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Masculinity and Men's Bodies in Fairy Tales: Youth, Violence, and Transformation

The study of masculinity in folklore and fairy tales, and in Western scholarship in general, has lagged behind the study of femininity. Only recently emerging as a distinct academic focus, masculinity has long dominated scholarly viewpoints as the default or unmarked norm (as one would expect in patriarchal cultures). In fairy-tale scholarship, too, masculinity has often been treated as an afterthought, beyond the more general concern with topics like heroes. Here, I focus on masculinity not only as a contrasting element to femininity, but also as a complementary aspect of gender construction, in which masculinity and femininity together are viewed as coconstructed parts of a whole sex/gender system. Obviously this, too, is a cultural construction: Western ideas of masculinity and femininity are no more complementary (or dichotomous) than anything else in the world. In this article, I review what has been said about masculinity in Western folklore and fairy-tale studies, followed by an analysis of the descriptions of men's bodies in a digitized dataset of canonical fairy tales, and finally by a gender performance-based attempt to locate the gender in men's bodies. My combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, and of feminist theory with masculinity studies, allows for a novel approach to the topic. I posit that masculinity is constructed in fairy tales as contingent and vulnerable, with men susceptible to transformations and judged more by hierarchical values like stature and birth order than are women, who tend to be judged by beauty.

The Construction of Masculinity

When feminist folklorists and fairy-tale scholars began investigating gender, they tended to focus on femininity. This was due in part to their sense that folklorists traditionally oriented their studies toward genres and themes that were relevant to men and did so with the assumption that male was an unmarked category. In their introduction to *Women's Folklore, Women's Culture*, Rosan Jordan and Susan Kalčik criticize folklorists for concentrating on male-oriented public genres and thus ignoring domestic-sphere genres (ix). Thus, feminist folklorists sought to draw scholarly attention to neglected women's genres as part of a corrective agenda. At the same time, feminist theory was introduced into folklore studies as not only a useful but also a transformative approach to studying expressive culture, ideology, and identity. The shift toward studying masculinity and men's folklore as its own subject, not merely as the default, occurred more recently in folkloristics. Joseph P. Goodwin's *More Man Than You'll Ever Be: Gay Folklore and Acculturation in Middle America* is an early example of folklore scholarship on masculinity.

While feminism was beginning to reach folklore studies, masculinity studies was growing in adjacent parts of academia. As R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt write of the field: "In the late 1980s and early 1990s, research on men and masculinity was being consolidated as an academic field" with the attendant publication of journals and textbooks to address this research agenda (833), all of which took cues and borrowed theories and vocabulary from feminism. Masculinity studies scholar Judith Kegan Gardiner has offered four points of consensus among feminist-inflected masculinity studies, which are helpful for evaluating what masculinity studies can offer folkloristic analyses of masculinity. These are that masculinity is a gender, not just an unmarked state; that masculinity is not a monolithic or static thing; that both/all genders should cooperate in political projects; and that essentialist views of genders should be challenged (Introduction 11–12). This cultural constructionist view is largely compatible with that of folklore studies.

Simon Bronner, editor of and contributor to *Manly Traditions*, asserts that "this book is the first to focus on the problem of the construction of manliness in American folklife" (xvi). Bronner disputes the claim of feminist folklorists that men's culture has been thoroughly documented and is correspondingly well understood, stating that the essays in *Manly Traditions* either document previously unnoticed men's cultures or shed new light on men's cultures using the construct of manliness as a critical focus. As might be expected, there is a lot less feminist in the version of masculinity studies done by folklorists like Bronner. For the most part, the contributors to *Manly Traditions* seemed to concur with Gardiner's cultural constructivist view of gender, but they are able to

do so in a way that connects them to masculinity studies without necessitating an allegiance to feminism.¹ What I perceive as the declawing of feminism in most essays in *Manly Traditions* tends to take a simplified view of feminism, which detracts from the important critical work feminism carries out within gender studies. The ways in which feminism gets posited in the book lead me to three specific problems with that volume as an example of masculinity studies: (1) whether masculinity studies is functioning as a backlash against feminism or as a critical enterprise unto itself, (2) whether masculinity studies can be successful without relying on divorcing men from masculinity, and (3) whether an activist dimension is central to masculinity studies. Bronner denies that the studies project is a backlash against feminism; instead, he affirms it is “progress toward fuller consideration of the way that gender is enacted, indeed embodied, in lived experience” (xviii). There is danger, however, that enthusiasm for masculinity too easily slides into nostalgia for the way things were before feminism, as Gardiner asserts in her introduction to *Masculinity Studies & Feminist Theory* (10).

My goal, then, is to combine the insights from masculinity studies with the rigor of feminist analysis in order to decipher the meanings of masculinity in a folkloristic context, specifically the meanings of masculinity in fairy tales. Existing studies of masculinity in fairy tales fall into three categories: interpretations of these materials from outside an academic disciplinary perspective, observations made by feminist folklorists almost as an afterthought once they have discussed the construction of femininity in fairy tales, and dedicated works on masculinity in folktales and fairy tales.

The most popular, and tellingly nonacademic, study of masculinity in fairy tales is Robert Bly's *Iron John*. Using a mythopoetic perspective, Bly interprets one version of ATU 502 from a particular translation of the Grimms to reveal a story supposedly about manhood and its tribulations. As an example of his universalizing approach, Bly writes about how “we hear from the Iron John story the importance of moving from the mother's realm to the father's realm” (ix). Appropriating anthropological ideas about wounding as a part of initiation rites, Bly explores how the figure of Iron John helps young men navigate masculinity: “The young man investigates or experiences his wound—father wound, mother wound, or shaming-wound—in the presence of this independent, timeless, mythological initiatory being” (36). Lacking any sense of cultural context, Bly's work is nevertheless quite popular. As an example of the feminist response to Bly, Gardiner critiques his work as being “ahistorical, inaccurate, ethnocentric, racist, and sexist” (“Theorizing Age” 102).

