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FUNCTIONS OF THE FANTASTIC

**Selected Essays from the Thirteenth
International Conference on the
Fantastic in the Arts**

Joe Sanders

 *Greenwood*
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Functions of the Fantastic

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Functions of the Fantastic

*Selected Essays from the Thirteenth
International Conference on the
Fantastic in the Arts*

Edited by JOE SANDERS

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To Mary, Always

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Introduction

Joe Sanders

This book contains papers from a scholarly conference, a fact worth special stress—on "scholarly" and on "conference." Each essay represents an expert's freshest understanding, but each also contributes to a larger understanding of the fantastic in the arts, an understanding that has grown out of the interaction at the conference.

The International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts (ICFA) has been evolving for a decade and a half now, having changed from a small gathering focused on the work of one writer into a major eclectic scholarly event each spring. Besides the lure of a warm locale in which to celebrate the end of winter, the conference offers hundreds of participants a chance to present scholarly papers. To fit everything in, the program has become a patchwork of overlapping sessions, both exciting and overwhelming. Usually during an ICFA, I'd page through the program, frustrated at how often program sessions I wanted to attend were scheduled to meet at the same time. I would talk with people and scribble in my notebook. I'd come away with pages of notes on various current projects, some notes jotted during sessions, others provoked by conversations, but always without a clear sense of the conference's overall drift.

In 1992, though, I gained a fresh perspective on the ICFA by, ironically, going through it in a haze. Just before the conference, when my new sinus medicine reacted with the original prescription, I went on automatic pilot. Other people testify that I was at the conference and even delivered a paper; I don't remember. Since I'd already volunteered to edit the volume of selected essays from the conference, however, there was proof that I had been there: a pile of papers I had brought away from the conference (those session chairs had recommended to be considered for publication) plus additional papers that trickled in through the mails for several weeks.

This is where the fresh perspective began to appear. Rather than rushing from session to session or being uneasily aware of presentations I was missing, I found

myself faced with a large portion of the conference piled in a shaggy heap on the corner of my desk, to be sifted through more or less at my leisure. Going through those essays has been a chore, a revelation, and a source of deep satisfaction. One of the recurring criticisms of ICFA has been its comprehensiveness, the way many kinds of "fantastic" are thrown together. As a division head, responsible for finding program sessions to fit proposed papers, I've realized how the submissions I have on hand at the deadline could fit into more than one combination, and a look at the finished program shows how other equally coherent sessions could have been selected out of the whole mass of available papers.

It was interesting, therefore, to experience a somewhat abridged, sequentially arranged version of ICFA itself by reading the pile of essays on my desk. I began with no unifying theme in mind. Selecting these most original and readable papers, however, I discovered that even though they came from different program sessions, in different subject division of the conference, they *did* fit together! Fitting them into subdivisions proved more difficult, however. In previous volumes in this series, the tables of contents have been split into smaller areas of focus, but these essays resisted such classification. Note, for example, how Jack Zipes's essay, discussing contemporary fantastic fiction for children, leads naturally into Richard Wunderlich's study of how *Pinocchio* has been distorted over the years, which in turn leads to Dennis O'Brien's examination of the TV series *Beauty and the Beast* as a vision of the modern world for adults, Norma Rowen's discovery of the story of Cinderella as a subtext in Jane Austen's novels, John Pennington's reflections on how an eccentric reading of *Alice in Wonderland* illustrates the activity of critical inquiry, and so on. Because the essays here connect so serendipitously, they refuse to be squeezed into narrow boxes. So does the sprawling, vital ICFA itself.

The other really striking thing I learned by editing this volume is how much these diverse essays share a purpose. They insist on applicability. This is not "relevance" in the burned-out sense of social protest that some people demanded of literature a few decades ago; however, these essays do talk about how people approach the fantastic, how they enter into it, and how they return from it with refreshed vision for our shared world and with fresh ideas of what we can do here. In particular, these essays stress seeing (or reexamining) representations of human experience, with at least the implied suggestion that people who have learned to notice what is valuable and healthy should be motivated to preserve and strengthen it. Thus this volume's title.

There may still be some readers who do not realize the fantastic *can* have a function. Such people can learn better by reading these essays carefully and paying closer attention to their own reading. They could also gain from a visit to an ICFA, where they can make their own connections among the swarm of ideas and speculate how to carry those concerns out into the world.

