

As brought up earlier, the scene in which the witch is pushed into the oven and dies has usually deemed as a horrifying moment presented in Grimms’ “Hansel and Gretel.” However, Rafiki’s response toward this plot indicated the necessity of brutality in order to put justice into practice in this tale:

Winnie: Do you think it would be like cruel to push the witch into the oven?

Rafiki: Sort of but she was trying to eat Hansel and Gretel… she was probably going to eventually eat Gretel and… so I think it was a little cruel but she did try to take somebody’s life.

Winnie: So did you feel sorry for the witch?

Rafiki: No, not really.

For the reason of identifying with the major characters, Hansel and Gretel, it became natural for Rafiki to consider the punishment administered upon the witch to be well reasoned. As a result, the supposedly gruesome detail seemed to be more acceptable and easier to cope with.
In addition to being able to deal with the scary plot in “Hansel and Gretel” by the Grimms mentioned at the beginning of this section, Wendy also demonstrated her capacity to deal with violence in other classic versions of fairy tales. During the first formal interview, while reflecting the pain suffered by Cinderella’s stepsisters in the Grimms’ tale, she expressed her fear firstly, but after a deeper contemplation, she was able to adapt it and verify the input of cruel treatment in the version:

Winnie: Among the three versions of the Cinderella tale you already knew, which one do you like the best?
Wendy: I like the normal one best, the Disney. And then I like the Perrault version. The Grimms one is my least favorite ‘cause it’s kind of scary. And they cut off some of their body parts and they still live with it. Kind of creepy.
Winnie: So tell more about your idea toward the ending of the Grimms version? Like the doves poked out the stepsisters’ eyes? Scary?
Wendy: Well…not too exactly scary, but I think they kind of deserve it because of what they did, they like did things mean to her and made her do things.

Wendy’s referring to the Disney version as “the normal one” in a certain degree suggested its quality of dullness; everything presented in it was familiar to her. However, the brutal elements unique in the Grimms, in spite of seeming “scary” and “creepy” to her, formed a powerful impression to her. The opportunity to think further enabled her to convert her former uneasiness and further accept such a design to carry out justice in this tale.

In a later interview for discussing another tale by the Grimms, “Snow White,” Wendy seemed to develop more strength to manage the barbarity in the story:
Winnie: I see. So let’s talk about the ending of this tale. Do you think it’s a scary punishment for the queen to step on the red hot iron shoes and dance until she fell down dead.

Wendy: I think it’s a funny punishment, to dance till she’s dead.

Winnie: Oh, interesting. So how about in the Disney version? Like she fell off the cliff and died?

Wendy: It’s kind of scary but it’s a good punishment. I like the Disney one more ‘cause in this one (Grimms), she could have said no and left and stayed alive.

By calling the brutal and horrible imposition upon the wicked queen as “funny,” Wendy revealed her stronger proficiency to confront violent elements presented in the classic version and even imagine an alternative path the doomed one could have chosen to decrease its fearfulness. On the other hand, the downfall of the villain depicted in the Disney version, a seemingly more “sanitized” variant, contrarily caused relatively more dismay from Wendy than the earlier version.

Children’s apprehension toward violence in classic versions of fairy tales gathered for this study connote that they actually have sufficient ability to cope with any possible anxiety caused by it, especially when the measure of brutality is used to punish villains in the stories. They tend to grant and accept more easily such a brutality because it makes more sense to them in terms of helping to achieve justice in fairy tales. If it happens that those disturbing elements were removed from the tale, children might on the contrary feel even more scared for the evil ones do not get punished as they deserve. In one previous study of Trousdale (1989c) to analyze children’s responses to the fearful elements in fairy tales, she described an irony resulted from the fact that adults’ purposeful sanitization of violent details may bring forth more fright out of children:
… I began to wonder whether a terrible irony had not occurred—whether attempts to make the story less frightening had not resulted in making the story far *more* frightening to her [one of Trousdale’s research subjects]. Is it possible that when the wolf [in “Little Red Riding Hood”] is allowed to survive and roam free, children are left with the sense that, indeed, he may certainly come back at any time? An element of gruesomeness has been deleted from the story, but along with it has been the lost of security of knowing that in the end the danger is resolved for good. (70, Trousdale’s emphasis)

Such an irony seems to imply the inevitability of violence arranged in traditional fairy tales in order to guarantee a more satisfying and thoughtful dénouement which may in contrast appears to be bearable in the end. In other words, “[c]hildren have a simple sense of morality that they need to see affirmed and reinforced by the world around them” (Tamminga, 2006, p. 0-7). Therefore, adult’s assumptions about frightening elements in the classic versions and further attempts to uproot the elements or shield children from the texts are challenged and need to be reconsidered.

**Authenticity of Classic Fairy-Tale Versions**

After being exposed to the early versions of fairy tales during the period of this research, all my participants have demonstrated their effort to absorb the elements of the chosen texts and further gain a better understanding of this genre. In other words, the new aspects which were formerly unfamiliar to them have been added to their original repertoire of fairy tales. Their drawings portraying their mental impressions toward the particulars tales during the interview process reflected this supposition. As Rafiki based on the Grimms’ tale “The Frog Prince” to draw its ending (See Figure 6), Li-Kwen also chose to draw his image based on the same version (See Figure 7):
Neither Rafiki nor Li-Kwen had prior knowledge of this fairy tale; therefore, it was reasonable that both of them built their perception toward it upon the classic version which was formally introduced to them in this study. As opposed to Rafiki’s picture which presented the moment the frog is thrown against the wall by the princess, Li-Kwen’s drawing depicted the real ending of the Grimms’ version in which the prince back to the human form sits in the carriage with the princess on the way to his kingdom and hears “a sound at the back of the carriage as if something had broken” when in fact it is the heartbeat of Henry, the faithful servant, who feels overly joyful for his master’s restoration (Grimms, p. 89). In a sense, Li-Kwen’s grasp of the relatively minor detail to render the ending of the Grimms’ version suggested an even deeper influence of this classic version upon him as well as a greater level of his absorption of this tale.

The power of classic fairy-tale versions to add to/vary children’s previous perceptions toward the genre was also manifested in my fourth participant’s reaction toward the fairy tale “Cinderella.” Wendy’s drawing presenting the scene of Cinderella
crying over her mother’s grave under the hazel tree and receiving a dress from the white birds so that she is able to attend the prince’s ball (see Figure 8):

![Figure 8- Wendy’s Free Drawing of “Cinderella”](image)

The fact that Wendy’s strongest prior knowledge of the Cinderella tale was drawn from the Disney animation was reflected through her ability to describe every single detail of the film’s plot without hesitation during the interview; however, while being asked to draw a picture based on what she knew about this fairy tale, she chose to depict a unique scene from the Grimms’ tale, the least favorite version among the three discussed:

Winnie: Yes. But you didn’t choose to draw your picture based on this story (the Disney version). Can you tell me your reasons?

Wendy: Well… I kind of wanted to, because it’s gonna like a new story I never heard before because there are like no pictures in the book so I think I can make up a picture in my mind.

Wendy’s reply to clarify my doubt about her choice indicated a tendency that fresh aspects of classic fairy-tale versions new to children could actually stimulate more imagination of them, especially when presented only through the format of verbal text. Moreover, Wendy’s response to the verbal text of Grimms’ tale illustrates what
Nodelman and Reimer (2003) describes as one of the strategies based on the reader response theory of filling in the gaps and building consistency while reading literary works—“concretization”: “Texts often describe how places, people, or objects look or sound or smell. Readers can enrich their experience and increase their understanding by forming mental pictures: by imagining what is being described as exactly as the words of the texts allow them to” (p. 57).

Ning-Ning’s initial free drawings of both “Cinderella” and “Sleeping Beauty” during the first interview conveyed plenty of Disney elements such as personified small animals (birds and rats) as well as headscarf and apron of Cinderella (see Figure 9 & 10 for comparison) and a similar design of dress hairstyle and rose as Aurora’s as well as three fairies (see Figure 11, 12 & 13 for comparison):

Figure 9- Ning-Ning’s Free Drawing of “Cinderella

Figure 10- Cinderella in the Disney film
Nevertheless, during the second interview, similarly with her primary understanding of the fairy tale “Snow White” by the Disney rendition, Ning-Ning drew a picture with one of the dwarfs standing at the door and surprisingly found Snow White with long hair\textsuperscript{66} lying on the floor after biting the poisoned apple (See Figure 14):

This picture presented a transformation in which Ning-Ning chose to include less elements from the Disney movie in it than she did for the previous two. Moreover, the choice to illustrate a scene shared by both the Disney rendition and the earlier versions like the Grimms’ signified that her repertoire had been gradually mediated by another

\textsuperscript{66} The feature of having long hair is different from Snow White in the Disney animation which has short hair to the shoulder instead.
variant instead of monopolized by the Disney movie. The drawing she did while being asked to portray “the true story” of the Snow White tale showed an even more obvious process of change for its depiction of three scenes in which Snow White is harmed by the wicked queen, using a lace, a poisoned comb and a poisoned apple, respectively (see Figure 15):

Rather than picking the Disney adaptation as “the true story” of the tale, Ning-Ning excerpted the three scenes from the Grimms version to suggest what she thought to be the accurate version of the tale. Such a decision served as another example to illustrate the authenticity of the traditional version over the later ones. The extension she made between her two pictures based on “Snow White” connoted not only that the range she knew about the tale had been broaden by the classic version but also that her impression of what to be the original version had been switched to a more “correct” one.

Ning-Ning was not the only participants who recognized the authority of classic fairy-tale versions. In Li-Kwen’s responses to the Cinderella tale, he also pointed out the earliest version as the undistorted one:
Winnie: And tell me which version do you think to be the true story of the Cinderella tale?

Li-Kwen: I think it would be the Perrault version. I think the Disney one is too but I would choose the Perrault one ‘cause it’s like in the seventeenth century.

Winnie: Oh, so you would choose an earlier version to be the true story of a fairy tale?

Li-Kwen: Yes. ‘Cause it’s like the first version of it.

Having not been exposed to even earlier versions of the Cinderella tale such as “Ye-h-Hsien”\(^\text{67}\), Li-Kwen chose Perrault’s version as the true story due to its antiquity. Despite the fact that his choice was still somewhat manipulated by his prior knowledge drawn from the Disney version, he was able to make a distinction and chose the earlier one.\(^\text{68}\)

Later, when the discussion moved to the Sleeping Beauty tale, his initial answer revealed a similar tendency that the choice was manipulated by the most-heard or familiar version:

Li-Kwen: I think the Brothers Grimm one. ‘Cause it only tells like from the start when the Sleeping Beauty was born to the end when they got married. Like it didn’t tell anything more than that.

Winnie: Right. But your favorite one is the Perrault version?

Li-Kwen: Yes. ‘Cause it has more details and tells more.

Winnie: So if I tell you that the Perrault version is actually earlier than the Grimms one. Would you change your mind?