And yet Gardiner's reading is more sympathetic than Jack Zipes's reading of Bly in “Spreading Myths about Iron John,” in which Zipes provides a model for how folklorists can contribute unique insights to analyzing the men's

movement. Zipes's close textual reading of the Grimms' tale undercuts much of Bly's attempt to claim this story for his purposes. And Zipes, unlike most of the folklorists who contributed to *Manly Traditions*, is explicitly concerned with women's welfare. Zipes reprimands Bly for his falsely homogenizing victimizing efforts, asking,

But where in his treatise are all the wounds that men cause? There is no discussion of the manifold disturbances in family and personal life caused by the development of capitalism; no class, gender, or racial distinctions made in Bly's diagnosis of the malaise affecting men; no consideration of the economic factors of unemployment and bureaucratization that cause violence in and outside the family . . . leaving women more victimized since the 1970s than ever before. (117)

Both Zipes's and Gardiner's critiques of Bly situate the construction of masculinity within a much broader context of gender relations rather than focusing on the isolated experience of the male character. Masculinity studies ought to examine the construction of male experiences and masculinity *in relation* to other subjects in order to avoid the misrepresentation of, in Bly's case, the "wounds" of the young man.

Feminist analyses of gender roles in fairy tales have tended to consider masculinity primarily in contrast to femininity, often as it relates to beauty, agency, and behavior. These analyses have also tended to emerge later, and in smaller numbers, than the examinations of femininity. As Ruth Bottigheimer believes, "Male tales . . . have received short scholarly shrift" ("Luckless" 259). Kay Stone notes the traits of male heroes, who "can be slovenly, unattractive, and lazy, and their success will not be affected" ("Things" 44). A consensus among critics is that the attractiveness of heroes is not as important as the attractiveness of heroines. Maria Tatar writes in *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales*, "If the female protagonists of fairy tales are often as good as they are beautiful, their male counterparts generally appear to be as young and naïve as they are stupid" (87). Thus, physical attractiveness would not seem to be a defining trait in the success of male heroes.

There is also a sense that male characters in fairy tales are more active than female characters. Stone writes, "Heroes succeed because they act, not because they are. They are judged not by their appearance or inherent sweet nature but by their ability to overcome obstacles, even if these obstacles are defects in their own characters" ("Things" 45). Marcia Lieberman concurs with the importance of being active for male characters, writing, "Girls win the prize if they are the fairest of them all; boys win if they are bold, active, and lucky" (385). Related to activity is aggression. Bottigheimer suggests in her study of the masculine tale "The Lazy Boy" that anger and aggressive actions belong

solely to the masculine realm: "anger is the prerogative of authority figures, whose authority is often constituted by their maleness" ("Luckless" 287).

Male characters are rewarded for acts of kindness, though the need to be polite and nice does not seem to be as ruthlessly enforced as it is with female characters. Additionally, these acts of kindness are possible because boys are active enough to seek out the opportunities to be kind in the first place. Lieberman notes, "The boy who sets out to seek his fortune . . . is a stock figure and, provided that he has a kind heart, is assured of success" (392). The male protagonists in the Grimms' fairy tales, specifically, do show compassion for their "natural allies and benefactors" (Tatar, *Hard Facts* 88). But the compassion is exerted only in certain situations: "If the hero often distinguishes himself by showing mercy for animals, he remains singularly uncharitable when it comes to dealing with human rivals" (90). As with other scholars who discuss gender in fairy tales, Tatar's discussion of masculinity benefits from a comparison to femininity:

In short, male heroes demonstrate from the start a meekness and humility that qualify them for an ascent to wealth, the exercise of power, and happiness crowned by wedded bliss; their female counterparts undergo a process of humiliation and defeat that ends with a rapid rise in social status through marriage but that also signals a loss of pride and the abdication of power. (94–95)

Male heroes, thus, seem to suffer less than their female counterparts, and their trajectory moves from lesser to greater agency, not necessarily the case in classic tales about heroines. These classic tales, of course, are not a universal set; tales written by women in seventeenth-century France and nineteenth-century Germany, for instance, vary in tone from those by the Grimm brothers, which Tatar is primarily focusing on here.² Other male characters are not described in such charitable terms; Tatar notes "the ease with which men slip into the role of beasts . . . the seeming interchangeability of man and beast" (*Hard Facts* 170). As feminist scholar Susan Bordo has noted, tales of beastly bridegrooms contribute to the double bind of masculinity enforced for men: ideal men "have the sexual charisma of an untamed beast and are unbeatable in battle, but are intelligent, erudite, and gentle with women" (*Male Body* 242).

Three works that specifically address masculinity in fairy tales from the perspective of culturally situated ethnography, disability, and symbolism are worth noting. One of the few works specifically on masculinity in folk and fairy tales is *The Bear and His Sons: Masculinity in Spanish and Mexican Folktales* by James Taggart. He uses folk-narrative repertoires with life histories, ethnographic observations, and psychoanalytic theories to analyze how masculinity is represented in Spanish-language folktales. Taggart regards the stock protagonist

Little John, as “obviously a symbol of manliness, and his story is a metaphor for the transformation of an unruly boy into a controlled man who is ready for marriage” (35). In *Disability, Deformity, and Disease in the Grimms’ Fairy Tales*, Ann Schmiesing examines men’s bodies in fairy tales specifically in the context of disability and disease in the Grimms’ tales, combining theoretical tools from disability studies with folklore studies. She notes that many disabled male characters appear in the Grimms’ collection, “in part because disability is a frequent attribute of male characters depicted as underdogs” (82). Examples include the Frog King, multiple instances of wounded soldiers, and monstrous births such as “Hans My Hedgehog” and characters who are reduced in physical stature (like Thumbling) or mental capacity (like Dummy characters). Notably, Schmiesing spends the most time scrutinizing men’s bodies in the tales—bodies that are depicted in ableist terms both to inspire audience sympathy and to enforce a normalizing effect. Francisco Vaz da Silva, though he does not specifically discuss masculinity as a topic in *Metamorphosis: The Dynamics of Symbolism in European Fairy Tales*, has written much about the ways in which men’s and women’s bodies both undergo transformations in fairy tales. Vaz da Silva, like his feminist counterparts, has spent considerably more time discussing the constructions of feminine bodies. However, particular traits of male bodies emerge from Vaz da Silva’s study. Men are more likely in European folk belief and folk narrative to turn into werewolves and to require disenchantment by dismemberment, sacrifice, and bleeding (44). In Vaz da Silva’s view, the werewolf is equivalent to the masculine body since a tail symbolizes a penis. Although Vaz da Silva spends far less time discussing male attractiveness than female attractiveness, he notes that golden hair, attractive attire, and recognizable markings, often on the legs or feet, are all part of the bundle of traits to be expected in European fairy-tale heroes.

