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The Most Beautiful of All: A Quantitative Approach to Fairy-Tale Femininity

Feminist folklorists have long asserted that women's bodies are represented in fairy tales differently than men's bodies, in normative and sexist ways. By using computational approaches to analyze a corpus of canonical fairy tales, I assess these claims and establish that women's bodies are depicted in distinctive ways in fairy tales. This finding is important for scholars interested in fairy-tale studies, gender studies, and computational approaches to folklore studies.

Keywords

AFS ETHNOGRAPHIC THESAURUS: Fairy tales, literary folktales, gender, computational folkloristics, feminist theory

Introduction

The time is ripe for a consideration of bodies in fairy tales. The body offers a lens to understand the construction of gender in expressive culture, as Christine A. Jones and Jennifer Schacker acknowledge in their introduction to *Marvelous Transformations*. They posit that studying “Little Red Riding Hood” (ATU 333) offers “an exceptionally clear illustration of how we have been trained by many critical theories not to see the trees for the forest of tale history” (2013:26). In attending to the prominence of the protagonist’s body in the Grimms’ version of the tale, Jones and Schacker become attuned to how “the conversation between the title character and the wolf shifts from Little Red Cap’s reason for being in the forest to a focus on her body” (32). In this version, as she is carrying the cake and wine under her apron, Little Red Cap’s body becomes metonymous with the treats held against it. The importance of worldly knowledge and discursive skills to attaining bodily safety—especially for women—is a theme that Jones and Schacker draw out masterfully (32–5).

The fairy tale genre eludes easy definition. Jones and Schacker assert that “the fairy tale genre for *centuries* has been malleable and dynamic” (2013:487; emphasis in original), encompassing both print and oral transmission, characterized by alternatively compact or complex plots, but unified by a (content-based) defiance of “the

constraints of realist fiction” (488). In his entry on the fairy tale in *Folktales and Fairy Tales: Traditions and Texts from around the World*, Donald Haase lists three definitive elements: “(1) the structure is episodic and constructed primarily on motifs; (2) the genre is unabashedly fictional, the setting indefinite . . .; and (3) protagonists overcome obstacles to advance to rewards and a new level of existence (achieving wealth, power, marriage, and/or social status)” (2016:321). Transmission is an additional defining factor, since, as a genre of folk narrative, most fairy tales circulate with identifiable variation. Hence, crucial folkloristic tools such as the motif and tale type indexes are essential for their study. Kay Turner and Pauline Greenhill propose that fairy tales, “oral or literary in derivation, feature human and non-human principal characters in developed fictional narratives, along with elements of wonder and the supernatural” (2012:3). It is the role of wonder and its relationship back to the real world (and gendered bodies therein) that concerns me here.

The significance of gender as a structuring concept in lived (and narrated) experience is one of the central tenets of feminist theory. My contribution to this conversation is to use computational methods to analyze how femininity and women’s bodies are constructed in Western fairy tales. I begin by discussing feminist critiques of women’s depictions and roles in fairy tales and then outline recent developments in computational folkloristics. This discussion sets the scene for my analysis of the descriptions of women’s bodies that appear in a data set of body descriptors found in 233 fairy tales from both oral and written traditions. I use straightforward statistical measures based on the frequency counts of these body descriptors to enter into a dialogue with assertions made by feminist scholars, assessing claims about five categories: beauty; hair, eyes, and skin; bodily fluids; suffering; and morality. This statistical analysis of body descriptors derived from fairy-tale texts reveals patterns in the gendered depictions of women’s bodies that both confirm and complicate earlier feminist critiques of fairy tales. Women’s bodies are bounded by expectations of beauty, but often in non-specific ways, contributing to the double bind that constrains femininity and gender norms.

Feminist Critiques of Women’s Bodies in Fairy Tales

In recent decades, feminist folklorists have moved from a simple criticism of the representations of women in fairy tales to a more complex discussion of how gender and ideology interact in the production, transmission, and reception of fairy tales.¹

Feminist scholars often consider women in fairy tales to be too passive, pretty, and domestic (if protagonists), or too wicked, ugly, and vicious (if antagonists) (Lieberman 1972; Stone 1985). This assertion is directly related to the body: the unrealistically high standards of beauty that female protagonists must achieve to be judged worthy of a mate or, alternately, the correlation of ugliness with evil and unworthiness in antagonists and false brides. Laurence Talairach-Vielmas writes that “what we generally learn as children is that all princesses are beautiful and may even try to improve their beauty” (2007:5). Beauty is linked with not only success in fairy tales, but also character. Much earlier, Marcia Lieberman noted: “Good-temper and meekness are so regularly associated with beauty, and ill-temper with ugliness, that this in itself must

influence children's expectations" (1972:385). Thus, feminist scholars view beauty as a problem in and of itself in fairy tales, but they also draw attention to its associations with other supposedly feminine traits.