Li-Kwen: Oh, then I think I will change my mind because the earlier one would be like the true story.

The alteration of his choice suggested that in Li-Kwen’s mind, authenticity is inherent to the earlier versions of a fairy tale. The older a version is, the more authentic it is. Such a

\(^{67}\) Narrated by Shih-Yuan Li and recorded by Cheng-Shih Tuan in 850 A.D., “Yeh-Hsien” may be the earliest existing version of the Cinderella tale, originated from the Chinese culture.

\(^{68}\) As mentioned in Chapter 4, the 1950 Disney animated film was mainly based on Perrault’s version, so that’s way Li-Kwen tended to equate the two renditions.
concept shown in Li-Kwen’s responses is worth for educators to keep in mind as one of the important perceptions of children toward classic fairy-tale versions.

**Children’s Reactions to a Juxtaposition of Old and New Fairy-Tale Versions**

Familiarizing children with classic versions of fairy tales can broaden the repertoire of their prior knowledge toward the genre, in terms of its roots and ancientness. Being aware that those “sanitized” fairy tales they used to know from the source of mass media like the Disney production are actually based on/originated from versions dated back centuries ago with eliminated fresh aspects helps them develop a better sense of these tales. The new knowledge children gain from reading the earlier versions can be applied to modify and stretch their fixed prior apprehension and initiate their reflections on it. Furthermore, a juxtaposed reading of traditional fairy-tale versions and their contemporary adaptations with subversive elements serves as a further step to cultivate children’s critical thinking ability to question their established ideas of fairy tales. Alessandra Levorato (2003) has also mentioned the effect which a comparison between old and new fairy-tale versions creates:

…twentieth-century liberating retellings choose to exploit the reader’s knowledge of the traditional version … and they become a transfiguration aimed at emphasizing the negative, anachronistic aspects of the tradition, forcing the reader to question her/himself. The possibility for a comparison with the original is used to highlight the conservative quality of the older version so that the reader will hopefully consider the alternative values offered. (154)
Hence, different types of modern disruptive fairy-tale variants, while being introduced together with their classic versions, can provide children with an access to challenge the internalized thoughts about the genre in a systematic fashion.

**Feminist Fairy Tales to Challenge Gendered Concepts**

During the first interview, each of my four research participants was introduced with paired versions of both the fairy tales “Cinderella” and “Sleeping Beauty.” There were respectively two modern disruptive variants for each tale and the four texts actually could be divided into two types (Type 1A and Type 1B in my typology listed in Chapter 1). *Prince Cinders* and *Sleeping Bobby* belong to Type 1A for their shared feature of having a male counterpart of the original fairy-tale heroine. Both of the books applied the strategy of exchanging the genders of the main characters in order to provide a new version of the particular tale. On the other hand, *Cinderella Bigfoot* and *Sleeping Ugly* can be categorized into Type 1B for their common attempts to overturn the generally-accepted ideology about beauty standard, for instance, the myth of “small feet” or the definite association between beauty and goodness as well as ugly and evil.

**Different Roles Assumed by Princes and Princesses in New Fairy Tales**

Both *Prince Cinders* and *Sleeping Bobby* provide an alternative possibility for what princes and princesses in fairy tales could be like and for how the gender relationship could be reconstructed. During the first interviews, all of the children noticed immediately the major difference of gender switch made in the two new tales, after discussing their earlier versions of Perrault and Grimms. Since Prince Cinders is actually a male Cinderella, his image is portrayed as thin, weak and poor. Reacting to such a different image of prince from that in traditional stories, my four research participants all
expressed a hesitation to accept him as a fairy-tale prince, with two sets of reasons.

Firstly, Li-Kwen happened to put focus on his disadvantaged social position (being poor) and claimed that he is unqualified to be a fairy-tale prince because of it:

Winnie: Do you think he’s like a regular prince in fairy tales?
Li-Kwen: No, ‘cause mostly princes live in fancy houses and have people do the chores and he has to do chores.
Winnie: So what’s a regular prince in fairy tales like to you?
Li-Kwen: Fancy. And like they have no like ripped clothes or anything and they don’t have to do the chores like him.

Comparing Prince Cinders with the image of a fairy-tale prince he held in mind, Li-Kwen paid more attention to his poverty (wearing “ripped clothes” and not living in a “fancy house” and low social status (doing “chores” for people). Rafiki, on the other hand, in spite of denying his status as a usual prince in fairy tales, eventually reckoned him as a prince because of the “crown” he wears:

Winnie: Rafiki, how do you like this book *Prince Cinders*?
Rafiki: I think it’s funny. He’s like Cinderella, but instead he is a prince. And instead of losing a shoe, he loses his trousers, which is funny. And he has three big hairy brothers and he wants to be like them. But he doesn’t end up being like them, but it ends up being a good thing that he’s not like them because they are too big to fit into the skinny trousers.
Winnie: So do you think it’s typical for a prince to be like this?
Rafiki: No.
Winnie: So do you like such an untraditional prince?
Rafiki: Yeah, I like it ‘cause it’s funny but that doesn’t really present what a prince usually look like. Because princes are usually wealthy, like they are sons of kings and queens, the rulers of a kingdom.
Winnie: Right. But after reading this book, would you consider accepting such an image to be a type of princes in fairy tales?

Rafiki: Yeah, ‘cause he’s has a crown which makes him look like that. Recognizing Prince Cinders as a male counterpart of Cinderella, Rafiki showed his uncertainty about categorizing him as a fairy-tale prince at first. Although he was willing to accept him as a prince at last, the reason was still established from the old evaluating standard to judge a prince—wearing a crown. In a sense, both Li-Kwen and Rafiki still held a strong inclination to their previous beliefs about the general economic condition a fairy-tale prince should be in such as the dress code signifying his richness (“fancy” clothes, “crown” and “wealthy”).

By contrast, the girls emphasized different aspects signifying a “prince.” Both Ning-Ning and Wendy noticed more the “unusual” physical features of Prince Cinders rather than his deprived financial well-being:

Winnie: I see. What about Prince Cinders himself? Do you like such a prince?
Ning-Ning: Not much, ‘cause he’s not strong enough.
Winnie: So if I want you to choose between a rich, skinny prince and a poor, strong one, which one will you choose?
Ning-Ning: I think I will choose the poor strong one.

Ning-Ning’s reply reflected the importance for a fairy-tale prince to have bodily strength in her mind. For her, it’s less necessary for a prince to have wealth, but it’s absolutely demanded that he is strong and able to protect others. Such a perspective was also shared by Wendy. Although her least favorite characters in the story are Prince Cinders’ elder brothers, while being asked to judge their appearance, she actually deemed it in a somewhat positive manner:
Winnie: Is the image of Prince Cinders similar to what you primarily thought what a prince should be like?
Wendy: Not too much.
Winnie: So what are the differences?
Wendy: A prince should usually be strong. Prince Cinders is weak.

Winnie: And any character you don’t like?
Wendy: I don’t really like his big hairy brothers.
Winnie: Do you think they are handsome by being big and hairy?
Wendy: Kind of.
Winnie: What about Prince Cinders? Do you think he’s handsome?
Wendy: Not really ‘cause he is thin and he is pretty weak.

From the two excerpts from my first interview with Wendy above, the archetype of a “handsome” prince in Wendy’s mind seemed relatively closer to the end of Prince Cinder’s “big and hairy” brothers instead of Prince Cinders himself as “thin and weak.” Therefore, both of my girl participants weighted more on the physical features (especially in terms of bodily strength) to decide if a figure is qualified to be a fairy-tale prince.

Besides their former impression established in the older versions of fairy tales toward a prince being modified by the reworked versions, my participants also experienced an examination of their past concept of the gender relationship between princes and princesses. It has been commonly assumed that the prince in a fairy tale often plays the role of savior while the princess is always the “damsel-in-distress,” waiting for his rescue. However, both Prince Cinders and Sleeping Bobby overturn this structure by reversing the gender of the two characters in the Sleeping Beauty tale—the princess becomes the one who comes to the rescue and the prince passively waits for her search to
either fit into the pair of “trousers” or wake up from a long slumber. Reacting to such a rather different gender construction, each of my four participants showed a different level of acceptance to it.

Among the four children, Wendy was probably the one who held the strongest opposition to the newly established gender structure in the two variants. Responding to *Sleeping Bobby*, she exhibited a steady inherence to her preexistent apprehension:

Winnie: Right. And what’s the major difference between *Sleeping Bobby* and the Grimms’ version?
Wendy: The major difference would be like in this one (*Sleeping Bobby*), there is a sleeping boy and in the other one, there’s a sleeping girl.
Winnie: So you like a sleeping boy in the tale or a sleeping girl?
Wendy: A sleeping girl.
Winnie: Oh, so you like that it’s a prince who saves a princess instead of a princess saving a prince?
Wendy: Yes.

* * *

Winnie: How about this princess riding a horse? Do you like her?
Wendy: Kind of. But I like the prince riding a horse better.

The transformation resulted from gender reversal presented in the disruptive version of “Sleeping Beauty” seemed pretty estranged to Wendy and her former perception of the “usual” gender relationship constructed in the older fairy-tale versions in a sense formed a barrier preventing her accepting a reworked format of it.

Claiming his favorite character to be Sleeping Bobby in the book, Li-Kwen nevertheless expressed a certain degree of reluctance to acknowledge the new relationship between princes and princesses:
Winnie: Tell me your favorite character in this one?
Li-Kwen: Sleeping Bobby.
Winnie: I see. But you just said in the Perrault version, you like the prince more because he’s brave. So how come you didn’t choose the princess who saved Sleeping Bobby in this one? She’s also brave, right?
Li-Kwen: I just didn’t feel like choosing her. I think I like Sleeping Bobby better.
Winnie: Okay. And do you think it’s natural for a girl to save a prince?
Li-Kwen: A little bit.
Winnie: Just a little bit, not much?
Li-Kwen: Yeah. Because mostly it’s a prince saves a princess and gets married, like that.
Winnie: Oh, so you don’t think it’s natural for a princess to save a prince?
Li-Kwen: Well… I’d only say one percent natural.

Li-Kwen’s choice of favorite character may be a natural result constrained by his own gender since it’s generally considered that people tend to identify with the main character with the same gender in a text. Although the identification was not influential enough to entirely shake his prior perception toward the behaviors of a fairy-tale prince (to save a princess and marry her), his responses revealed a beginning (“one percent natural”) to incorporate more possibilities of gender structure in fairy tales.

In contrast to Wendy’s and Li-Kwen’s disagreement, both Rafiki and Ning-Ning expressed a relatively more broad-minded attitude toward the new gender construction:

Winnie: Right. And when Princess Lovelypenny found Prince Cinders, she proposed to him immediately. Do you like this part? Like it’s a princess who proposes to a prince, not the other way around?
Rafiki: Yeah, because in a lot of stories, it’s mostly the girl who’s like the prince in the story but it’s nice to have a boy for a change.