Based on these scholarly explorations of male fairy-tale figures, one would expect to find male characters who are active, somewhat attractive (but with less of an emphasis on male attractiveness than on female attractiveness), and some combination of kind, simple, and humble. Yet male characters are also expected to be more aggressive than female characters and perhaps more prone to violence. Some sorts of transformations, perhaps enabled by dismemberment or blood, would also be common. These traits, while contradictory, form the basis for the explorations of my dataset in the section following an explanation of my methods.

Men’s Bodies in Digitized Dataset: Methods

My larger project uses 233 fairy tales, spanning six collections, to arrive at a sense of gendered bodies in fairy tales. The dataset I hand-coded into a

spreadsheet consists of 11,144 entries, 5,453 of which describe female bodies, and 4,879 of which describe male bodies (the remaining 812 are either gender neutral or implicate both genders).³ Here, I address which nouns, adjectives, and actions or themes co-occur most with men's bodies, and I suggest what they mean in light of the criticism from feminists, folklorists, and masculinity studies scholars already discussed.

In order to get a representative sample of the way bodies appear in classical fairy tales, I chose to work with six tale collections, spanning the early modern and contemporary periods, and folk and literary sources. That said, this study can mostly account for these texts' contemporary translations because translations are always a reflection of the period in which the text was translated; as a major example, the *Arabian Nights* reads quite differently depending on not only the era of its translation into French or English but also the individual translator, and the implications for depictions of gender and sexuality vary accordingly. The choice of texts to translate also has cultural, possibly exoticizing, connotations. Lawrence Venuti writes, "[P]atterns of selecting texts for translation tend to be informed by literary canons in the receiving culture where the decision to translate is usually made" (163), and these decisions can lean toward texts that are foreign on the surface but actually hew close to the receiving culture's values. Individual translators' choices to assimilate rather than exoticize a text thus come into play, making the task at hand one that requires some caveats.

My six chosen texts are *Beauties, Beasts, and Enchantment: Classic French Fairy Tales* translated by Jack Zipes (covering the classical French tradition from the 1690s onward), *The Collected Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm* translated by Jack Zipes (based on the 1857 edition of the Grimms' tales), *Italian Popular Tales* compiled and translated by Thomas Crane and edited by Jack Zipes (spanning Italian literary and folktales mostly from the 1800s), *Folktales of France* edited and translated by Geneviève Massignon (tales that she collected in the 1950s), *Folktales of Germany* edited and translated by Kurt Ranke (compiled from fieldwork collections from approximately 1850–1950), and *Folklore by the Fireside* by Alessandro Falassi (tales that he collected in Tuscany in the 1970s and translated). Keeping in mind Kathleen Ragan's admonition that any "study that attempts to draw conclusions about the folktale or culture from the folktale but does not consider gender in the compilation of the dataset can also be considered compromised" (238), I chose my collections with an eye toward those that specified that they included female narrators when they were based on fieldwork and I also encoded data about the gender of the tale-teller or author, collector, editor, and protagonist (though I do not use that contextual information in this article, instead focusing on the content of the tales).

While I attempted to prioritize collections that had been translated by folklorists, translation practices remain a complex and sometimes contentious topic. For example, Anne Duggan has stated that Zipes drew on James Planché's much older translation of literary French fairy-tale texts into English for his *Beauties, Beasts, and Enchantment*, which complicates any uncritical use of these as English-language texts (2018). Christine Jones makes a compelling case for careful translation of canonical texts such as Perrault's *Histoires ou Contes du temps passé* (1697; *Stories or Tales of Time Past*, 1729), noting that every retelling of a tale also reinvents the story: "Every time another teller, writer, or cinematographer reimagines [Cinderella], it benefits from creative insight—they are all 'translators,' that is to say, writers of the tale" (19). My study relies on the status of translations as new versions of tales in order to link Anglophone versions of the tales with English-language visions of masculinity, though other studies might work closer with a given linguistic textuality or cultural context in order to derive different insights. In other words, English-language versions of classical fairy tales are already circulating and exerting an influence, and deserve to be understood based on their own language and merits, though I contend that they likely also share body-part motifs and descriptions with their analogues in other languages. Classical status is, of course, retrospectively bestowed, and thus this study makes no claims about tales that might have had classical status in their own time periods.

From each collection, I worked with tales of magic, ATU types 300–749, extracting all descriptions of bodies and body parts to hand-code into my dataset for analysis. Similar to the word-count method Ruth Bottigheimer used to ascertain who has access to speech (and hence power) in the Grimms' collection and to the quantitative analysis of nouns and adjectives Alessandra Levorato used to reach ideological understandings of gender and power in a dozen English-language versions of "Little Red Riding Hood," this project represents a first step toward pairing feminist interpretative methods with empirical counts of gendered language in a large corpus of tales. While evermore sophisticated computational methods of studying folkloric materials continue to evolve (see, for instance, Tangherlini), I chose to focus on word counts. Like Bottigheimer and Levorato, I posit that the repetition of and associations with words (and the values implicitly assigned them) throughout a text can and will add up to an impression in the audience. I regard my study as a simple but necessary initial step in establishing empirical patterns in the descriptions of gendered bodies in fairy tales, and future research should of course move beyond this project's scope in terms of orientation to translation and cultural context, computational methods used, reader response data, and so on.