Helplessness and patience, along with contentedly accepting one's fate (being a "nice" girl) are key characteristics of the critique of feminine passivity in the fairy tale (Yolen 1988; Waelti-Walters 1982). As Jack Zipes observes, the versions of "Cinderella" by both Charles Perrault and the Grimms "set models for girls of the upper class who need to show off their beauty and docility to win the appropriate mate" (2016:360). Passivity is also projected onto women sexually; Ruth Bottigheimer notes that, unlike related genres such as *fabliaux*, in fairy tales, "men act on women's bodies," intruding "their bodies into the private space of terrified girls or women" (2004:48–9).

The concatenation of various feminine traits makes it important to study them in connection with one another. Lori Baker-Sperry and Liz Grauerholz conclude "that messages in the Grimms' fairytales, especially those that have been reproduced often, are consistent with other messages women and girls receive about the importance of feminine beauty" (2003:724).² As Kay Stone notes, "the emphasis on ideal female beauty, passivity, and dependence on outside forces suggested in the fairy tales is supported by Western culture in general" (1985:141). Thus, fairy tales are but one outlet of Western society insisting on the imbrication of traits that are supposedly inherently feminine: beauty, goodness, passivity, dependence, and an affinity for the domestic sphere (see also Tatar [1987] 1992, 2003).³

In addition to general traits of idealized femininity, feminists have criticized physical appearances that recur in fairy tales. Marina Warner comments on the "teeming population of blonde fairytale heroines" (1994:362) and demonstrates how "fairness was a guarantee of quality" in the social system of meanings that penetrates the fairy-tale tradition (364). Blondenness connotes both Christian virtue (366) and class privilege, as "blonde hair implies pale skin, which in turn entails lack of exposure . . . either to the rays of the sun in outdoor work, or to the gaze of others" (368). Though attending to symbolic meaning rather than social meaning, Francisco Vaz da Silva characterizes ideal fairy-tale heroines as white (which symbolizes purity) splashed with red (2007:245–8). Dorothy Hurley (2005) and Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz (2003) find that beauty and whiteness (as a racial category) are often correlated in fairy tales. This position argues, in contrast to Max Lüthi's observations about colorlessness in fairy tales (that few people in fairy tales are distinguished by color [1986]), that the fairy tale's image of beauty does carry social meaning.⁴

To summarize the claims made by feminists and other scholars of fairy tales, one would expect female protagonists' bodies in fairy tales to display the following traits: they must be beautiful; their beauty includes Western stereotypical attributes like white skin and blonde hair; their bodies are passive, pliant, and patient; and their beauty correlates positively with other features such as kindness.⁵ Constrained by stereotypes and cultural norms, this view of women's bodies in fairy tales is limiting and dismal.

In order to test these proposals quantitatively, I examine the appearance of five main groupings of traits: general mentions of beauty; descriptions of hair, eyes, and skin; bodily fluids like blood and tears; suffering; and morality.

Quantitative Methods for Fairy-Tale Studies and Project Scope

The application of quantitative methods to folklore studies has been labeled “computational folkloristics” (Tangherlini 2016b). One of the movement’s biggest proponents, Timothy Tangherlini, says these developments “offer folklorists new opportunities for the analysis of traditional expression” (2016a:5). These new opportunities have been practiced in relation to both narrative and non-narrative genres; as an example of the former, see Peter Broadwell and Tangherlini’s work on legends (2016) and Folger Karsdorp’s work on fairy tales (2016), and as an example of the latter, and see Davor Nikolić and Nikola Bakarić’s work on tongue-twisters (2016).

In fairy-tale studies, early quantitative studies relied on simple metrics such as counting and comparing character attributes. Bottigheimer hints at a quantitative approach in her essay “Silenced Women in the Grimms’ Tales,” listing tales in which female characters lose their voices and counting the distribution of the word “speak,” noting that it “appears more often in conjunction with authority figures” (1986:126). Kathleen Ragan studies the correlations between gender of character, tale collector, and collection editor using quantitative methods (2009), and Mark Alan Finlayson demonstrates how to automate computer learning about Vladimir Propp’s functions from a corpus of Russian folktale texts (2016).