* * *

Winnie: Good. So you noticed this change of gender switch.

Rafiki: Yeah, a lot of gender switch. I like it ‘cause they made it funny and the gender switch is probably good because there are other versions of it.

Winnie: Right, like the alternative versions. So do you like that it’s a guy who fell asleep and there was actually a brave princess who came to save him?

Rafiki: Yeah. And unlike in both of the old ones, it’s a brave princess.

* * *

Rafiki: Probably. I also like Bobby because it’s mostly female characters that something bad happens to and it sometimes it’s nice to have a male character for a change.

Rafiki’s reactions showed a positive perspective toward the strategy of “gender switch” applied in the reworked versions. Although he perceived it as a light-hearted measure by calling it “funny,” he pointed out the important function of such a transformation to create alternative versions of the same fairy tales. In addition, he also recognized the value of role reversal to produce more possibilities for characterization and plot in fairy tales.

Compared to other research participants, Ning-Ning expressed most agreement with the reversed position assumed by the princesses and female agency bestowed to them in the new tales:

Winnie: And in this story (Prince Cinders), it’s the princess who picks the prince, not the other way around. Do you like this? Or you prefer that the prince picks the princess?
Ning-Ning: I like that the princess can choose the prince because she is able to choose somebody she likes.

Winnie: Tell me your favorite character in Prince Cinders?
Ning-Ning: Princess Lovelypenny, ’cause she gets to pick somebody she likes instead of waiting to be chosen, like Cinderella in the old tales.

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Ning-Ning: I think I like the one with a gender switch (Sleeping Bobby). It’s more interesting, with a brave princess.
Winnie: I see. And who’s your favorite character in this story?
Ning-Ning: I like the princess because she’s brave.

* * *

Winnie: If I want you to choose between being a princess waiting to be saved by a prince or a princess saving a prince?
Ning-Ning: Well… I kind of like both. But if I only get to choose one, I would choose to be a princess saving a prince, ‘cause such princesses are brave.

Like Li-Kwen, Ning-Ning showed an obvious tendency to identify with the character with the same gender as hers, that is, the princess in each story. However, unlike Li-Kwen, such an identification in a certain degree enhanced her ability to accept/incorporate an alternative image of fairy-tale princesses (being brave and able to save someone) into her prior repertoire.

* Alternative Concept of “Beauty”*

One of the “myths” the Cinderella tales have created is the connection of “having small feet” with beauty and happiness. Because of her tiny-sized feet, Cinderella is able to fit into the slipper she left and nobody else can take her place. Since the slipper is the only way for the prince to identify her as the pretty princess dancing with him in the
ball(s), small feet become the key for her to achieve and guarantee her ultimate happiness. Therefore, reading this fairy tale, along with other socially constructed messages to emphasize the value of “small feet” which equal to physical beauty, children tend to easily internalize such an ideology.

After being introduced to one of the contemporary variants of the Cinderella tale, Cinderella Bigfoot, all the four participants considered the unconventional image with a girl who has enormous feet but still gets the prince to marry her very “funny”; however, while being further asked about their opinions on the heroine’s big feet, almost every one showed a certain level of difficulty to digest such a rather “bizarre” feature and hence had their prior impression challenged by it. While every one of them inclined to stick to their previous impression that small feet mean beauty, they were forced to examine such a concept through a juxtaposed reading of Cinderella Bigfoot and Grimms’ Cinderella version portraying the violence that the stepsisters need to cut off parts of their feet in order to fit into the slipper.

In his reactions to the two old and new Cinderella versions, Li-Kwen presented a contradictory idea toward having “small feet” or making feet smaller to fit into the shoe.

Winnie: So which character you dislike the most in Grimms’ version?
Li-Kwen: I’ll still say the evil stepmother ‘cause she’s evil and in this one she’s more cruel because she asks her daughters to cut off their feet.
Winnie: I see. Do you think it’s correct for women doing things like that, like to cut off their feet to fit into the shoe so that they can marry the prince?
Li-Kwen: No.
Claiming the stepmother in Grimms’ version “evil” by having her daughters cut off their feet, Li-Kwen showed an opposition to the idea that women should have smaller feet in order to marry the prince. However, while discussing Cinderella Bigfoot, he revealed his preference for women with small feet, despite the fact that they may not be “healthy”:

Winnie: So do you think that in the older versions, Cinderella has those extremely small feet so that they can fit into either glass slippers or golden slippers to be normal to you?
Li-Kwen: Yeah, pretty much. ‘Cause you might not like be healthy and then your feet can like be really small. But you can’t grow too big feet like these.
Winnie: Oh, ok. So tell me which one you prefer, like a beautiful girl with big feet or a beautiful girl with small feet?
Li-Kwen: Small feet. ‘Cause anyone could fit into big shoes but not everyone can fit into small shoes.
Winnie: But in this one, actually no one can fit into the big sneakers.
Li-Kwen: Yeah, not all the way.
Winnie: But you still think beautiful girls should have small feet instead of big feet?
Li-Kwen: Yeah, like Cinderella.
Winnie: So if you were the prince, you would choose girls with small feet or girls with big feet?
Li-Kwen: Small feet.

In the extract above, Li-Kwen made a comparison between Cinderella in the earlier versions and Cinderella Bigfoot. Through such a comparison, he revealed his thoughts of treating “small feet” as a kind of talent not possessed by every girl (“not everyone can fit into small shoes”) and his preference for “small feet” to “big feet,” even after being reminded that “big feet” of Cinderella Bigfoot are unique that no one can fit into her
sneakers. Thus, the adherence of Li-Kwen to his prior knowledge that “small feet” are prettier and more desirable was obvious in his responses.

Winnie: Oh, small feet, okay. So tell me which character you like the best in this story (Cinderella Bigfoot)?
Li-Kwen: I’ll say Cinderella.
Winnie: Cinderella Bigfoot?
Li-Kwen: Yeah, ’cause it’s really funny that her feet were that big.
Winnie: But do you think she’s qualified to be a beautiful bride or something?
Li-Kwen: Not really.

Winnie: Okay. You just said girls should not cut their feet only to fit into small shoes, so would you prefer a fairy tale with the prince prefers girls to have big feet instead of small feet?
Li-Kwen: I don’t think so.
Winnie: You don’t think so. You think a prince should still prefer girls with small feet?
Li-Kwen: Yes.
Winnie: So if you were a prince, you would look for girls with small feet?
Li-Kwen: Hmm…like a medium size, like a normal size.

Although Li-Kwen declared that Cinderella Bigfoot was his favorite character in the story, he liked her because of her funniness, instead of her attractiveness. This served another indication of his attachment to the former impression. However, when being recalled the cruel plot of cutting feet off to fit the shoe in Grimms’ version, he started to modify his prior thoughts by wanting girls with “medium-sized” feet. Therefore, the way of juxtaposing the earlier and modern Cinderella versions in a certain degree helped Li-Kwen examine the conditioned favor for “small feet” in his mind and further adjust his fixed ideas about “small feet.”
Ning-Ning’s responses also revealed a strong inclination of sticking to her previously internalized concept about equating “small feet” to beauty:

Winnie: Now let’s talk about *Cinderella Bigfoot*. What’s the major difference between this story and the old Cinderella tales?

Ning-Ning: The stepsisters are beautiful and Cinderella is kind of funny in this story. And this Cinderella has big feet instead of small feet.

Winnie: Do you prefer Cinderella with big feet or small feet?

Ning-Ning: Small feet, ‘cause big feet may cause trouble, like in this story. Her big feet block the road and they are weird, too.

Winnie: So which Cinderella is more beautiful? The one with small feet or the one with big feet?

Ning-Ning: I think the one with small feet is more beautiful. I prefer Cinderella in the old versions ‘cause she has small feet although Cinderella Bigfoot is funny, especially her feet are like seaplanes.

Winnie: I see. So if, say, you get big feet in the future like the stepsisters of Cinderella, would you cut off part of your feet to fit the shoe?

Ning-Ning: No. I won’t be as stupid as them. I’d rather not marry a prince and live a happy life of my own.

Ning-Ning’s reply indicated not only a tendency to consider having small feet a necessary quality of physical attractiveness but also the contrary effect the book “Cinderella Bigfoot” produced. By creating an exaggerated image of Cinderella with enormous feet which cause lots of problems such as blocking doorways and stopping traffic, the new variant may have spoiled the intentional/unintentional attempt to subvert the ideology concerning “small feet” established in the earlier versions. The “funny-looking” Cinderella, in spite of achieving the function to entertain children, makes them adhere to the prior preference for small feet. On the other hand, the brutal part described in Grimms’ version assisted her to correct the obsession for small feet. Instead of
pursuing small feet to make herself become qualified to marry a prince, she chose a
feminist approach to “live a happy life of her own.”

Confronting the same scene of brutality in Grimms’ version, Rafiki also showed his
doubt for the validity of the motivation behind having feet cut off:

Winnie: Right. What do the stepsisters do when they know that their feet
cannot fit the shoe?
Rafiki: One of them, the older one, cut off her toe, but then the prince found
out by the birds and they said that her foot was bleeding so the prince
turned back. And the second one cut off her heel and the birds did the
same thing.
Winnie: Do you like this part in the Grimms’ version?
Rafiki: That’s not something I would do ‘cause that’s not very right, but
there was this stepmother who told them to. So I would just say no
and accept my foot didn’t fit. In the first place, I wouldn’t have gone
because if I knew it wasn’t me, then there would be no point in going.

Putting himself into the shoe of Cinderella’s stepsisters, Rafiki imagined how to avoid
conducting the “not right” behavior in the tale. His comment that “so I would just say no
and accept my foot didn’t fit” indicated a broader-minded attitude toward the concept of
“small feet.”

Winnie: So do you think having big feet is a good feature for a fairy tale
heroine?
Rafiki: If you are trying to make the fairy tale funny, yeah.
Winnie: But if not?
Rafiki: No. I think Cinderella in the originals is more appealing because her
feet are a lot smaller. And her big feet make her do things that other
regular princesses usually wouldn’t do. But if Cinderella Bigfoot
didn’t have big feet, she wouldn’t stick out from everyone else.
Winnie: So having big feet actually makes her stand out.

Rafiki: Yes. ‘Cause one of her sneakers could make the traffic stop.

Regardless that Rafiki also addressed “small feet” as a more “appealing” quality for women to have, like Cinderella in the older versions, his responses presented a relatively more positive perception he held toward the feature of “big feet.” It actually makes Cinderella Bigfoot distinguished from “other regular princesses” in fairy tales.

As for the fourth research participant, Wendy, her reactions revealed similar thoughts:

Winnie: Right. Tell me your favorite character in this book.

Wendy: Cinderella Bigfoot ‘cause she’s kind of funny with her giant feet walking around everywhere.

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Winnie: Next time when you see a girl with big feet, would you consider her to be like a princess in fairy tales? Or you still think that princesses should have small feet?