Quantitative Descriptions of Men's Bodies

This section deals primarily with nouns, adjectives, and themes (actions that happened to or with bodies, such as deaths or transformations, that did not fit easily into the category of either noun or adjective but are still noteworthy) relating to men and masculinity. Of the nouns, some are used solely with men, and never with women. These include “beard” (56 mentions), “leg” (20), “dwarf” (16), “humpback” (11), “corpse” (6), “nails” (6), “tongues” (5), “spirits” (4), “chest” (4), “human” (4), “sockets” (14), “gut” (3), “souls” (3), “deformity” (3), “fist” (3), “cheek” (3), “organs,” (3), “deformities” (2), “necks,” (2), “nostrils” (2), “deaths” (2), “half” (2), “handful” (2), “hunger” (2), “mark” (2), “nostril” (2), and other words that appear only once. None of these words are sex-specific, including “organs,” which in English vernacular can be used to refer to male genitals (but that is not the case with the usage in these texts). The appearance of the word “organs” here also comes with a caveat, as it appears in only one tale, “The Three Army Surgeons” (ATU 660) in the Grimms’ collection. One could make the case that beards tend to occur more on men than on women, though it is not impossible for women—especially those who have a hormone imbalance—to grow beards. Here, though, it seems that beards are framed as culturally masculine.

Other nouns in my dataset appear with both women and men but predominantly with men, so they are worth noting here. For the purposes of this investigation, I am considering words that appear with men at least 60% of the time to be a predominantly man-associated word. These words include “head” (169 mentions, 66.80% with men), “death” (91, 61.49%), “youth” (81, 86.17%), “shoulders” (37, 71.15%), “back” (36, 76.60%), “form” (32, 64%), “body” (31, 68.89%), “legs” (29, 65.91%), “arm” (28, 68.29%), “knees” (22, 61.11%), “shoulder” (22, 88%), “ear” (21, 84%), “bones” (20, 68.97%), “heads” (19, 73.08%), “ears” (16, 66.67%), “hairs” (13, 72.22%), “wounds” (10, 76.92%), “beating” (10, 76.92%), and others with fewer than 10 mentions each.⁴ The nouns in this group and the last group are the pillars of the body: people stand on their “leg”/“legs,” supported by joints like the “knees” and “shoulder”/“shoulders,” with their “head”/“heads” (centers of cognition) resting atop a “back,” “chest,” “necks,” and “bones.” The associative images are ones of strength and capability. These body parts also provide a three-dimensional image of men, suggesting that men are fleshed-out, whole persons. At the same time, violated and disfigured bodies appear: men are more likely than women to have “wounds” or take a “beating” or to experience “death,” while men exclusively have “deformity”/“deformities” or a “mark,” and men are exclusively relegated to the status of “humpback,” “corpse,” and “dwarf” (at least, in the texts used here; bad women in other fairy-tale texts, such as

those by Madame d'Aulnoy, are given humpbacks and deformities). Body nouns that refer to men thus either uphold the ideal of normative masculinity—strong and capable—or point out its deficiencies and failings.

The adjectival descriptions associated with men in my database are also indicative of the construction of masculinity in fairy tales. There are 93 adjectives associated solely with men (and 88 adjectives shared between women and men, and 93 adjectives associated solely with women).⁵ Here I list those that occur more than twice. These adjectives include “gray-haired” (8 mentions), “handsomest” (7), “horrible” (5), “drunk” (4), “hoary” (3), “strongest,” (3), “best-looking” (2), “crippled,” (2), “curly” (2), “fiery” (2), “green” (2), “healthy” (2), “inhuman” (2), “kindhearted” (2), “poorer” (2), “sound” (2), “sturdy” (2), “swollen” (2), “tiny” (2), “vigorous” (2), and “wretched” (2). Only a few of these adjectives function to evaluate physical appearance; rather, they seem more related to health (or lack thereof) or moral evaluation.

The adjectives that appear predominantly with men—at least 60% of the time—are also worth noting. They include “young” (326 mentions, 62.10% with men), “little” (262, 62.17%), “handsome” (114, 94.21%), “rich” (35, 83.33%), “human” (20, 60.61%), “strong” (19, 83.36%), “gray” (16, 94.12%), “fat” (14, 93.33%), “sick” (11, 61.11%), “right” (10, 83.33%), and others with fewer than 10 mentions each. There is only one subjective adjective in this bunch, “handsome”; the rest can be fairly objectively used to describe a person's state of being. This contrasts with the high number of physical evaluative words that were used exclusively or predominantly with women. Some of these words do correspond to a physical state but imply less judgment and more fact. There are also fewer moral evaluative words used with men than with women; women were more often than men described as “wicked,” “wise,” or “evil,” whereas men are described as “kindhearted” or “evil-hearted,” descriptions that appear with men only twice and once, respectively, as opposed to the higher numbers of “wicked,” “wise,” and “evil” descriptions of women. The implication is that men's moral status requires less qualification than that of women: men more than women can be assumed to be average in this area since they do not require special descriptions to tell how exactly they deviate from the norm. This is another instance of the normalization of masculinity in fairy tales.

The adjectives that tend to cluster around men emphasize physical abilities and objectively assessable states of being. Strength and health appear to be important to masculinity, while being handsome is also an asset. However, while for women there are many adjectives assessing physical attractiveness, the list for men is limited to “handsome,” “handsomest,” “handsomer,” “good-looking,” and “best-looking” (the last three with less than five mentions each). Here, it is also important to note that English differentiates between “beautiful”

and “handsome” in gendered ways, whereas, in other languages (like French), the distinction is less important; this is another reason to consider the nuances of working in translation. The first three of these adjectives are all variations on the same word, and the latter two are quite similar in structure. Men’s stature is more likely to be commented on because men are more than twice as likely to be described as “little” than as “handsome.” The word “little” is used in different contexts, with various meanings. Sometimes “little” connotes extreme age or extreme youth, as with the many instances of little old men or little boys. In “The Seven-Headed Monster” in Massignon’s collection, the protagonist is “a small boy all crippled and hunched” (34) who leaves home and from then on is referred to as “the little cowman” since he herds the king’s cows (35). In some cases, “little” helps reinforce the supernatural identity of a particular tale role as in the Grimms’ tale “The Gnome” in which “a tiny little gnome” (308) is both antagonist and helper to the huntsman protagonist. This also holds true for supernaturally small protagonists, such as “Thumbling” in the Grimms, whose parents wished for a child “even if it were tiny and no bigger than my thumb” (132). “Little” is also used to describe relative age, as in “The Brother Who Was a Lamb” in Massignon’s collection, where the girl is reluctant to leave her brother once a king offers to marry her: “I do not want to leave my little brother, the lamb” (143). Words relating to relative age within a family fittingly connect to one of the main themes of fairy tales because the genre is concerned with the fragmentation and formation of families.