Functions of the Fantastic

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Recent Trends in the Contemporary American Fairy Tale

Jack Zipes

You can always tell when Christmas is approaching in America. Sometime in November, the bookstores begin displaying glossy fairy-tale books with attractive colors and startling designs in their windows. It is almost like magic, and the store windows appear to be enchanted by these marvelous books. Of course, there is really nothing magical about this phenomenon. It is absolutely predictable: Storeowners and publishers are in collusion, seeking to entice both children and parents to buy as many books as possible during the holiday season. In most cases, it does not matter if the contents of the books are vapid. It is the fluff that counts, the ornament, the diverting cover designs that promise a wonderful world of pleasure and take the onlooker away from the harsh realities of the present. In the bookstore window there is the glow of difference and the promise of pleasure. In the fairy-tale books there is hope for a world distinctly more exciting and rewarding than the everyday world in the here and now.

But is there any basis for such hope? Are the fairy tales in America mere commodities that compensate for the technological evolution that has narrowed the range of possibilities for developing the imagination and humane relationships in reality? What sociocultural function do fairy tales have in an American society in which the most extreme fantasies *and* nightmares have been coolly and brutally realized so that little is left for the imagination?

In a significant study of the historical development of the literary fairy tale, Friedmar Apel has argued that from its origins, the central theme of the fairy tale has always concerned the struggle of the imagination (representing the spiritual side of humanity) against the hard reality of exploitation and reification (representing the rise of inhumane technology). Whereas the earlier fairy tales of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries could optimistically project a harmony of soul and reality brought about by magic or a fantastic element that seemed commensurate with progress in the world, Apel has claimed that the modern temper is stamped by our conscious recognition that such harmony can never be

achieved and thus the very basis of the fairy tale is no longer relevant and can never again be valid, unless its formal characteristics totally change. As he states:

While other genres (i.e., the novel, lyric poetry) have been able to maintain themselves only by depicting the impossibility of the unity of the world and soul, the fairy tale requires the possibility of conceptualizing this unity as a starting point, no matter how relativized it becomes. Without this possibility, the fairy tale must give up its formal function of depicting the marvelous (das Wunderbare), unless it wants to degenerate into mere entertainment literature by feigning harmony and thus losing all connection to actual life. . . . [A]ll new endeavors to portray the marvelous with the traditional means of the fairy tale and other fantastic stories only serve to amuse the imagination and can no longer fulfill the old functions of conveying a sublime interpretation of life and a way of putting the meaning into practice.¹

In short, Apel dismisses the profound utopian value, the fairy tale, either as oral or literary product, once had, and he asserts that it is impossible in the twentieth century for it to be anything more than *divertissement*, escape literature, a cultural commodity that is part of the entertainment business. His position is obviously a radical one and must be qualified, if we are to understand the development and the present function of the literary fairy tale in the West, and more specifically in America. Certainly, if we look at the Walt Disney industry and the vast distribution of bowdlerized and sanitized versions of fairy tales by Perrault, the Grimms, Bechstein, Collodi, and other classical authors, it is apparent that they have been incorporated into the Western culture industry mainly to amuse children and adults alike. Yet amusement is not to be taken lightly, for distraction and *divertissement* have an important ideological function: Almost all the classical fairy tales that have achieved prominence and are to be enjoyed in the United States can be considered as products that reinforce a patriarchal and middle-class social code. Their meaning is not limited to this ideological function. For instance, even if their purpose is to amuse and pacify the rebellious instincts of readers, they are received by the public in different and unpredictable ways. Although a text may contain directives within it, it cannot prescribe its effect. Meaning shifts with the individual in history. And if the more serious fairy tales of the twentieth century and specifically contemporary American fairy tales are to have any meaning today, then we must begin at first in the production phase with the proposition that many authors believe that the classical works are indeed patriarchal and anachronistic and have served an ideological function that needs to be replaced or, at the very least, to be revised in light of the major sociopolitical changes since World War II.