Wendy: I think they should have smaller feet because princesses are usually like really nice and kind and …. usually kind of small. I think if they had big feet, they would be big and take up a lot of space.

Winnie: I see. But in this book, is Cinderella Bigfoot nice?

Wendy: Yeah… she’s still nice… but I mean like normal princesses would usually be pretty small and not very big.

Winnie: So you think she’s not a normal princess?

Wendy: Not a normal one.

Winnie: But do you like her?

Wendy: I kind of like her because she’s funny.

Like the other children, Wendy considered Cinderella Bigfoot to be funny and liked her because of the characteristic. However, it could also be detected that Wendy had already
built a firm impression of how a fairy-tale princess should normally look like, having not only small feet but also tiny figures. Such a mental image in a sense formed a barrier to keep her from accepting “big feet” as one of the qualities which a fairy-tale princess could also possess. Nevertheless, Wendy’s inclination to appreciate an extraordinary version of Cinderella like Cinderella Bigfoot still can be regarded a sign to represent a start for her to incorporate more alternatives into her repertoire concerning gendered concepts.

The accustomed association between attractive looks and kindness is also one of the stereotypical impressions brought forth in traditional versions of fairy tales in which almost all the princesses having both qualities. In the discussions by my four participants to the book *Sleeping Ugly*, the tendency for them to have internalized such an association was apparent. All of them made a connection between beauty and benevolence and further claimed that Sleeping Beauty was the ideal type of girl by possessing the two features. Therefore, Yolen’s book, through presenting a physically unappealing girl as the main character who finally married the prince, served the function to challenge the former ideas of the children. Joosen (2005) in her article also points out a similar idea about applying this book to promote critical thinking of children:

… on the one hand, the child’s knowledge of the tale of “Sleeping Beauty will probably influence his or her understanding of Yolen’s story; on the other hand, Sleeping Ugly invites the child to reflect on the traditional tale and on his or her earlier readings (or viewings) of this story and of the popular fairy tale in general. Paradoxically, retellings such as Yolen’s attempt to teach readers to be critical of (patriarchal) ideology and didactic
intentions in children’s literature, and if they succeed in doing so, they train children to question narrative authority and to read against the text. (p. 135)

Compared with his reaction to the concept of “big feet,” Li-Kwen’s response to ugly girls as heroines of fairy tales was relatively more open-minded, as long as they are kind-hearted:

Winnie: Tell me the major difference between this book and the two earlier versions.
Li-Kwen: Those earlier versions, like the sleeping one is like beautiful and this one is ugly.
Winnie: I see. So if you were the prince who needs to kiss them, who would you rather to kiss? An ugly girl with a kind heart or a beautiful with an evil heart?
Li-Kwen: Number one.
Winnie: Right. But if it's between an ugly girl with a kind heart and a beautiful girl with a kind heart, who would you choose?
Li-Kwen: I think number two.
Winnie: Oh, a beautiful girl with a kind heart. So basically you probably like the Sleeping Beauty in the earlier versions better than Sleeping Ugly, right?
Li-Kwen: Yes.
Winnie: So do you think what someone looks like is really important to you?
Li-Kwen: No. I think it’s more important that they have a kind heart.
Winnie: I see. And does this story tell you something? Like an ugly girl can be a major character in a fairy tale, too, not necessarily needs to be beautiful.
Li-Kwen: Yeah.

Despite the fact that a girl with beautiful looks and a kind heart was still Li-Kwen’s first choice (by preferring Sleeping Beauty to Sleeping Ugly), Yolen’s book achieved the goal
of making him become aware that these two characteristics do not always go together. The conditioned association between them was hence broken and modified.

My second research participant, Ning-Ning, also expressed her emphasis on fairy-tale heroines’ inner goodness rather than fair appearance by stating it’s not necessary for them to be pretty:

Winnie: And do you like Sleeping Ugly? Like she’s an ugly girl but has a kind heart.
Ning-Ning: Actually I think as long as she has a kind heart, I would like her. But it’s even better to have a pretty appearance. Of course having a kind heart is more important. Sleeping Ugly is not my favorite character in this story ‘cause she kind of didn’t do anything special.
Winnie: And which kind of girl do you think a prince should choose—a beautiful girl with a mean heart or an ugly girl with a kind heart?
Ning-Ning: I think he should choose the ugly one.
Winnie: Right. So you think it’s not necessary for a fairy tale heroine to be pretty?
Ning-Ning: Yeah, it’s not necessary.

A comparably more tolerant attitude of Ning-Ning toward unattractive but cordial girls as fairy-tale heroines could be sensed in the extract above. In addition, it’s also worth to note that although Ning-Ning showed her acceptance of a character like Sleeping Ugly, she also pointed out her dullness in the story by asserting that the character “kind of didn’t do anything special.” In a sense, Yolen’s story succeeds in replacing the traditional beautiful and kind-hearted princess with a plain girl as the heroine so as to break the necessary connection between beauty and kindness, but her heroine still remains to be submissive and lacks agency like those pretty princesses in older versions, if not more. Such a direct
response from children like Ning-Ning’s may resonate the observation of Joosen (2005) on the image of Sleeping Ugly: “Plain Jane may be endlessly good and kind, she is also sedate, a bit naïve and slightly boring. Even Walt Disney’s Snow White and Sleeping Beauty seem to have more spirit than Jane” (p. 136).

Like his relatively broad-minded attitude toward the concept of “big feet,” Rafiki seemed to be able to perceive the unconventional images of fairy-tale heroines presented in Sleeping Ugly with less difficulty:

Winnie: And tell me, do you think it’s reasonable to have a beautiful princess who’s mean, like having an awful personality in a fairy tale?

Rafiki: Yeah.

Winnie: And do you think it makes sense to have an ugly girl to become a heroine of a fairy tale?

Rafiki: Sort of… Because it probably wouldn’t make… if there wasn’t the fairy, it probably wouldn’t have happened. And then the prince usually gets married to a different… not the ugly one, usually another person who’s not ugly.

Winnie: So you don’t think it makes sense for a prince to marry to an ugly girl?

Rafiki: No, not really. Well…it depends on how he feels. Like this prince, depending how he is, depending on what he likes, he chose the ugly girl with a kind heart but if he was as mean, he probably would choose the other one, someone similar to him.

In his response, it was obvious that Rafiki appraised the unconventional images from the perspective of the prince in the story. From such a standpoint, he was able to rationalize Prince Jojo’s choice of Plain Jane over Miserella with the theory of “birds of a feather
flock together” he came out with. This also indicated his ability to cope with and further accept such images into his repertoire.

As for Wendy, she also expressed her preference for Sleeping Beauty to Sleeping Ugly at first while asked to choose between the two as her favorite character:

Winnie: So comparing Sleeping Ugly with Sleeping Beauty in the two earlier versions, which one do you like better?
Wendy: I like Sleeping Beauty more. Because this one (Sleeping Ugly) is kind of weird.
Winnie: I see. But we just discussed that Sleeping Beauty is actually kind of not very smart, remember?
Wendy: Yeah.
Winnie: And do you think Sleeping Ugly is smart?
Wendy: Yeah, she is smart and knows more things.
Winnie: Yeah, she is smart and kind, but you just chose Sleeping Beauty over her? How come?
Wendy: I think I changed my mind. I would choose Sleeping Ugly instead.

Without doubt, Wendy’s initial choice was based on her prior knowledge toward common fairy-tale princesses. By calling Sleeping Ugly “weird,” she suggested a discrepancy between this character and the mental image she held in her mind toward heroines in fairy tales. However, during the earlier part of the interview, she had commented Sleeping Beauty as “pretty and kind but not very smart” for pricking her finger on the needle of the spinning wheel. Thus, after being reminded of that part, she decided to change her initial choice of the pretty girl to the ugly one, since the latter is “smart and knows more things.” In a sense, the juxtaposition of older fairy-tale versions and modern liberating ones helped her reexamine her former thoughts and further be able to modify them.
Voices from the Dark Side to Question Good-Evil Dichotomy

In the second interview, along with the classic versions of “Little Red Riding Hood” (Perrault and Grimms), “Three Little Pigs” (Jacobs) and “Snow White” (Grimms), the children had been exposed to their modern variants categorized as Type 2—tales narrated either from a villain’s or a minor character’s perspective. As introduced in Chapter 4, The Wolf’s Story: What Really Happened to Little Red Riding Hood is a reworked version of the Grimms’ tale from the wolf’s point of view while The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs! By A. Wolf is also similar in its use of narrative perspective. Both books provide stories from the villain’s side which turn the original tale upside down. As for the disruptive adaptation of the Snow White tale, “The Seventh Dwarf,” it is narrated from one of the minor characters in the tale. Despite the fact that it may seem not so subversive and contradictory as the previous two stories, it still offer the reader a new angle to perceive the fairy tale. No matter it is a story from an evil character or one from an insignificant role, it bestows an opportunity for the reader to hear the voices from the dark side of the tales. Moreover, such upside down stories can function to produce a topsy-turvy world of fairy tales and further help children examine the fixed good-evil dichotomy established in the traditional fairy tales and further question its validity so that their perception toward the genre of fairy tales can be broadened.

Variation of Choices for Favorite Characters and Emergence of “Grey Area”

Although the widely used narrative technique applied in the classic fairy-tale versions is the third-person narration, the reader is generally encouraged or even forced to identify with the central figures in the stories. Due to such an accustomed and conditioned identification with the major characters presented in the traditional fairy tales,
that is, enlightening and positive values in the stories, the reader usually tends to make judgments from the viewpoint of those characters from the good side. Therefore, when it came to making a choice of his/her favorite character in the specific earlier tale during the interview process, each of my research participant expressed the unquestionable agreement with the protagonist. For instance, Li-Kwen immediately declared that the third little pig was his favorite character whereas the wolf was the one he disliked while discussing Jacobs’ version of the tale:

Winnie: I see. So which character do you like the best in this story?
Li-Kwen: I think I like the third little pig the best. He’s like very wise and smart.
Winnie: Any character you dislike?
Li-Kwen: I think the wolf. ‘Cause he’s like evil and eats like the first and second little pigs.

However, after reading the tale from the wolf’s side, his choices of preferred and loathed characters had been entirely changed:

Winnie: I see. Let’s take a look at the illustrations in this book. First, this cheeseburger…
Li-Kwen: He like eats those furry animals like the rabbit’s ears…like a mouse’s tail and raccoon like paws…
Winnie: Right. So do you think this cheeseburger makes him a bit scary?
Li-Kwen: No. It seems normal for him to eat those animals.
Winnie: Okay. So you agree that a wolf should be like eating small animals, right?
Li-Kwen: Yeah. ‘Cause this kind of wolf is like a good guy, not a bad guy.
Winnie: So do you think this cheeseburger makes him big and bad?
Li-Kwen: No.