The preoccupation with size is peculiar, as it only extends to the diminutive end of the spectrum. Where “little” appears with gendered bodies 422 times in my dataset (262 with men and 160 with women), “big” appears only 26 times (15 with women and 11 with men). As already discussed, “little” is an efficient way of describing a protagonist, antagonist, or helper figure as notable based on age (its presence or lack) or supernaturally diminished stature. By the same token, one might expect that “big” would be used to differentiate characters occupying different roles, but this is not the case. Why does the adjective “small” appear so much more than “big,” and why is it linked with men? I would argue that smallness, in addition to being a physical description linked to age and familial categories, is also a way to indicate powerlessness. Fairy tales are essentially about the transfer of power from old characters to the young. Many (male) protagonists begin as “little” boys or youths and must make their way into the world and acquire power. Their lack of both stature and might is inscribed on their bodies with the adjective “little” in such a way that their physical beings are defined in relation to their quest for control and strength. Conversely, many of the (male) helpers and antagonists who are described as “little” display a disproportionate amount of strength and power, thus calling attention to the uneven distribution of power in fairy tales in translation.

Certain nouns and adjectives support the affiliation of men with violent acts. The nouns "wounds" and "beating" both appear more with men than with women, as they are each mentioned ten times with men and only three times with women. The noun "corpse," indicating that violence may have taken place, appears exclusively with men (six times total). Even words that only appear rarely, such as "cut" or "cuts" (one mention each), appear in connection with men. The adjective "wounded" is used only once but with a man. The adjective "blind," appearing seven times with men and three times with women, often has overtones of violence, as in Massignon's "The Two Brothers" (ATU 613) in which one youth blinds the other so that they can both benefit from the money obtained from begging.

The other theme significantly associated with men is that of transformation. I had to treat this bodily happening as a theme, in addition to a noun in its own right, because not every description of a magical transformation included the word "transformation" (more often, a verb was used, such as "transformed," "became," or "turned into"). The theme "transformation" occurred with men 196 times (to women's 77 times), whereas the actual noun "transformation" was used with men 4 times and with women 3 times. Statistically, the theme "transformation" is very important for men: it occurs with men 71.79% out of all times it refers to a gendered body. Simply put, men are transformed into other shapes more than women are in this sample of fairy tales (see fig. 1).

To summarize this exploration of male bodies in my dataset, physical stature and youth (or their lack) are two of the most frequently commented-on traits of male bodies. As I've already posited, the regularity of the adjective "little" may reinforce the scholarly notion that many male heroes are rewarded for being meek and mild at the tale's outset. Many of the adjectives applied to male bodies are less concerned with subjective evaluations of physical attractiveness than with establishing where a male body fits in relation to the norm: whether he is healthy or ill, hunchbacked, or strong. (It is worth noting that these norms are sometimes applied to female characters, too, as in Giambattista Basile's and d'Aulnoy's tales.) The lack of emphasis on beauty for men ("handsome" was mentioned as the top attractiveness adjective 114 times with men, compared with "beauty" as the top attractiveness adjective mentioned 418 times with women) corresponds to the scholarly hypothesis that physical appearance is less of an indicator of fairy-tale success for men than for women. One important point revealed by the empirical data is that violence, death, and transformation, significant factors in men's bodily experiences in fairy tales, are mentioned explicitly far less frequently in the tales' texts than is beauty (the most significant theme for women). Violence (including death,



Fig.1. *Samantha Jorgensen, Cinghiale, etching, 2009.*

dismemberment, and beatings) and transformations are themes that coalesce around male bodies in fairy tales, leading to the impression that the men's existence is contingent and fraught, a notion I investigate in the section immediately following.

Performance-based Analysis: Where Is the Gender in Men's Bodies?

If one of the tenets of both feminist theory and masculinity studies is that men “have” gender as much as women do, then where is it located? How do men perform their gender? In this section, I analyze the constructions of masculinity in the tales in my dataset, applying insights from gender performance theory, other feminist theories, and masculinity studies, in an attempt to understand the conventions by which masculinity is normalized. The topics that I explore in this section include the invisibility of masculinity, the anonymity that characterizes male fairy-tale characters, and the erasure of signs of male power.

One of the characteristics of idealized or *hegemonic masculinity*—the masculinity that men must try to live up to in their behaviors, even if attempting to enact a perfected ideal is doomed to fail—is that it is self-apparent, so obvious in its rightness as to be invisible.⁶ Of course, this rightness or naturalness is not actually natural at all and must be achieved through cultural means. Where idealized femininity is naturalized by symbolically becoming natural, idealized masculinity is naturalized by becoming transparent or undetectable. This strategy is reflected in how male bodies amount to slightly less than half of the overall body count in the fairy tales in my dataset (even though the tales were evenly split between male and female protagonists according to my count). Also, as already mentioned, fewer words to evaluate physical attractiveness or morality are used with men than with women; this implies that there is less to consider regarding the male body. However, the foregoing statements are the case when looking at the dataset as a whole rather than breaking down materials according to national traditions; since masculinity is culturally constructed, it follows that it will be constructed differently in different social and historical contexts. On the whole, though, there is less to look at, less to judge, than with women's bodies. It is as though men simply *are*. This is reminiscent of Simone de Beauvoir's observation that women are the marked sex, the Other, in contrast to the normal, unmarked male identity (5–6). As Elizabeth Grosz describes this phenomenon, “[A] corporeal ‘universal’ has in fact functioned as a veiled representation and projection of a masculine which takes itself as the unquestioned norm, the ideal representative without any idea of the violence that this representational positioning does to others” (188). One of the cultural mechanisms by which this comes about, then, is the obscuring of male bodies in fairy tales: there are slightly fewer of them, and the descriptions attached to them seem more objective, requiring less evaluation.