Bearing this in mind, the literary fairy tale of the twentieth century, despite what Apel asserts, has maintained a crucial utopian function when it is self-reflective and experimental. By questioning the forms and themes that fairy tales

have traditionally developed, the best of the modern fairy tales reflect the complex problems brought about by highly industrialized or postindustrial societies and the difficulties that the genre itself has in maintaining its utopian purpose, for the fairy tale has always projected the wish and possibility for human autonomy and eros and proposed means to alter the world. As Michel Butor has remarked about the images conveyed by the ideal and serious fairy tale, "A world inverted, an exemplary world, fairyland is a criticism of ossified reality. It does not remain side by side with the latter; it reacts upon it; it suggests that we transform it; that we reinstate what is out of place."²

One of the qualitatively distinguishing features of the fairy tale in America during the past twenty-five years has been the manner in which it has questioned gender roles and critiqued the patriarchal code that has been so dominant in both folk and fairy tales until the 1960s.³ However, just as feminism and the feminist movement have been culturally exploited and compromised by the mass media and turned against themselves, the fairy tale that seeks to maintain its utopian purpose and social critique is always in danger of being defused and transformed into mere entertainment.

The quandary of the fairy tale has been most evident during the Reagan-Bush years of the 1980s, which brought a destruction of social welfare services and projects, increased pauperization of women and minority groups, and supported the individual self-absorption of the middle classes, often equated with the so-called Yuppies. It would appear that the fairy tale in the 1980s has become nothing more than a decorative ornament, designed to titillate and distract readers and viewers, no matter how it has been transformed as novel, poem, short story, Broadway play, film, cassette, or TV series. Yet it would be unfair to the fairy-tale genre and to the writers of fairy tales to dismiss all the creative attempts as mere decoration and a reflection of the narcissism of the 1980s. In some respects, the fairy tale can be characterized as trying to find an adequate fantastical form to reply to the curtailment of the fantasy in reality and to provide a viable option that will give audiences the hope that they can reach their creative potential.

Since it is extremely difficult in a short essay to present a comprehensive picture of the development of the American fairy tale during the 1980s, I would like to discuss some of the more interesting and more relevant attempts to experiment with traditional fairy-tale material and to cultivate both a social and aesthetic critique. First some short prefatory remarks about recent trends.

One of the more successful Broadway musicals toward the end of the 1980s was a production entitled *Into the Woods* (1987), which was a hodgepodge of various fairy tales that harmlessly poked fun at various fairy-tale characters like Little Red Riding Hood and was concerned mainly about being a commercial success.⁴

Indeed, it was a success, and there has been something like a fairy-tale resurgence during the late 1980s that one could possibly interpret as a flight from

reality, a withdrawal from the problems of American society or, more positively, a postmodernist endeavor to explore possibilities to go beyond the traditional boundaries of the fairy tale and generate new worlds. The fairy-tale TV series *Beauty and the Beast*, which ran from 1987 to 1990, had a large following in the States and has been successful as a TV rerun and as a video. (Most likely the Disney Studio decided to capitalize on this popularity by producing its animated version of *Beauty and the Beast* along with a bestselling book in 1991.) Various fairy-tale films like *The Princess Bride* (1987), based on William Goldman's novel, have been popular in the theaters. In 1986 Terri Windling, at Ace Books, began editing a series of novels that retell classic fairy tales, and six works by well-known fantasy authors have been published thus far. Numerous innovative illustrated fairy-tale books for children are issued each year, perhaps the most famous by Maurice Sendak entitled *Dear Mili* (1988), based on a letter written by Wilhelm Grimm, which has sold over 200,000 copies. Moreover, the classical Grimm and Perrault fairy tales such as *The Frog Prince*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and others are newly illustrated and published in the thousands each year, often with cassettes or records. Finally, there are various fairy-tale imports from England and the Continent like the works of Michael Ende, Angela Carter, and Tanith Lee that are avidly read and seen by American audiences. For instance, Ende's *Neverending Story* (1984) was made into two films, just as Carter's story, "The Company of Wolves," from *Bloody Chamber* (1979), was adapted for the cinema.

In sum, the fairy tale has assumed many guises in America and is alive and well. That is, it is certainly immensely popular, but is it popular for the wrong reasons? Is the hope it promises perverse? Does it offer temporary escape from the hard times of the present? Is there anything of substance in the fairy-tale experimentation that sets a foundation for essential cultural transformation?