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Winnie: So do you think it’s a little bit not right for the wolf to blow off the pigs’ houses?
Li-Kwen: No, it like sneezed at them. Not on purpose. And this kind of like the pigs are mean, the other way around. Like this one, “your old granny can sit on a pin.”
Winnie: Okay, that’s from the third pig, right?
Li-Kwen: Yeah.
Winnie: And do you think the wolf should be forgiven for blowing off the first and second little pigs’ houses and eating them?
Li-Kwen: Yeah. Like the wolf didn’t like blow off the houses on purpose. And the pigs were like already dead, so I think it’s okay to eat them.
Winnie: So which character is your favorite in this story?
Li-Kwen: I would say the wolf, because the wolf is like a good guy, not a bad guy.
Winnie: So do you believe him? Like what he said about the pigs, the sneeze and borrowing the sugar?
Li-Kwen: Yeah, I believe him. ‘Cause he like always like sneezes.
Winnie: So who do you dislike in this story?
Li-Kwen: I think the third little pig. ‘Cause he’s like mean.

From the two excerpts showing Li-Kwen’s responses to Scieszka and Smith’s book, his prior perception toward the image of “big, bad wolf” was totally overturned. The previous excuse he applied for justifying his disfavor for the wolf—being evil to eat the first and second little pigs was replaced his agreement with the wolf to eat small animals by calling such a behavior “normal.” Being encouraged to relate more to the wolf through this new story, Li-Kwen in his comments even made efforts to explain the excuses for the wolf’s cruel behaviors of blowing off the houses and eating the pigs as well as pointing out how “mean” the third pig is by cursing the wolf’s granny. Therefore, an obvious
switch of the subject for him to identify with appeared to indicate the new variant’s effect upon his former impression toward the tale.

A similar variation of choices for favorite characters also happened in Ning-Ning’s reactions to the reworked Three Little Pigs tale narrated by the wolf. Like Li-Kwen, Ning-Ning also initially chose the third little pig as her favorite character and the wolf as the disliked one while discussing Jacobs’ version. However, after reading the new tale, she changed her prior opinions:

Winnie: So who’s the evil character in this story?
Ning-Ning: The wolf.
Winnie: And who’s your favorite character?
Ning-Ning: The third little pig, because he’s smart and he worked hard.
Winnie: And the character you dislike the most?
Ning-Ning: The wolf, because he’s mean. He wanted to eat the little pigs.

* * *

Winnie: Right. So can you tell me the differences between this book and the versions you knew before?
Ning-Ning: Like *The Wolf’s Story*, the wolf in this book is a good guy. And the third little pig becomes the bad one ‘cause he looks very mean in the illustration.
Winnie: What about the first and second little pigs? Are they bad?
Ning-Ning: They are bad as well. Because they don’t loan the wolf a cup of sugar for his granny’s cake, like the third little pig.

* * *

Winnie: So how do you think that he ate the first and second little pigs? Do you think he should eat them?
Ning-Ning: I think he should because they didn’t loan him a cup of sugar. He didn’t kill them on purpose and he didn’t want to waste the food.
The intertextual connection Ning-Ning made between *The Wolf’s Story* and *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs!* suggested her acknowledgment of both stories being similar in providing the villain’s side of account portraying his innocence. The “mean” image of the third little pig enhanced the transformation of feelings she had toward the characters and the plot of the story provided her with a solid reason to justify the wolf’s deeds of “revenge” for not getting a cup of sugar. Furthermore, despite the fact that Smith offered the picture of a brick house in his illustration, Ning-Ning’s previous impression she had about the third little pig’s characteristic of hard-working was surpassed since she no longer identified herself with the position of the third little pig.

While talking about the same tale, Rafiki made exactly the same choices for the characters he liked and disliked as Li-Kwen and Ning-Ning. However, he also showed certain doubts toward the ending of Jacobs’ version in which the third little pig eats the wolf:

Winnie: Who’s your favorite character in the story?
Rafiki: The third pig. Because he actually knows what to do and what’s for strong houses. Because building a house out of straw would be probably very easy and you also work to actually get something good.
Winnie: And who’s the character you don’t like?
Rafiki: The wolf. He’s just not a very nice character.
Winnie: And what happened to him at the end? Remember?
Rafiki: I think he got boiled or something.
Winnie: Yeah. He got boiled and also like eaten for supper by the third little pig. Do you like such an ending?
Rafiki: No, not really. Well… it’s okay but I don’t like it because it doesn’t make any sense. Because pigs don’t really eat meat from what I know
but. And the reason why I think it’s fair is because the wolf ate his two brothers.

Winnie: So you think the third little pig should eat the wolf even though it doesn’t make sense. Because you think pigs are vegetarian?

Rafiki: Yeah. From what I know; I don’t know very much about pigs.

Winnie: Okay. So do you like that the third little pig actually outsmarted the wolf, like for gathering apples or something like that?

Rafiki: Yeah.

Even though Rafiki thought it’s an unreasonable arrangement for the pig to eat the wolf, he still agreed upon it due to the necessity of fulfilling justice in this tale—an eye for an eye. Additionally, after being exposed to the updated version from the wolf’s point of view, he also made the same change to his previous choices. However, unlike the other two participants, he did not accept the account completely:

Winnie: So do you think it’s reasonable for the wolf to eat the pigs?

Rafiki: Yeah, because they’re already dead so they probably just rot there. He could let them do that but it’s… sometimes I think it would be good for other animals to actually eat it because it’s already dead. If it’s still alive, maybe it’s not good.

Winnie: How about in the Jacobs version, do you think it’s reasonable for the wolf to eat the first two pigs?

Rafiki: Yes, even though they are alive, it would be better if he didn’t but he’s probably just looking for food.

Winnie: But you just said that the wolf is the evil character in the story.

Rafiki: Yeah, he’s purposefully eating them but…

Winnie: But what about Al? Do you think he’s evil in the story?

Rafiki: I think this is just his story, but yeah, I think he would be evil. Because his story is sort of more convincing but I still don’t believe him.
Winnie: And what do you think about the pigs in this story? Do they behave well?
Rafiki: No, ‘cause they just stayed ignoring to the wolf.

* * *

Winnie: Yeah, this pig is rude. So do you feel sorry for Al?
Rafiki: Yeah, if this was true, I would feel more sorry because he’s just trying to make a cake.
Winnie: So do you think it’s reasonable for him to be put in the jail?
Rafiki: Yeah. ‘Cause he probably did eat those pigs so he should get punished.
Winnie: So who’s your favorite character in this story?
Rafiki: The wolf. Because he’s trying to act innocent when he’s really not.
Winnie: So you still like him even though you don’t believe him and you think he’s not innocent?
Rafiki: Yeah.
Winnie: What about the character you don’t like?
Rafiki: The third pig. Because he’s just saying that… he’s not giving the wolf any sugar when he has plenty.
Winnie: So who’s the evil character do you think in the story?
Rafiki: I am not really sure. Because there isn’t really anybody who’s evil except the third pig doesn’t want to share.

The plot of the reworked version from the wolf’s side laid an apparent influence upon Rafiki’s former perception toward the wolf’s “cruel” behavior of eating small animals. He started to consider the wolf’s needs for food and used it to justify for the wolf. Nevertheless, his previous belief still formed an opposing force to overturn this new impression; therefore, his responses presented a complicated idea about the wolf.

By claiming that he did not trust the wolf, Rafiki experienced a double process of having his understanding challenged: one was that the new adaptation made him question
his established thought through the older version about the wickedness of the wolf and
the other was that the fresh image of the wolf made him doubt its own trustworthiness.
Hence, a “grey area” emerged to disrupt the fixed good-evil dichotomy constructed in
both earlier and recent versions. The wolf became neither evil nor good to him and the
third little pig might not be too evil for not lending the sugar. In a sense, the juxtaposition
of old and new versions of the Three Little Pigs tale could be beneficial to Rafiki in terms
of training his critical thinking ability and widening his earlier firm comprehension of
this fairy tale.

As for Wendy, although she picked the same character (the third little pig) as her
favorite character in the earlier version of the tale, the characters she detested most was
the first and second little pigs, a choice which was dissimilar to other participants:

Winnie: So tell me, which character do you like the best in the Jacobs
version?
Wendy: The third little pig because he’s smart enough to outsmart the wolf.
Winnie: And which character do you dislike the most?
Wendy: Mmm… I don’t really like the first and second pigs ‘cause they are
not very smart. They could have run to get help.
Winnie: Yeah, so do you think they deserve some punishment because of this?
Wendy: No, that’s just how they are.
Winnie: What about the wolf? What’s your impression about him?
Wendy: I kind of like him and don’t like him. I don’t really know why I like
him but I kind of don’t like him ‘cause he’s not too smart, either. To
let the other pig outsmart him… and if… the other pig was always
doing one hour early, he could have like known that he would show
up one hour early and he could have gone one hour early.
Winnie: I see. But you don’t like him for he’s not smart, as opposed to he’s cruel or bad?
Wendy: He’s kind of like a bad character, too. I just don’t like him to be like not nice.

Wendy’s apprehension about the good-evil dichotomy in Jacobs’ tale was apparently not as “black and white” as the other children’s. The common identification with the protagonist, the third little pig, was obvious, but it was unique that her feelings toward the wolf were not so straight forward and the main reason for her dislike about the character was his stupidity instead of his wickedness. Later, after reading the adapted version from the wolf’s point of view, the choices of her preferred and detested characters were altered, like the other participants, but her mixed feelings toward the wolf were still in presence in her responses:

Winnie: So do you like this story, *The True Story of The 3 Little Pigs by A. Wolf*?
Wendy: It’s kind of funny. Like he sneezes and the houses fall down. And the bad pig, the third pig doesn’t give him a cup of sugar.
Winnie: You just referred him as a bad pig.
Wendy: Yeah, the wolf is actually a good guy and the pigs are sort of bad guys.
Winnie: Why are the pigs bad?
Wendy: Because the wolf was just asking for a cup of sugar and then the pigs were like being really rude to him, like go away…
Winnie: Yeah, they were sort of being impolite to him. So do you think in this story the wolf has good reasons for eating the first and second pigs?
Wendy: Well… I don’t think he should because they are his neighbors.
Winnie: Yeah, that’s a good point. You don’t eat your neighbors.
Wendy: Or friends. But... he ate them because they were like dead.
The plot of Scieszka and Smith’s book reversed Wendy’s former perceptions about the
good-evil opposition between the third little pig and the wolf; moreover, it was clear that
she discontinued identifying with the third little pig by referring it as “the bad pig.”
However, the new story did not entirely overturn her impression toward the wolf.
Concerning the deed of eating the pigs, she still held certain doubt and did not wholly
agree upon it. Thus, like Rafiki, Wendy also developed a sense of “grey area” in her
understanding about the wolf; this fairy-tale character became no long extremely good or
extremely bad to her.69 Such a result may indicate a development of her critical literacy
as well—learning to question what has been presented to her and making judgments from
different perspectives/positions.