Visibility and power have been linked in folklore and patriarchal culture more generally, so it is not surprising that masculinity is rendered less visible

in many fairy tales. As Alan Dundes points out regarding American worldview, but with some references to Western worldview more generally, sight is the predominant sense referred to and respected within American folklore, conferring legitimacy and legibility. Literary critic Peter Brooks discusses the importance of the gaze in structuring literary desire: "The relation to another body is repeatedly presented in visual terms, and the visual as applied to the body is often highly eroticized, a gaze subtended by desire" (11). Brooks goes on to write that paradoxically, in literature, history, and culture, the male body is both the norm and that which is veiled from inquiry. Brooks hypothesizes that the male nude body symbolizes the heroic, whereas the female nude "seems to be an object of male erotic looking from nearly the beginning" (17). As the female body is constructed as an object of male desire, the male body recedes farther from view. Being able to observe rather than be observed is thus an expression of (gendered) power in the West. More attention to cultural context and differences is, of course, needed; as Lewis Seifert observes in *Manning the Margins*, "[M]en too can be and are 'marked'" (17) in seventeenth-century French literature and culture. And, as Duggan notes in *Salonnières, Furies, and Fairies: The Politics of Gender and Cultural Change in Absolutist France*, d'Aulnoy's tales in particular posit that men and women can and should be intellectual equals (ch. 6) and that men should beautify themselves for the pleasure of their female partners (217–18).

Accompanying the pleasure and power inherent in being the gazer rather than the gazed-upon is the construction of the gazer as a whole, three-dimensional subject. As feminist film critic Laura Mulvey has observed, "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female" (838). In film, this happens through techniques such as camera angle and how much of the body is shown, as well as the conventions of identifying with characters in a film.⁷ Mulvey writes, "In contrast to woman as icon, the active male figure . . . demands a three-dimensional space" (838). While many of her observations in that essay are specific to the visual context of film, the mechanisms of identification and erotic power she describes are present in many expressive forms of Western culture, including, I would contend, the fairy tale. This is especially evident in the body-part nouns that cluster around men: they are the trunks and limbs, the substantial body parts that make characters seem three-dimensional, both metaphorically and literally. According to the size and allotment of body parts (limbs over extremities, for instance), male characters take up more space than female characters do. Their increased three-dimensionality is part of the construction of men as more substantial, more human, than women. However, as the three-dimensionality of male tale characters' bodies is not something that is obvious on the surface or in the texts of the tales, it is yet another example of the

usefulness of empirical methods to attain a more nuanced understanding of body parts in fairy tales.

In a related turn, masculinity is also more likely to be framed in such a way that male characters are idealized to the point of appearing anonymous or interchangeable with one another. Tatar writes, "Most people may be at a loss when it comes to naming fairy-tale heroes, but few have trouble characterizing them" (*Hard Facts* 85). She goes on to list these characters as active, adventurous, and so on. However, she notices in the Grimms' collection, "If there is any attribute that these heroes share, it is naiveté" (86). These men, then, are literally a blank slate. Additionally, the male characters in tales with female protagonists are hardly described: Cinderella's prince "remains a colorless figure. The tale tells us nothing more about him than that he is the son of a king. Lacking a history, a story, and even a name, he is reduced to the function of prince-rescuer waiting in the wings for his cue" (92). With such blank male characters, they might as well be interchangeable, cogs in a happily-ever-after machine.

For all the male characters that appear to conform to an ideal and elude the gaze, there are male characters that are aberrations, drawing attention, and they also function to uphold a certain vision of masculinity. On the surface, many of the male bodies that appear deformed are that way in order to serve obvious narrative functions. Little gray old men and dwarves serve as clear-cut donor figures or villains, while being given a hump or a humpback is a punishment for an antagonist, as is the case in many of the Grimms' tales. Cristina Bacchilega, focusing on the female protagonists in various Bluebeard (ATU 312) retellings, notes that the villainous husband is often Othered through bodily means: "He is also a mysterious being who usually presents himself as a rich man with a beard, be it blue or green, or a silver nose in an Italian version, as the visible clue to his otherness" (109–10). In this case, the male character's body shows the markings that reveal his monstrous identity and hint at the danger he poses to the heroine and humankind. This follows Schmiesing's observation that "[d]isability and deformity are of course markers not only of the outcast underdog but also of wicked characters" (140) of both genders.

However, even where fairy-tale men are acknowledged to be monstrous, as with Bluebeard, the focus is shifted away from the monstrosity of their actions and onto other aspects of the narrative. Both critics of the tale "Bluebeard" (such as Bettelheim) and writers of certain versions of the tale (especially Perrault) shift the focus to judging the heroine's actions—namely, her curiosity in violating the interdiction to open the forbidden chamber—resulting in what Bacchilega calls "an explicit condemnation of the heroine's curiosity, but total silence on the ethics of the husband's serial murders" (106). At the same time, certain versions of "Bluebeard," such as Perrault's, implicitly

critique Bluebeard's violence precisely by exaggerating the severity of his actions, compounded by Orientalized and feminized traits that attach to the body and behavior of Bluebeard himself (*Salonnières* 156–63). In many versions of “Bluebeard” and the accompanying criticism, there are thus both textual and metatextual strategies for displacing the husband's transgressive behavior onto the wife, downplaying the threatening consequences of his masculinity.

Another of the ways in which the construction of fairy-tale masculinity is obscured is by divorcing monstrous behavior from monstrous bodies. Pauline Greenhill has observed of the antagonist Fitcher in the Grimms' “Fitcher's Bird” (ATU 311) that, despite his being a serial murderer, “Fitcher's own body is unremarked and apparently unremarkable” (163). This is in contrast to the heroine and her dismembered (and then re-membered and revived) sisters: “Those who appear to inhabit the grotesque and the marvelous (the women) actually embody the non-monstrous, while those who appear ordinary (the men) are authentically fiendish” (163–64). The same principle applies in related tales with fiendish male characters whose bodily presence is downplayed. For instance, in the Grimms' “The Robber Bridegroom” (ATU 955), the cannibalistic bridegroom is obviously the antagonist of the tale, and yet one of the only mentions of his body—or any male body in the whole tale—is at the very end, when “he and his whole band were executed for their shameful crimes” (*Complete Fairy Tales* 145). The other time a male body appears in the tale is when the old woman whose intervention saves the heroine says, “When they have you in their power, they'll chop you to pieces without mercy. Then they'll cook you and eat you, because they're cannibals” (143). The men are classified as cannibals, but that is all there is to them in terms of physical description. Instead, there are descriptions of the robbers giving a female victim wine until “her heart burst in two. Then they tore off her fine clothes, put her on a table, chopped her beautiful body to pieces, and sprinkled the pieces with salt” (143). Women's bodies are described in great detail in this tale, made into a gruesome spectacle, and yet the bodies inflicting the harm are hardly mentioned.