There are no definitive answers to these questions, and it is extremely difficult to provide a comprehensive picture of the different types of fairy-tale experimentation that is presently being undertaken in different medias today. Nevertheless, there are some key works that can help us at least address some of the questions I have raised, for they are representative of both regressive and progressive tendencies to make the genre play a vital role in the development of American culture. The works I shall discuss are as follows: Maurice Sendak's *Dear Mili* (1988), the TV series *Beauty and the Beast*, William Goldman's *The Princess Bride*, Raymond E. Feist's *Faerie Tale* (1988), Wendy Walker's *The Sea-Rabbit, or The Artist of Life* (1988), Jane Yolen's *Tales of Wonder* (1983), six fairy-tale novels by Steven Brust, Kara Dalkey, Charles de Lint, Patricia C. Wrede, Pamela Dean, and Jane Yolen in Terri Windling's series, and Robert Coover's "The Gingerbread House" (1970).

The history behind *Dear Mili* is highly significant because it reveals something about the connections between production, reception, and form of

children's fairy tales in the late 1980s.

In 1983, Justin Schiller, a well-known New York bookseller, auctioned off a letter written by Wilhelm Grimm that contained a trite and sentimental tale. When the bidding contest was over, Michael di Capua of Farrar, Straus & Giroux boasted that he had paid well over the \$26,000 asking price. In order to recoup his money, Di Capua announced to the press that the unknown, allegedly "magnificent" tale would be translated by the gifted Ralph Mannheim and illustrated by the famous Maurice Sendak. Now, this tale was written by Wilhelm in a letter to a girl named Mili, evidently to give her some solace during the Napoleonic Wars. The tale itself was not original, but part of a didactic religious tradition and was fully developed by Wilhelm in a different way in "St. Joseph in the Woods" in the second edition of the Grimms' *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (1819). The fact that Wilhelm never felt the need to refer to the "Mili tale" later in his work on folk tales is indicative of his low opinion of this trite piece. The plot is simple: A mother sends her daughter into the woods in order to save her from an encroaching war, and she tells her to trust in God. The obedient and pious child does as she is told and is protected by a guardian angel. In the woods she finds an old man who is actually St. Joseph, and she shows how domesticated she is by performing various humble acts. After thirty years of dutiful behavior, which the girl perceives as only three years, she is sent home by St. Joseph, who gives her a rose to carry to her mother. When the girl is reunited with her, they go to sleep and are found dead the next morning with St. Joseph's rose in full bloom.

Anyone familiar with Sendak's work, particularly *Where the Wild Things Are*, can perhaps understand why he was drawn to this tale. He has never tired of illustrating the flight and return of the child, who reconciles himself to a mother or home.

However, rarely in his career has he ever illustrated a text so dripping with religious sentiment as this one. Where, then, is the book's salvation if there is one? To read it as my eight-year-old daughter did when she could not read. That is, to ignore the text and look at Sendak's playful pastel illustrations that recall the odyssey of a courageous girl who survives on her own in a mysterious forest. In fact, Sendak unconsciously or consciously re-illustrates the history of Little Red Riding Hood in a fascinating way. Sendak's girl, who cannot be more than eight, is adorned with a red frock, and throughout the illustrations Sendak uses all sorts of hues of red to play upon the theme of courage and/or sin. Clearly, his little girl, who loses her red shoes in the woods and who will return barefoot to her mother with a red rose, blossoms as the images of the woods are transformed from wilderness to garden of Eden. As usual, Sendak has his fun with his viewers by introducing personal themes and motifs from his other works. For instance, Mozart, also dressed in a red jacket, conducts a choir of Brooklyn school kids in one scene. In another, St. Joseph, who looks more like an old wise

rabbi than a Christian saint, gives the rose to the girl as a sign of redemption. The man in the woods is not a wolf but a spiritual guide, who looks after her during a period of trial and separation.

Unfortunately, most of the illustrations are derivative and bland. In the final analysis, the text of *Dear Mili*, seen through the eyes of Maurice Sendak, is transformed into another story that has something to do with Maurice Sendak's personal odyssey and sentimental old age. Gone is the rebellion of his early period. Gone are the weird, disturbing figures of *The Juniper Tree*.