Accountability of the Alternative-Viewpoint Tales and Effect of Intertextual References

From the children’s responses, it was apparent that the selected contemporary
disruptive versions transformed their previous unchanged recognition toward the images
of fairy-tale characters as well as the binary opposition of good and evil established
through the earlier versions. In other words, those upside down tales functioned to
provide unexpected alternatives and urged them to examine their prior beliefs and
assumptions. Nonetheless, the effect which such stories offered was not only limited to
what was mentioned above; the accountability of these tales served as a further chance
for my research participants to cultivate their critical thinking ability. That is to say, the

69 Wendy’s reactions to The Wolf’s Story revealed a similar process of developing a more ambiguous and
complicated idea toward the wolf—Winnie: So after reading this story, is your opinion about the wolf in
fairy tales changed? Or you still think they are all bad? Wendy: Mmm... in most of them, they are bad, but
having read this one with a good wolf... They are not all bad.
children did not actually accept the adapted stories completely by expressing a doubtful attitude toward the reliability of the new narrator.

Among the four children, Rafiki was the one who showed most doubt to both of the villain’s accounts:

Winnie: So you read *The Wolf’s Story: What Really Happened to Little Red Riding Hood*. Do you like it?
Rafiki: Yeah. I like it because the wolf gets a chance to speak what he thinks happened even those are probably not true.
Winnie: Oh, so you don’t think his story is true?
Rafiki: No, he’s just trying to protect himself.
Winnie: Wow, so you don’t believe he’s innocent?
Rafiki: No.
Winnie: So what made you think he’s not innocent?
Rafiki: Because near the end of the book, he said “No, please, look at me, would I lie to you?” That’s why I don’t think he’s telling the truth because he said that.
Winnie: Oh, so you think he’s lying to you.
Rafiki: Yeah.

* * *

Winnie: Among these versions, which one is your favorite?
Rafiki: *The Wolf’s Story*. Because it’s funnier and the wolf is nice instead of mean.
Winnie: Right. So after reading this book, is your opinion about the wolf changed?
Rafiki: No, not really. Well… he can sort of be convincing but he can be tricky.
Winnie: And you don’t want to be tricked by him.
Rafiki: No.
Rafiki’s reactions to the wolf’s account of the Little Red Riding Hood tale suggested that his practice is to hold a critical attitude toward what was presented to him as suspicious and further question the trustworthiness of the narrator. Therefore, the paralleled reading of the classic and updated versions of “Little Red Riding Hood” provided Rafiki with a chance to spark his critical thinking ability in a two-fold process: first disputing the traditional impression toward “the big, bad wolf” and then reexamining the reliability of the new story-teller so as to avoid being “tricked” by him. Furthermore, even though Rafiki showed his disbelief to the wolves’ tales, it did not affect the fact that he still considered each wolf to be his favorite characters in the respective book. In other words, while reading against the texts critically, he still could appreciate the humor and irony concealed in them.

Like Rafiki, Wendy also viewed some of the adapted stories critically. To her, the degree of accountability actually varied from text to text:

Winnie: But do you believe this is the true story of the three little pigs?
Wendy: No. I think the one I heard before is the true story. I just don’t think this wolf is believable.

Winnie: So you believe the wolf in The Wolf’s Story but not this one?
Wendy: Yeah. That wolf is more believable.

Winnie: And do you believe what these characters said? Do you believe their stories?
Wendy: I believe these two (The Wolf’s Story and “The Seventh Dwarf”) but not The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs! I believe The Wolf’s Story because in some of them, they eat the grandmother but I don’t believe he would do that ‘cause in this one, he says he’s a vegetarian kind of. And I kind of believe that he would be kind of vegetarian,
trying to change his diet. Like here, he was trying to help her but then she fainted; I don’t think he pushed her down. It’s just an accident. ‘Cause in this picture, looks like he’s not pushing or touching anything; it looks like she’s fainting.

It was interesting to note that Wendy focused on the characteristic of being a vegetarian displayed by the wolf in *The Wolf’s Story* so that she believed him to be innocent while she simply suspected the other wolf and distrusted his similar account. This indicated that the unique personal preference or experience played a huge role in one’s interpretation of the texts. Carol Bearse (1992) in her study of analyzing a group of first graders’ written responses toward fairy-tale texts also points out a similar phenomenon: “… students do indeed make intertextual links. Even students who were not conscious of the details in their writing incorporated elements of fairy tales into their stories” (p. 694). Although Bearse’s focus is on children’s written responses in the form of creating new stories of their own, the research result regarding their ability of making intertextual connections still serves as a solid proof for the effect of references made between texts on my participants’ interpretation of new stories.

Similarly, Li-Kwen’s mistrust of the minor character’s story (“The Seventh Dwarf”) served as another proof to suggest a person’s past experience as an intertextual reference to influence his opinion toward the text. He was solely reluctant to believe the dwarf, while the other three participants all expressed their acceptance to the dwarf’s account and claimed that it actually could be combined with the original tale (Grimms) to make both tales valid:

Winnie: So you just read this very short story “The Seventh Dwarf.” Do you like it?
Li-Kwen: Yeah. I like the seventh dwarf like tripped like the prince so Snow White can come back to life.

Winnie: So do you believe what the seven dwarf said, about he’s the real savior of Snow White?

Li-Kwen: No. I just don’t think so. I think I know which dwarf is this one.

Winnie: Oh, which one?

Li-Kwen: I think it’s like Dopey. Because Dopey is like… likes Snow White a lot.

Winnie: Oh, I see. So Dopey was the one who sneezed a lot?

Li-Kwen: No, Dopey was like the clumsy one.

* * *

Winnie: How about the seventh dwarf? Do you believe him to be the real savior of Snow White?

Li-Kwen: No. The story is not detailed enough. And I don’t think he’s telling the truth.

Winnie: Okay. And what about the wolves in the two books? Do you think they are telling the truth?

Li-Kwen: Yeah.

Winnie: So what made you think so?

Li-Kwen: I just know that the seventh dwarf is Dopey and he likes Snow White very much. So I think he doesn’t tell the truth.

By pointing out that “Dopey” was the name of the seventh dwarf, Li-Kwen presented an interesting mix of the Snow White narratives in his mind—the Disney animated film and the short story of Hessel. Knowing that “Dopey” is the one who secretly admires Snow White, Li-Kwen developed his disbelief to the dwarf’s story. In other words, the intertextual link he made with Disney’s rendition as a strong source of his prior knowledge toward the fairy tale laid a heavy influence upon his interpretation of the newly perceived tale by Hessel.
Stretched Stories to Dispute Stereotypical Impressions

The paired texts applied in my third formal interview were based on two classic fairy tales—“Hansel and Gretel” and “The Frog Prince,” both recorded by Brothers Grimm. Both the contemporary adaptations, the short story “A Delicate Architecture” as well as the picture book The Frog Prince Continued, belong to Type 3 of my typology as the extended stories describing the incidents either happening before or after the primary tales. Such stretched accounts, by imagining what could have occurred ahead or what would occur behind, also work to vary the former perceptions children acquire from reading merely the earlier versions and hence dispute their stereotypical concepts toward the fairy-tale characters or fairy tales in general.

Transformation of Mental Image for Witches

Grimms’ “Hansel and Gretel” features a scary and cannibalistic witch who coaxes children with her gingerbread/candy house, lures them inside, locks them up and cook to eat them. Hence, due to the tendency to identify with the position assumed by Hansel and Gretel, the common impression of youngsters toward this witch often leans to an old woman in a dark-colored cloak and with a long nose, that is, an evil figure. Such an image was also reflected in the drawings of my four participants characterizing her presence in the tale. Nevertheless, after being exposed to Valente’s story which is a prequel to the fairy tale and offers an explanation to them about why the witch with a tragic fate ended up building a house with candy in the forest, all of the four children made certain adjustments to their mental images of the witch in their second attempt to portray her:
Figures 16 & 17-Li-Kwen’s Drawings of the Witch in “Hansel and Gretel” (Before and After)

Figures 18 & 19-Ning-Ning’s Drawings of the Witch in “Hansel and Gretel” (Before and After)

Figures 20 & 21-Rafiki’s Drawings of the Witch in “Hansel and Gretel” (Before and After)
In his/her first attempt of visually depicting the witch (see Figures 16, 18, 20, 22), each child tended to draw an “unpleasant” figure in the picture. Both of the boys chose to portray the witch standing outside the gingerbread/candy house while the two girls selected the same scene in which the witch tried to feel the “finger” of Hansel locked in a cage. All the four initial images of the witch featured a long nose; Ning-Ning’s wore a standard outfit of witches with a pointed hat and black robe whereas Wendy’s put on a blue cloak and glasses (“I think she had like a blue cloak on, a long nose and glasses. Really light skin. Because she was like an old person and she can’t really see with her eyes and she wanted to try to see with her glasses. She’s trying to feel Hansel’s finger and Hansel’s putting out his knuckle bone.”). Without doubt, these initial drawings were all based on my research participants’ prior knowledge about the tale “Hansel and Gretel” (along with other fairy tales with witches in them) and all of them pointed out her evilness while describing the images.

The “after” set of pictures (see Figures 17, 19, 21, 23) suggested a dramatic change of each child’s mental impression toward the witch in “Hansel and Gretel,” followed by reading Valente’s reworked version. In each participant’s response to the text, there was
without exception a switch of target for their sympathy: from the children in the tale (Hansel and Gretel) to the witch. Hence, the sad experience of being deserted by her own father and hung on the wall to provide sugar to the royal family for such a long time described in the story bestows the “witch” with a status for the readers to be sympathized with and even a reason to justify her implied attempt to catch the children at the end of the text.

As a result, the afterward images all became to a certain degree pleasing and approachable, not evil any more; the trademark long nose indicating the wickedness disappeared from each picture and the former horrible and scary figures were replaced with rather normal human forms. In the description about his second picture, Li-Kwen stated that “I drew like her stomach like grumbling and I drew like one of her fingers cut off and I also drew like her hair like shaky because it’s made of caramel or something. And I drew her nose smaller ‘cause like… and I didn’t drew her like evil eyes ‘cause in the story, she’s not like that evil.” In addition, the smile put by Li-Kwen on the witch’s face also intensified his effort to remove the evilness of the witch.

As for Ning-Ning, she distinctively chose to draw the witch when she was still a girl living with her father—“I drew her with red hair before she went to Vienna. And she’s not evil at that time. I feel sorry for her because she’s not able to eat real food then.” Her second attempt to depict visually the witch indicated strongly her favor toward the witch by portraying a young girl in a dress with a curvy lace-like bottom fringe. The hairstyle was entirely changed as well, from straight and black to wavy and light color. The witch hat was removed, too. Such a dramatic transformation between pictures showed Ning-Ning’s hearty attempt to “de-uglify” or even “beautify” the witch.
Rafiki also made several significant changes to show his previous perception had been varied: “I changed that instead of the witch with a sort of evil grin, she had just a regular smile. And she didn’t have anything that was holding her up, like in my last picture, she had like things she was walking on that were sort of hard to see. Like right there, under her arms, those are like holding her up so she can walk. And I didn’t have those in this picture. I did that because that’s what was like in the other version, she was probably older. And this one, like she doesn’t have anything to help her walk; she just walks and she’s not old.” Although the outfits worn by the two witches did not appear to be very different, there was hair added on the second witch’s head. This effort of Rafiki also expressed his intention to “normalize” the witch, that is, making her look more like an ordinary human being.