However, I believe the phenomenon of shifting the focus away from male bodies and male power also extends to tales with male characters that are less obviously monstrous. This occurs more subtly in one of the three Grimms' versions of “The Maiden Who Seeks Her Brothers” (ATU 451) titled “The Six Swans.” When the heroine, who has taken a vow of silence while attempting to redeem her transformed brothers, is wedded to a king, the king's mother begins causing trouble for her. The king's body is only mentioned once, when the silent heroine's beauty “moved the king's heart, and he fell deeply in love with her” (170). Yet, much is made of the king's “evil mother” (170) and her

tactics to dishonor the heroine by stealing the children she gives birth to and smearing “the queen’s mouth with blood while she was asleep” (170). Ultimately, the evil mother’s ploy forces the king to send the heroine to a court, which condemns her to death. Throughout all of this, the person who is ostensibly the most powerful in the land—the king—is the least embodied narratively, while a spectacle is made of the powerless heroine. This may be a recent phenomenon; as Susan Bordo notes, “Modernity has been especially squeamish, it seems, about the male body” (26). The king, who should be able to protect his young wife, is instead rendered powerless by his “evil mother” (who is also repeatedly called an “old woman,” conflating villainy with age). This is thus another instance in which a man whose actions (or in this case inaction) can harm women is not depicted as having a notable body or features; rather, the women are more embodied, more fully realized, almost as though to displace the blame for the harm onto them.

Displacing blame from men’s actions and men’s bodies occurs in many other tale types and can be said to be a general pattern in classical Western fairy tales. In many French versions of “Beauty and the Beast” (ATU 425C), Jack Zipes notes “The male protagonist is *never* responsible for the world being out of joint. Each tale depicts him as a victim (generally transfigured by a wicked female fairy)” (41). Maria Tatar has observed that generally in fairy tales, “[e]ven when they violate basic codes of morality and decency, fathers remain noble figures, who rarely commit premeditated acts of evil” (151). Some fathers do harm their daughters through their actions, but, as Marina Warner argues, their influence has been lessened over time. Tracing the shifts in the Grimms’ collection and others, Warner states, “Wicked fathers gradually drop from view in the fairytale tradition” (347). Warner attributes these changes to contextual shifts in what was deemed appropriate for fairy-tale audiences.

To return to the question with which I opened this section: Where is the gender located in men’s bodies? Only a handful of body part nouns or adjectives correspond specifically to men, such as “beard” and “handsome”; rather, a discursive field of forced objectification through violence and transformations seems to constitute masculinity. Schmiesing observes that, in tales about transformed male characters, “transformation is a disabling deformation that circumscribes a character’s agency” (100). However, gender plays a significant role in terms of how said agency is narrated. In contrast to often-passive female protagonists like the Maiden without Hands, the Frog King in the Grimms’ collection

grows more embodied, with far greater attention drawn to his experience of his body and his unwillingness to be stigmatized because of it. The frog is typical of male protagonists insofar as he is rewarded for pushing against adversity rather than silently and piously accepting it. (108)

Violence against men follows narrative patterns, whereas the violence men do to women is practically obscured, which helps to conceal men's responsibility in perpetuating violence.⁸ Men's bodies are more three-dimensional than women's, filled out by the depiction of limbs rather than extremities, yet also more invisible in terms of their being the norm. Paradoxical, though, as this sounds, this is often how culture works, depicting charged or contentious issues as refracted through an array of competing messages. This is certainly the case with femininity in different eras; the contradictory messages aimed at women have nonetheless expressed a unified ideology of oppression. Overall, the location of gender in men's bodies is slippery and fluid: men are not aligned with the body or nature in the same way that women are, though the size of their body (their "littleness" or lack thereof) defines their prospects of success. This can be attributed to the invisibility that masculinity and its position of power have occupied in the West. Initially, I was unsure whether this pattern would be replicated within fairy tales, as the more fantastic genres of expressive culture often express subversion and wish fulfillment, but now I feel confident that this is the case with the translated tales I examined.

Perhaps more importantly, I have also found it nigh impossible to discuss the construction of masculinity without also discussing femininity. This situation may have emerged because prior feminist scholarship has paved the way for a nuanced dialogue about femininity while the dialogue on masculinity is still evolving; I believe this perceived complementarity is also caused by the inherent characteristics of the construction of masculinity and femininity. Note that the inherent characteristics of the *construction* of masculinity and femininity differ from the inherent characteristics of masculinity and femininity themselves; I do not believe that the latter exists, as gender roles are culturally constructed. They may exhibit similarities over time and space, but these are due to contact and diffusion rather than sharing an essential, universal, unchanging identity (much the same way that there is little if any folklore that is universal or unchanging; rather, it spreads and adapts to local culture). As Bordo writes, "Our bodies, no less than anything else that is human, are constituted by culture" (142). Masculinity and femininity, as human constructs, are interdependent concepts evident in this corpus of Western European tales; it is difficult to refer to one without implicitly invoking the other. This, I would argue, is even more the case with masculinity than with femininity, for femininity is constructed as natural, contained within itself, having being marked in easily identified and signified ways. In contrast, masculinity is more likely to be constructed in relation to femininity, to constitute that which femininity lacks, which requires a reference to femininity as lack.

Conclusions

Hegemonic masculinity functions in part through establishing male bodies as the unmarked norm, the *normal* to which all bodies should aspire, and by which all bodies are measured. The male bodies explored in this article reveal a surprisingly contingent, vulnerable construction of masculinity. Men are subject to transformations (some voluntary, some involuntary) and death and violence of all kinds. More is said about the violence men receive than the violence men do to others—which is an inversion of the real world, where the bulk of violence is committed by men and masculine institutions.