Sendak has tamed himself, and though *Dear Mili* may be sweet and tender, it reflects a restorative tendency of the contemporary American fairy tale for children. Obedience to the mother, diligence, submission to male authority, reward by divine powers—these are the dominant motifs in a fairy tale that does not show respect for the autonomy of a child or encourage her to develop her creative powers. Such a tale is perfectly in accord with the present ideological atmosphere in America, and it is not much different from most of the reprints of the Grimms' classical tales. Of course, there are numerous endeavors to rewrite and re-illustrate the traditional tales such as Shirley Climo's *The Egyptian Cinderella* (1989), Charlotte Huck's *Princess Furball* (1989), and Margaret Tomes's *Tattercoats* (1989) or to transform them radically like Jane Yolen's *Sleeping Ugly* (1981). Most of these tales depict a strong heroine who actively determines her own destiny. Yet despite the strong feminist component in many of the new and revised fairy tales for children, the emphasis on closure, harmony, happy end, and a well-ordered world remains the governing principle so that the tales rarely hold a critical mirror to the ossified reality of our times. In the case of fairy tales for children, the harmonious ends may be justified as long as they motivate children to believe that sex roles can be altered. But given the vast problems confronting women in American society—teenage pregnancy, pauperization of single women with children, inequitable wages, and so on—these fairy tales also conceal reality and give children a false impression of what awaits them as they mature.

This is not to say that there have not been revisions of classical fairy tales for children that compel readers to confront the harsh realities of the 1980s.⁵

Martin Waddell's *The Tough Princess* (1986) and Babbette Cole's *Princess Smartypants* (1986)⁶ are superb examples of how writers and illustrators can revise the classical tradition in a way that can contribute to the autonomy of children. Both are parodies of *King Thrushbeard* or *The Taming of the Shrew* and present young women who resist the will of their parents, who want them to marry the perfect prince. These tales, told with delightful and unorthodox images, are open-ended and provoke readers to reconsider their gender identity with the hope that they can become whom they want to be. There are, however, radical revisions of fairy tales that leave shockingly little hope. For instance, the theme of violence, the violation of a child's will, is treated in a more somber way in

Sarah Moon's remarkable *Little Red Riding Hood*. Using Charles Perrault's 1697 text with her own stark, contemporary photographs of a young girl on her way to her grandmother's house at night in an urban setting, Moon addresses the topic of violence in our society and shifts the blame for the girl's rape and/or death to the predators or to social conditions. This revised version of *Little Red Riding Hood* is a haunting photographic essay about the dangers girls face on our streets. Not only do the photos demand that we reexamine Perrault's text carefully, but they make us aware of the insidious, threatening climate in which young girls grow up with dread.

Apparently, this was also the intention of the TV series *Beauty and the Beast*, conceived in 1986 by Ron Koslow and adapted as a fairy-tale novel by Barbara Hambly in 1989.⁷ The plot tells all: Catherine Chandler, daughter of a wealthy corporate lawyer, has followed her father's footsteps, and after graduating Radcliffe and Cornell Law School, she works in his New York office as an associate. Though not satisfied with her work, Catherine enjoys the glitter of New York and lives the life of a professional Yuppie. She mixes mainly with the rich, and her lover, Tom Gunther, an ambitious real estate developer, is concerned primarily with prestige and money, values that Catherine appears to share. Indeed, she could be described as a spoiled New York princess, who has no awareness of the social problems in New York. However, one night she is kidnapped, raped, and beaten. Left for dead in Central Park, she is found by a strange beastly creature named Vincent, who is from an underground world. A cross between a lion and a human being, Vincent was found as a baby by an extraordinary man named Father, who raised him in the underground tunnels of New York, where numerous homeless people and outcasts live. The people are the "different" ones, the nonconformists with a heart, who have rejected the capitalist society of New York and are content to live in the tunnels from the remnants discarded every day by the New Yorkers. After Catherine spends ten days with Vincent, who helps her recuperate from her attack, she returns to the city with a completely different consciousness. She leaves her father's firm and begins working for the district attorney's office to help the victims of social injustice. Moreover, she breaks her relationship with Tom and feels a deep bond of affinity and love for Vincent, who is dedicated to preserving an underground world that has a precarious existence. Though Catherine and Vincent rarely see each other, they feel each other's presence all the time.