Wendy described what she imagined after the witch escaped from the palace and hid in the forest: “She has a black dress and the cinnamon and then red eyes like berries or something. She’s just a little scary with the red eyes but not too much. I feel sorry for her because they hung her up and didn’t treat her nicely ‘cause they used hair until she was bald and they got her skin almost down, like almost down to the bone.” Moreover, the blue cloak-like outfit attached with a hood worn by the witch in Wendy’s “before” picture was changed into a black long dress which matched with the verbal descriptions of the witch in Valente’s tale. The glasses which indicated the witch’s weak eyesight were removed as well, suggesting another change of Wendy’s prior impression toward the witch.

Comparing the four sets of “before” and “after” pictures in a whole, we can see that the primarily inevitable connection between the witch and the gingerbread/candy house
in the four children’s minds has been disrupted and become not absolutely necessary. All
the houses appearing in the “before” pictures were eliminated by the four children in their
“after” pictures in a tacit agreement. Therefore, through a comparison of each pair of the
“before” and “after” pictures individually and as a whole, the effect of the contemporary
extended tale to provide the children with an alternative impression toward the witch and
further broaden their repertories of fairy-tale witches could be clearly sensed.

**Necessity of the “Happily Ever After” Ending in Fairy Tales**

The sequel of Grimms’ tale “The Frog Prince,” *The Frog Prince Continued,* presents an account in which the prince gets bored of being a human after marrying the
princess and living in the palace so he escapes to take an adventure in the forest, looking
for a witch who can turn him back to a frog. As mentioned in Chapter 4, this story is
effective in not only providing alternative images of fairy-tale princes as well as witches
but also placing a question to the common ending of fairy tales—“happily ever after.”
However, by terminating the book with a second “happily ever after” ending, Scieszka
and Johnson’s story may have in contrast encouraged children to emphasize such a
design even more and further strengthen their ideas about the necessary presence of a
happy-ever-after ending in fairy tales as well as their favor for it. In fact, Li-Kwen’s
reactions to the book revealed such a tendency:

Winnie: So you just read *The Frog Prince Continued.* Do you like it?
Li-Kwen: Yeah, pretty much. I think I like when he turned into a carriage
‘cause it’s pretty funny.
Winnie: So this story actually describes things happened to the prince and the
princess after the happy ending. Do you think it makes sense that
they actually did not live a happy life after the ending? Or you still think they should live happily ever after?

Li-Kwen: I think they should live happily together.

Winnie: I see. But is this what happened in this story?

Li-Kwen: No. I think they should. But like the ending of this book, they still live happily ever after.

Winnie: Right. So you like that ending? Like they both turned into frogs?

Li-Kwen: Yeah, pretty much.

By pointing out that the new version finishes likewise with a usual “happily ever after” ending, Li-Kwen expressed a strong adherence to the necessity of such an ending in fairy tales, in spite of the story’s original attempt of mocking such a fixed and ideological design. Nevertheless, this book still functioned to enlarge Li-Kwen’s previous apprehension toward some fairy-tale characters such princes and witches:

Winnie: So after reading this story, have your ideas about a fairy tale prince should be like been changed?

Li-Kwen: A little. Like a prince should like a princess but he doesn’t. And this prince is like lazy.

Winnie: But would you still consider him a fairy tale prince?

Li-Kwen: Maybe, yeah.

Winnie: What about witches? Does this book change your opinions about them?

Li-Kwen: Yeah, normally the witches in fairy tales are scary but the ones in this book are not.

Ning-Ning’s responses to the book reflected a similar inclination to the necessity of a happy ending in fairy tales:

Winnie: So you just read The Frog Prince Continued. Do you like the story?

Ning-Ning: Yeah, I like it. I like the part where the prince kissed the princess and they lived happily ever after.
Winnie: So do you think it makes sense that the life which the prince and the princess lived after the happy ending was actually not as happy as we thought? Or you still think that they should live a happy life together?
Ning-Ning: Well… I guess so, but I like the story which they were unhappy for a while but they turned out to be happy again at the end.
Winnie: But if this story had an ending which they were still unhappy, would you still like the story?
Ning-Ning: Maybe not as much.

* * *

Winnie: And which is your favorite illustration in this book?
Ning-Ning: I like the first picture in which the prince and the princess kissed in a heart and the final picture in which they both became frogs and hopped together. ‘Cause in both pictures, they looked happy and lived happily ever after.
Winnie: So is this “happily ever after” ending your favorite ending for fairy tales?
Ning-Ning: Mmm… I guess so.

Although Scieszka and Johnson’s story might have urged Ning-Ning to rethink what follows the happy ending may not be so happy at all, such a reflection did not influence her resolute preference for a happily ever after ending in fairy tales. Her favorite illustrations in the book depicting the two happy endings also served as a solid proof. Both Li-Kwen’s and Ning-Ning’s aspiration for happy endings in fairy tales may be connected with their need to feel a sense of achievement for the righteous which can provide hope to them in real life. Just as Joseph Campbell (1949) states, “[t]he happy ending of the fairy tale, the myth, and the divine comedy of the soul, is to be read, not as
contradiction, but as a transcendence of the universal tragedy of man” (p. 26, my italic emphasis).

Unlike Li-Kwen and Ning-Ning who preferred strongly a happy ending in the tale even if both the prince and the princess turn into frogs, Rafiki showed his doubt for such a “happy” ending:

Winnie: And do you think reading this story would make you question that ending?
Rafiki: Yeah.
Winnie: So do you think it’s reasonable that the prince actually, like gets bored of being a human?
Rafiki: It’s not usual, because he wanted to become a human and now he doesn’t want anymore. It’s funny.
Winnie: And what do you think about the ending of this book?
Rafiki: It’s pretty strange. Because first there were a frog prince and a princess, and then there were a princess and a regular prince and now they are both frogs.

Hence, the final twist that Scieszka made in the story, though still within the format of a happy ending, served as a stimulus to Rafiki’s former thoughts regarding a joyful union of the two characters while keeping their human forms.

During the interview, Wendy expressed the same preference for the arrangement of a happy ending as well as wonders about what would happen after the reunion of the frogs:

Winnie: Now you read The Frog Prince Continued. Do you like the story?
Wendy: Yes. I like where something wasn’t so happy and they kissed the second time and they both turned into frogs and lived happily ever after.
Winnie: I see. After reading this story, will you start to wonder about the life the prince and the princess live after the happily-ever-after ending? Like in the fairy tales, we always hear that the prince and the princess live happily ever after, but maybe it’s not the case. So will you start to question that?

Wendy: Yeah. I would kind of question what would happen after they are frogs. Like what did they do after they hopped off.

Despite the fact that Wendy’s preference for a happily-ever-after ending and idea about its undeniable appearance in fairy tales was in a certain degree reinforced by the plot of this book, the strategy the story applied to adapt the old tale through stretching it helped her develop a concept of continuing imagining incidents occurring after this second ending. As a result, Scieszka and Johnson’s extended tale, though still ends with “happily ever after,” sets a model for children to think beyond the terminating point and bestows the genre with more possibilities.

This multiple case study presented my four research participants’ various responses toward chosen fairy-tale texts. The prior knowledge they held toward the genre probed through the pre-interview meetings indicated that some of their perceptions had been conditioned and fixed as unshakable beliefs such as its indispensable elements of magic and ancientness as well as the stiff roles assumed by common fairy-tale characters like princes, princesses and witches. Besides, the dominant influence from the popular media-based fairy-tale adaptations like the Disney animated films/books could also be traced in their reactions. Although a dim effect of other alternative fairy-tale versions (old or new) was shown, there was still an urgent need to expose them with a more variety of texts of fairy tales in order to broaden their apprehension toward the genre.
In my research participants’ responses to selected older and relatively recent works of fairy tales, the effect of their own gender identity was able to be traced. For instance, the two boys tended to identify with the male protagonists in the tales (especially the princes) while the two girls projected themselves as the heroines of the stories (especially the princesses). In other words, both male and female sides incline to accord more with the characters of the same sex. As for the influence of their cultural background, it was not as explicit as that of gender identity; the reactions of both Chinese children did not show particular differences from those of the two American children. The reason may be that the texts chosen for discussions mainly relate to Western culture instead of having multicultural features. Such a characteristic of homogeneity naturally limited the possibility of dissimilarities presented in the children’s responses caused by their different cultural backgrounds.

The fresh aspects of the earlier versions recorded/written by Perrault or Brothers Grimm served as a stimulus to disturb what they used to believe about fairy tales. On the other hand, the violent components which we as adults/educators of children generally consider to be unbearable to young minds actually are unexpectedly anticipated by my research participants due to their function of leading to the practice of justice in fairy tales. In a sense, such a phenomenon just coincides with the witty statement of Gilbert K. Chesterton\(^70\) (1922) in one of his essays “On Household Gods and Goblins” of *The Coloured Lands*—“For children are innocent and love justice; while most of us are wicked and naturally prefer mercy.” In addition to eradicating some of adults’ false or questionable assumptions, my research participants’ responses also revealed an undeniable force of authority embodied in traditional fairy-tale versions upon them; once

\(^{70}\) Gilbert K. Chesterton (1874-1936) was an English author and Catholic apologist in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.
such versions were introduced to these children, almost all of them considered these older tales as the “true” stories.

Although some of the four children’s reactions reflected certain powerful ideologies have already taken roots, a systematic way of familiarizing them with selected contemporary variants in this qualitative research according to my typology listed in Chapter 1 still indicated that their former established impressions have been examined and challenged. While paralleling these new versions with the earlier ones, these youngsters were encouraged to rethink what they had internalized and held as truth. Through the acquaintance with a larger range of fairy-tale texts employing various strategies of subversion, the children’s critical thinking ability has been enhanced and their repertoire of the genre has been broadened.
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Children nowadays perceive fairy tales from a number of sources; however, despite the fact that many elementary schools in the United States have already included this genre in the primary curriculum\(^{71}\), the strongest prior impressions toward fairy tales held by most youngsters are still built on the popular mass media-based adaptations such as the animated films or books of fairy-tale retellings by the Walt Disney Company. As a result, I found that the established knowledge of school-aged children toward the genre have often been distorted and conditioned by those popular adaptations and children tend to believe that those prevailing variants are actually the original stories. In order to make a change to such an undesirable situation, I suggest exposing them to a great variety of fairy tales as the one and only way to broaden their repertoire and to develop their critical thinking ability toward the genre. Nevertheless, it becomes essential for us to find a pleasurable and engaging way of (re)introducing children to the literary body of fairy tales so as to achieve this goal.