In future research, finding ways to measure the violence done to and by bodies in fairy tales might prove fruitful. Based on what I was able to observe, however, these patterns in the representation of violence are congruent with larger social patterns: in eras when social change occurs, ruling classes lash out at those who appear to be eroding their privilege. In the same way, violence against women, both physical and discursive, increases when women gain more rights and freedoms. Bordo, along with other feminists, has suggested that anxiety over women's bodies and hungers "appears to peak, as well, during periods when women are becoming independent and are asserting themselves politically and socially" (*Unbearable Weight* 161). I suggest that the same trend occurs in fairy tales, which began to crystallize as a genre around early modernity: the time of the Enlightenment, which transitioned to the Romantic era, the age of nationalism, and so on. These time periods witnessed heavy anxieties about the role of the person in society, especially if that person was perceived as gendered (i.e., feminine). Suzanne Magnanini is one of the authors to suggest that "[t]he birth of the literary fairy tale was, then, a monstrous birth, and like all anomalous parturitions of that time, it was greeted with a combination of horror, pleasure, and repugnance" (6) and that the monstrous bodies in the fairy tales of Gianfrancesco Straparola and Giambattista Basile—often gendered—function to create and uphold binaristic hierarchies.

However, this is not to suggest that patriarchal power was never disputed, or only disputed in recent movements that self-identified as feminist. Indeed, Duggan urges scholars to view gender politics according to the nuances of their respective time periods, such as situating the early modern French debate over the status of women in epistemologically appropriate terms (personal communication). Qualifying this statement as needed according to cultural context, I would suggest that men, whose power over women in early modern and modern Europe was significant, would narratively construct their power as contingent and themselves at risk, needing to justify their expansions of power (see Tucker for an account of such a struggle in early modern France). This was most likely not a conscious colonization of the fairy-tale or folktale

genres, but rather a process whereby people were more likely to tell and retell those stories that narratively presented and solved conflicts that resonated with them. Women storytellers and authors, naturally, have pushed back against this dynamic in multiple ways, which is a topic to be considered in future research.

Another important facet of my research on fairy-tale masculinity was informed by taking a quantitative approach to the materials. The complementary nature of quantitative and qualitative methods is evident; for instance, in counting only explicitly named body parts, I might have missed the importance of transformation and death to the construction of men's bodies in fairy tales. By putting quantitative and qualitative methods in dialogue, we can illuminate the implicit patterning of gender in folkloric materials such as fairy tales and thus bring to light the hidden ways in which masculinity shapes lived experience and is expressed in folklore.

Notes

1. For example, this shallow incorporation of what it means to do feminist work is evident in Bronner's introduction to *Manly Traditions*, wherein he states that the contributors' inquiries borrow from feminism a reflexive concern with the impact of the researcher's identity upon the study, as well as a concern with power relations. Attention to reflexivity and power relations—is that all feminism has to offer? Another important point is whether masculinity studies must work on separating men from masculinity in order to successfully analyze and theorize both, and again, feminism is key. I worry that folkloristic studies of masculinity risk reinscribing gender norms and justifying a return to studying the masculine (and hence male, without this critical separation of men and masculinity) performances that used to dominate the discipline's scholarship before the arrival of feminism. Masculinity studies, finally, requires a critical dimension in order to distinguish itself from the popular men's movement—or, it should, in my opinion. Simply deciding to study masculinity is a good start, though. Not studying masculinity at all would be a mistake, for, as Calvin Thomas points out in his essay in *Masculinity Studies & Feminist Theory*, “to leave masculinity unstudied, to proceed as if it were somehow not a form of gender, is to leave it naturalized, and thus to render it less permeable to change” (61).
2. For seventeenth-century fairy tales by women in France, see Patricia Hannon's book *Fabulous Identities: Women's Fairy Tales in Seventeenth-Century France* and Lewis Seifert's book *Fairy Tales, Sexuality, and Gender in France, 1690–1715: Nostalgic Utopias*. For nineteenth-century fairy tales by women in Germany, see Shawn Jarvis's chapter “Trivial Pursuit?” in *The Reception of the Grimms' Fairy Tales*.
3. Each entry consists of a row with the noun, adjective, or theme (something like death or transformation that clearly happens to a body but is not always explicitly named in the text), with the columns corresponding to that row listing the other information that I chose to code for. This information ranged from objectively in

the text to a more subjective call that I as the sole coder made, and it includes Gender, Young/Old, High/Low (status), Quoted Speech, Skin Tone, Positive/Negative value, Grotesque, Violence, Nudity, and Move (in Bengt Holbek's sense of structure). As Levorato notes of her own study, particularly chapter 2, which focuses on individual words and their collocates (or the words they frequently appear alongside), "The main advantage of this type of analysis is that it brings out all potentially significant patterns, eliminating, to some extent, the analyst's power to decide what to investigate" (198). Being attuned to narrative bodies at the level of word lends my study some objective strength, even as the choices I made about which facets of a body deserved which attributes means that the study bears my individual marks as a fairy-tale scholar.

4. For space reasons, I direct readers to my dissertation to read about the remainder of the data.
5. These numbers have changed slightly due to updates in the database after writing this chapter, but I retain them here to show how the numbers shaped my interpretations.
6. According to Connell and Messerschmidt, "The fundamental feature of the concept remains the combination of the plurality of masculinities and the hierarchy of masculinities" (846). Although hegemonic masculinity is a useful concept, I refer to it only briefly throughout this chapter because my data are already refracted through idealized lenses because folklore provides an artistic portrait of culture.
7. Mulvey writes of this identification process, "This is made possible through the processes set in motion by structuring the film around a main controlling figure with whom the spectator can identify. As the spectator identifies with the main male protagonist, he projects his look on to that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence" (838).
8. In a related phenomenon, Bordo observes how, in the realm of beauty, "men's desires bear no responsibility, nor does the culture that subordinates women's desires to those of men, sexualizes and commodifies women's bodies. . . . Rather, it is in Woman's essential feminine nature to be (delightfully if incomprehensibly) drawn to such trivialities and to be willing to endure whatever physical inconvenience is entailed" (*Unbearable Weight* 22).

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