Sources

Because fairy tales exist on a spectrum from oral to written, it is important to strike a balance between folkloric and literary sources in analysis. This strategy also ensures that my expertise as a folklorist will benefit others in fairy-tale studies and those on the fringes of computational folkloristics, as it has been lamented that scholars unfamiliar with folkloristics ignore non-literary versions of tales (Dundes 1989:119). Cautionary tales already exist; Tangherlini relates the disciplinary creep that occurs among scholars intrigued by the materials:

Jamie Tehrani, in his attempt to revive the search for fairy-tale origins through the application of computational methods developed for the study of evolutionary biology, could have avoided the various pitfalls related to his source materials, which undermined his conclusions, had he worked with domain experts. (Tangherlini 2016a:7–8)

Similarly, Jonathan Gottschall et al. utilized folktales as grist for their mill of Darwinian quantitative studies of sex roles in society. Among other things, they found that “when information on attractiveness was present, this information was, overall, more than twice as likely to be conveyed about females than males” (2003:372). Gottschall et al. reached this conclusion by ignoring cultural context and translation. As Haase points out, Gottschall et al.’s (2003, 2008) “problematic assumptions . . . not only undercut his methodology but also perpetuate colonialist perspectives still entrenched in our field” (Haase 2010:28–9). A quantitative approach to fairy tales, therefore, is at its strongest when it takes into account all of the nuanced context that folklorists have spent centuries compiling tools to understand.

I follow Zipes in establishing an interest in “classic” fairy tales, which he defines as works by those major writers and collectors from the seventeenth through twentieth century who “are significant because they helped evolve, expand, and reform the discourse and have thus been rewarded with ‘classical’ status in our cultural heritage. The reasons for their ‘classicality’ vary, for their symbolic acts were made either to legitimize or criticize the course of the western civilizing process” (2006:10–1). Taking Zipes’ “our cultural heritage” to refer to Western society provides an excellent leaping-off point. Of course, the classic tale is a moving target. Defining a genre in part by how it retrospectively appears is problematic; it risks privileging the etic over the emic, the scholarly category over the native category.

Viewing classic fairy tales in terms of their longevity means, from a folkloristic perspective, that their relationship to cultural values has been a productive one, even if the genre seems largely defined by outsiders in retrospect. As Jones points out, this type of work is a timely project, as demonstrated in her new translation of Perrault’s tales, a choice that “stems from how much press the Mother Goose characters attract in our own culture and how badly they are in need of rethinking and reinterpretation” (2016:85). As scholarship is a type of reinterpretation or intervention (Joosen 2011), I propose that attention to gender and bodies in classic fairy tales will add to our understanding of the interaction of genre and social value.

Classic fairy tales, because they have persisted for so long and can be shown to have a significant effect upon both children and adults, are worth studying in depth. Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz examined gendered descriptions of beauty in fairy tales both from the Grimms’ collection and from reproductions of the Grimms’ tales up through current times. Their hypothesis is that “women’s beauty appears to play a more important role in fairy tales during certain time periods, possibly serving as a means of normative social control” (2003:714). They acknowledge that “one limitation of our study is that we cannot determine the extent to which messages concerning feminine beauty found in fairy tales have in fact been internalized or by whom” (723), though they cite feminist research indicating that even young girls show an awareness of the beauty ideal and knowledge of when they fail to live up to it. While it would take another study to ascertain what people actually think about the bodies in fairy tales—classic or contemporary or both—it is important to establish, from the outset, how bodies in classic fairy tales are textually constructed and represented.⁶ Consequently, the target corpus for this study consists of classic European fairy tales as well as tales from modern ethnographically collected sources that display a large overlap of tale types, demonstrating that many of the same tales have retained their popularity with modern narrators, attesting to their classic status.⁷

Practical concerns placed constraints on the number of collections I was able to work with. Schacker analyzed four tale collections in *National Dreams* and provided a nuanced account of the cultural context in which the tales were translated and received by the Victorian English public (2003). Bengt Holbek ([1987] 1998) and Propp ([1928] 1968) each studied tales from a single collector, while Lüthi (1986), James Taggart (1990, 1997), and Vaz da Silva (2002) analyzed tales from multiple tellers and various collections. The collections used here are *Beauties, Beasts, and Enchantment: Classic French Fairy Tales*, translated by Jack Zipes ([1989] 2009; covering the classical French

tradition from the 1690s onward); *The Collected Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, translated by Jack Zipes (Grimm and Grimm 2003; based on the 1857 edition of the Grimms' tales with additions from their notes); *Italian Popular Tales*, compiled and translated by Thomas Crane and edited by Jack Zipes ([1885] 2001; spanning Italian literary and folktales mostly from the 1800s); *Folktales of France*, edited and translated by Geneviève Massignon (1968; tales she and others collected in the 1950s); *Folktales of Germany*, edited and translated by Kurt Ranke (1966; compiled from fieldwork collections from approximately 1850–1950); and *Folklore by the Fireside* by Alessandro Falassi (1980; tales he collected in Tuscany in the 1970s and translated). It is worth noting that two of these collections come from Richard Dorson's important Folktales of the World series, which has been influential in folkloristics as a set of rigorously collected, categorized, and translated folktales. My analysis includes only the proper fairy tales (those numbering 300–749 in the ATU tale type system, with a few exceptions for tales that fall outside that category but are still clearly tales of magic or appear in combination with magic tales) from each collection. This selection balances between tales collected by single collectors and tales written by single authors, folk and literary versions of tales, and classic and contemporary versions of tales.