Classic versions of fairy tales have long been censored for their elements assumed inappropriate for children by adults such as violence and thus been discounted from the formal elementary curriculum. However, from the interviews I conducted for this study, children’s responses disputed such a false adult assumption. To deprive children of the

\(^{71}\) Taking the elementary schools of the State College Area District, Pennsylvania for instance, there has been a formal unit called “The Land of Make Believe” designed in the curriculum for first graders to introduce the genre to children with the application of various fairy tales within mainly the format of picture books.
opportunity to read these older texts is actually to prevent an important way to increase their knowledge regarding the genre’s origin and related elements often minimized in school curriculum. As a matter of fact, from my research, I discovered that traditional fairy-tale versions like Perrault’s or Brothers Grimm can provide youngsters with a deeper and more complete and contextual background information about the genre since these tales have been passed down for centuries and represented the undeniable root for innumerable new renditions we can find today. The fresh aspects of these earlier versions unfamiliar to youngsters who have already known roughly about the stories can stimulate their previous recognition and enhance their apprehension of fairy tales. Furthermore, due to the characteristic of ingrained authority possessed by such versions, children can develop a concept of treating them as the true “originals” and thus have a more accurate understanding of the genre. In other words, I strongly recommend that educators of children use traditional fairy tales as the first step to promote their critical literacy.

Moreover, in the field of children’s literature, there has been a common tendency to rewrite old fairy tales and bestow them with new possibilities in the past two decades. Many children’s books are retellings of fairy tales using various strategies to overturn or disrupt the stereotypical impressions established through preexistent stories.72 Such a new kind of fairy tales functions as a “second chance” for children to question their prior perceptions toward the genre. By introducing them with a juxtaposed reading of these contemporary disruptive variants with the classic versions, we can let children start to reflect and examine the stock knowledge they have held as truth about fairy tales so that

72 The typology presented in Chapter 1 provides an overview of the common strategies being applied to rewrite fairy tales within the form of children’s books.
their critical thinking ability can be developed. Additionally, I think that we need more adult facilitators to make good use of the categorized modern versions undertaking a variety of approaches as a systematic method to alternate children’s previous recognition and actualize the purpose of promoting critical literacy.

As teachers/educators, we have the responsibility to understand our own ideologies and then make the effort to have children avoid developing the same fixed concepts or to encourage them to be aware of them. As Terre Sychterz (2002) points out, “[a]dults must be aware of their own ideologies and be willing to acknowledge the assumptions that underlie those ideologies… Ideologies will never disappear, but an awareness of them is a starting point” (p. 191). Learning from children’s responses to fairy-tale texts can help us find out what stereotypical assumptions toward their reactions we as adults hold and examine what ideological impressions they already inherit from their past experiences of encountering the genre. Furthermore, concerning the beliefs of children toward fairy tales, I believe that the method of a juxtaposed reading of old and new versions can be a marvelous way to make them become attentive to what they have internalized as “truth” about the genre and to provide them with an opportunity of establishing a critical attitude toward fairy tales, literature and ideally to everything they encounter in life, like Synhterz (2002) puts, “[c]omplex literature is a safe way for children to explore complexities of life” (p. 193).

Putting together various versions of the same set of fairy tales can produce the effect of making children possess manifold of impressions toward the stories. Some of the perceptions may be contradictory to each other and sometimes a “grey area” of their impressions toward a certain type of fairy-tale characters can emerge. However, such
results can be considered to be a good thing, in terms of making them expand their knowledge so as to have a collaborative and mosaic-like memory toward individual fairy tales instead of a hegemonic recollection of the dominant adaptations like the ones produced by the Disney Company. Thus, the necessary incorporation of more renditions into youngsters’ repertoire of fairy tales is urged to be started.

To fulfill the need of putting more variety of fairy tales into the elementary school curriculum, I provide a sample of a two-week syllabus for teachers/educators of children as a way to introduce the classic fairy tales and reworked variants to them in a systematic and organized fashion

| Week 1 |
|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|
|                | Classic Versions | Contemporary Variants | Type of Modern Versions |
| Day 1          | “Cinderella” (Perrault, 1697; Grimms, 1812); | “Prince Cinders” (Cole, 1987) “Cinderella Bigfoot” (Thaler and Lee, 1997) “Princess Smartypants” (Cole, 2005) “Princess Smartypants Breaks the Rules!” (Cole, 2009) | Type 1-1 Type 1-2 Type 1-3 |
| Day 2          | “Sleeping Beauty” (Perrault, 1697; Grimms, 1812) | “Sleeping Bobby” (Osborne, Osborne and Potter, 2005) “Sleeping Ugly” (Yolen and Stanley, 1981) | Type 1-1 Type 1-2 Type 1-3 |

The conventional and modern fairy-tale texts listed in this sample syllabus may be adjusted depending on the actual needs of teachers/educators of children as well as the inclusion of more recently-published children’s books which fit the criteria for each type of modern variants.

My typology of contemporary disruptive fairy tales (Table 1, p.12-16 in Chapter 1) provides a detailed description for each specific type listed in this syllabus.
| Day 4       | “Hansel and Gretel” (Grimms, 1812); “Rumpelstiltskin” (Grimms, 1812) | “A Delicate Architecture” (Valente, 2009) | “Rumpelstiltskin’s Daughter” (Stanley, 2002) |
| Day 5       | “Jack and the Beanstalk” (Tabart, 1807) | “Goldilocks and the Three Bears” (Southey, 1837) | “The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales” (Scieszka and Smith, 1992) |

**Week 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Modern Versions</th>
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| Day 7       | “The Frog Prince” (Grimms, 1812) | “The Prince of the Pond: Otherwise Known as De Fawg” | “Snow White in New York” (French, 1986) |
| Day 8 | “Three Little Pigs” (Jacobs, 1890) | The Three Wolves and the Big Bad Pig (Trivizas and Oxenbury, 1997) | Type 7 |
|       | An Undone Fairy Tale (Lendler and Martin, 2005) | | |
| Day 10 | Fairest of All: A Tale of the Wicked Queen (Valentino, 2009) | Bubba the Cowboy Prince: A Fractured Texas Tale (Ketteman and Warhola, 1997) | Type 2 + Type 6 |
|       | I Was a Rat! (Pullman, 1999) | | Type 1 + Type 5 |
| | | | Type 2 + Type 3 + Type 6 |

Table 5-A Two-Week Sample Syllabus of a Juxtaposition of Classic Fairy Tales and Their Contemporary Disruptive Variants for School-Aged Children

The main approach I presented through this syllabus is to make use of different fairy-tale texts, old and new. With this way children can be exposed to a maximum number of stories. While the traditional versions can bring fresh aspects of specific tales they already roughly comprehend (from media-based mediums most likely) and modify their former apprehension about the root of the genre, the contemporary disruptive variants can provide invaluable chances to reflect on what they believe to be true previously and include more possibilities about fairy tales into their repertoire. Following the order of new fairy-tale types listed in my typology (Table 1, p.12-16 in Chapter 1), children are able to learn about recently-produced adaptations in the field of children’s literature systematically and understand how they work to discredit the various ideologies children internalize by having been acquainted with the genre through a dominant and
monopolizing source. As a result, the critical thinking ability of youngsters can be enhanced so as to develop their critical literacy.

Such a syllabus employing classic and modern fairy tales to promote critical literacy of children can be matched with a set of teaching materials produced to offer a collection of creative ideas and activities which can be used in the primary classroom after children already build a solid knowledge foundation of the genre though a juxtaposed reading of old and new texts of fairy tales. A chart showed as Appendix B provides a list of such teaching materials with the application of fairy tales published in the past two decades. The books in the list all offer innovative and practical ideas for classroom activities with the complex use of fairy tales. Through doing the suggested activities, the critical thinking, writing and comprehension of literary works (or even in other subjects like math, as applied in the book no. 7 listed in the chart) can be greatly strengthened.

Conducting this study of exploring children’s responses to fairy-tale texts has been like embarking on a journey (teaching/learning process) enabling me to examine my assumptions as an adult/educator/parent and to understand what children think about specific fairy tales and fairy tales as a whole. Children’s interpretive/imaginative ability to read literary works can never be underestimated. Through a juxtaposed reading of old and new fairy tales, children’s fairy tale literacy emerges and develops gradually. My study has demonstrated the multiple ways of such a juxtaposed reading in helping children learn to perceive the genre of fairy tales in a new light and get to know about the origins of popular modern fairy tale adaptations (such as the Disney productions), and further in promoting children’s critical literacy. This journey will go on.
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APPENDIX A

Selected Images Applied in the Identification Activity of Fairy-Tale Characters

Princesses:

Princess Fiona in “Shrek”

An overweight girl wearing a fancy dress

Princess Justina Albertina

Princess Anne

Princess Knight

Mulan (Disney)
Princes:

- Prince Charles
- Prince Charming in “Shrek”
- A man dressed in a prince outfit
- Prince Charles (older)
- A frog on a lily pad
- A prince kissing another prince from *King and King*
Witches:

Kiki from “Kiki’s Delivery Service”

The evil fairy in “Sleeping Beauty” (Disney)  Cinderella’s stepmother (Disney)

The witch from *Hansel and Gretel*  Aunt Tigress
# APPENDIX B

A Booklist of Teaching Materials with the Application of Fairy Tales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Book Title (Publication Year)</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><em>Fairy Tale Frolic: Interdisciplinary Units and Enrichment Activities (Kid’s Stuff)</em> (1994)</td>
<td>Sue Wright</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><em>From the Land of Enchantment: Creative Teaching with Fairy Tales</em> (1997)</td>
<td>Jerry D. Flack, Gay Graeber (illustrator)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><em>The Beanstalk and Beyond: Developing Critical Thinking through Fairy Tales</em> (1997)</td>
<td>Joan M. Wolf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><em>Cinderella Outgrows the Glass Slipper and Other Zany Fractured Fairy Tale Plays:</em> 5 Funny Plays with Related Writing Activities and Graphic Organizers That Motivates Kids to Explore Plot, Characters, and Setting* (2002)</td>
<td>Joan M. Wolf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><em>Fairy Tales Thematic Unit</em> (2004)</td>
<td>Jeanne King</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td><em>Teaching Thinking Skills with Fairy Tales and Fantasy</em> (2005)</td>
<td>Nancy Polette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td><em>Children in Wonderland: Teaching with Fairy Tales</em> (2006)</td>
<td>Rutger Jan Bieewe Tamminga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td><em>Once upon a Time: Fairy Tales in the Library and Language Arts Classroom for Grades 3-6</em> (2007)</td>
<td>Jane Heitman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td><em>Fairy Tales in the Classroom: Teaching Students to Write Stories with Meaning Through Traditional Tales</em> (2010)</td>
<td>Veronika Martenova Charles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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