Finally, when Catherine, who has learned self-defense, tracks down her kidnappers, who run a prostitution and blackmail racket, she valiantly fights them but appears to be doomed. All of a sudden, Vincent appears out of nowhere to kill the thugs and rescue Catherine. Though they must part again, Catherine "had no idea where this would end, no idea where it might lead her. She only knew that they were bound together, she and this strange and beautiful soul, and the thought, rather than uncertainty, brought her peace."⁸

This fairy-tale novel is based on the two-hour TV pilot that introduced the series in 1987, followed by different hourly episodes once a week. Therefore, the ending of the novel, like the TV pilot, had to be inconclusive so that for the next two TV seasons Catherine and Vincent could have many adventures with each one taking turns saving each other and both developing a more passionate love for each other. Both the novel and TV series are based on sentimental and predictable plots. The appeal of both, however, can be attributed to the fact that Koslow employed a well-known fairy-tale scheme to address immediate problems of American society, ranging from drugs to white-collar crimes. Moreover, here it is the princess who is converted into a more humane person by the beast, who remains a beast and true to his outsider state. Another appealing factor was the unconsummated love between Catherine and Vincent. Unfortunately, the series quickly succumbed to the stale formula of most American-TV crime shows and did not develop the fairy-tale form in a new way; and the novel is written in a trite, traditional manner that leaves little room for the reader's imagination.

On the other hand, William Goldman's *The Princess Bride*, published as a novel in 1973 and produced as a film in 1987, is a mock fairy tale that plays with traditional motifs and themes and challenges the reader/viewer to consider whether fairy tales have any value for us today. In the comic introduction to the book, Goldman tells the reader how his father, a European immigrant, used to read S. Morgenstern's classic fairy tale, *The Princess Bride*, with the boring parts left out. Since it was his favorite book, Goldman writes his own adaptation for contemporary readers and retells the tale, constantly interrupting the flow of the narrative with droll comments. The story concerns the beautiful Buttercup in the land of Florin, somewhere between Sweden and Germany, some time long ago. Buttercup is a feisty village maid who always orders the farm boy Westley to do all the chores; when she reaches eighteen, she realizes she loves him. However, he decides to go to America to find his fortune there to be worthy of her love. While he is gone for three years, Buttercup is forced to become engaged to Prince Humperdinck of Florin, who eventually wants her murdered by three unusual villains: Inigo, the greatest swordsman in the world; Fezzik, the strongest man in the world; and Vizzini, the cruelest man in the world. However, Westley returns in disguise and outsmarts these villains, and later two of them join him and help him rescue Buttercup from the evil prince. Nobody is what he or she appears in this fairy tale. The characters speak in contemporary American slang. The impossible is always possible. In the end, Goldman leaves the reader up in the air as to whether Buttercup and Westley will live happily ever after.

In his opinion, after they escaped,

they squabbled a lot, and Buttercup lost her looks eventually, and one day Fezzik lost a fight and some hot-shot kid whipped Inigo with a sword and Westley was never able to really sleep sound because of Humperdinck maybe being on the trail. I'm not trying to make this a downer, understand. I mean, I really do think

that love is the best thing in the world, except for cough drops. But I also have to say, for the umpty-umph time, that life isn't fair. It's just fairer than death, that's all.⁹

Entertaining and bizarre, this novel parodies all the conventions of the fairy tale but not with the intention to dismiss the value of the genre. Goldman recreates himself as the fictitious author of this work; that is, he uses a mask in the tradition of eighteenth-century novels and recalls how his father's telling of Morgenstern's fairy tale introduced him to a new world of fantasy that cured him of a sickness, somewhat like Michael Ende's *Neverending Story*, and that this imaginative story remained with him because it changed his life. In other words, the power of the imagination can cause changes in reality and alter one's life.

However, imagination and creativity have been on the defensive for some time now, and most of the recent fairy-tale novels record in some form or another the desperate fight of valiant heroes and heroines to save the imagination from being destroyed or wiped out by the instrumental forces of technology that seek to rationalize life in a sterile and exploitative manner. It is not by chance, then, that the series of fairy-tale novels edited by Terri Windling has as its major purpose to breathe new life into traditional material and show the diverse uses a modern storyteller can make out of the fairy-tale genre. Thus far, six novels have been published and appear to be manifestoes in defense of the power of the imagination. Steven Brust's *The Sun, the Moon, and the Stars* (1987) is based on a Hungarian folktale and set in contemporary America. A group of artists work together in a studio and appear doomed to obscurity. However, they fight against odds to arrange for an exhibition and gain respect for their imaginative endeavors. In *Jack the Giant Killer* (1987), Charles de Lint borrows from folktales about cunning tailors and tricksters to weave together his own fantastic narrative about a young woman, named Jacky, whose mundane life is suddenly transformed in an extraordinary way. She witnesses the mysterious murder of a tiny man called a hob in the city of Ottawa. Soon she feels compelled to explore this mystery, and before Jacky knows it, she becomes the only hope of a fairy realm called Kinrowan threatened by savage hordes. With the help of her best friend Kate (Crackernuts) Hazel and a swanlike prince, she demonstrates that force and violence are not necessary to overcome brutality if one has faith in the imagination. This message is also stressed in Pamela Dean's *Tam Lin* (1991), which is actually a fairy-tale adaptation of an old Scottish ballad. Dean, too, updates, the ballad to the Vietnam era and sets the action at a midwestern college where Janet, her pregnant heroine, must make a difficult decision about "keeping the heart of flesh in a world that wants to put in a heart of stone."¹⁰

In contrast to the contemporary settings of Dean, Brust, and de Lint, Kara Dalkey's *The Nightingale* (1988) and Patricia C. Wrede's *Snow White and Rose Red* (1989) take place in the past. Dalkey's revision of Hans Christian

Andersen's tale is set in medieval Japan and concerns Uguisu, who uses her extraordinary talent as a flautist to save the emperor's life and bring about peace and harmony in his kingdom. Wrede's adaptation of Wilhelm Grimm's *Snow White and Rose Red* takes place in Elizabethan England. Unlike Grimm's version, the Widow Arden and her two daughters, Blanche and Rosamund, are active and creative characters who help the queen of faerie and her two-half mortal sons, Hugh and John, to keep the ties alive between the fairy realm and mundane society.

The most recent of the fairy-tale novels in the Windling series, Jane Yolen's *Briar Rose* (1992), is by far the most experimental, since it moves through memory, flashbacks, and a retelling of "Sleeping Beauty" from the present to the horrors of the Holocaust. In her haunting narrative that reads somewhat like a mystery novel, Yolen demonstrates that fairy tales can be used to address the most atrocious crimes of the Nazi period in a manner that generates hope in readers who, Yolen believes, must come to terms with Auschwitz and its consequences.

Though the plots of each one of these novels that I have discussed are certainly very different, there is a common thread that unites them, a thread that can be traced back to German Romanticism and especially the works of E.T.A. Hoffmann: There is a secret humane and imaginative world, the realm of faerie, that is threatened by powermongers, rationalists, materialists, scientists, and the like. Without this world, that is, without imagination, life would become drab and monotonous, and people would become like automatons. Somehow, a balance must be struck between the inner and outer worlds of human beings, between the creative forces of the imagination and the reality principle of the world.

This message is at the heart of a recent bestseller entitled simply *Faerie Tale* by Raymond E. Feist. The plot concerns a successful screenwriter by the name of Phil Hasting, who moves into a huge house in rural upstate New York with his wife and three children. However, it turns out that the house is the seat of magic powers, and a magic black force is accidentally unleashed by Hasting and his friends. The queen of Faerie and her realm become endangered, and Hasting's twin sons are on the brink of death because an agreement between the guardians of faerie power has been broken by one of its members. Fortunately, the sons, who believe in the faerie power, have the courage to resist the evil forces, and they are all saved by the intervention of the guardians of the faerie realm.

Feist's novel contains long-winded expositions about magic, Celtic tradition, and fairies and has a secondary plot concerned with Hasting's teenage princess daughter, a rich heiress, who falls in love with an all-American graduate student writing his dissertation on a topic related to the occult and magic. As in the other fairy-tale novels, this plot is strained and at times preposterous and pretentious. The best that one can say about the lot of them is that they want to find an