Working in translation offers both constraints and unique opportunities. As tales are always being translated and transmitted to new cultures, it is possible to treat translations like any other version of a tale: a variant. Bottigheimer notes that “new translations are often new tellings of an old tale” (2013:559). Additionally, all translations are mediated texts; as Jones points out, any “translation can achieve the status of ‘original’ for its culture” (2016:15); this is partly what I am after. As Jones notes, “ideas about [Perrault's] fairy tales—and particularly their female characters—spread quickly in translation, with long-lived and wide-reaching impact in the English-speaking world” (2–3). The study of fairy tales in the anglophone world is a worthy pursuit on its own merit. I make no claims as to the ability of this study to illuminate meanings of the body or gendered bodies in the original cultural contexts of these tales; rather, I view this corpus of tales as a usefully representative sampling of classic tales disseminated through (and thus disseminating) an anglophone lens.

A brief note on the translators themselves: each collection used here was translated by folklorists with a scholarly or educated public audience in mind, which promises a higher degree of linguistic accuracy. Zipes notes of Crane's translation, for instance, that it is “remarkably accurate” due to how “he mastered different Italian dialects and slang” (2001:viii). And while Zipes has now translated the Grimms' tales again (based on the 1812 edition of the tales), his anthologizing of the French tales used here must be treated with caution, as his translation began with J. R. Planché's nineteenth-century English translation of the French tales and made corrections from there (discussed in Malarte-Feldman 1999; Zipes [1989] 2009). We must thus keep in mind that these are mediated texts (see also Sutton 1996).⁸

Methods

The tales were coded for both metadata and body descriptors. Each tale was coded according to 14 metadata points (Tale, Collection, Author, Teller, Collector, Year of

Writing/Collecting, Year of Publication, Tale Type, Region, Original Language, Gender of Teller/Writer, Gender of Collector, Gender of Editor, and Gender of Protagonist). Then each tale was coded for 14 features related to mentions or descriptions of a body. The 14 feature categories were divided into text-based categories (Noun, Adjective, Surrounding Text, Page Number, Gender, Young/Old, High/Low, Quoted Speech, Skin Tone) and interpretive categories (Positive/Negative Value, Grotesque, Violence, Nudity, Move). “High” and “Low” refer to social status, while “Young” and “Old” refer to the character’s age: youthful characters are of child-bearing age or younger, while old characters are beyond child-bearing years or are the parents of children who are already mature, derived from Holbek’s modification of Elli Kongäs-Maranda’s oppositional categories (Holbek [1987] 1998:347–8). The “Move” category is drawn from Holbek’s modification of Propp’s 31 tale functions.⁹

The resulting data set is the firsthand-coded database of body descriptors in fairy tales, combining objective and subjective elements. To code each of the 233 tales, I made an entry into a spreadsheet every time a body or body part was mentioned or described. Rather than relying on full-text extraction or trusting an algorithm to correctly identify every mention of a body, and also to extract metadata such as the gender of the character involved (additionally, not all texts were available digitally at the time due to copyright restrictions), I entered sentence fragments surrounding each body-part noun or adjective. Age and social class are more subjective categories and sometimes had to be inferred from contextual information in the tale. Whether a body was ascribed positive or negative value, whether it counted as grotesque, and whether violence was being done to that body were also subjective judgments.¹⁰

Much of the information presented here is based on simple word counts. This is not a new method (see Bottigheimer 1986), though it has been made easier with recent technology. Co-occurrences can also yield information about how women’s bodies are modified and described; here, I arrive at co-occurrences by finding instances where an adjective (such as describing the color of the hair of a character) co-occurs with a noun (the aforementioned hair), and I align that co-occurrence with the extracted features for that given sentence (e.g., metadata indicating the gender of that character).¹¹ These co-occurrences were left unweighted for each tale. The resulting matrix consists of 11,144 rows, with each row constituting an extracted feature, and 27 columns, with each column related to either a data or metadata feature. Of these, 5,454 describe women’s bodies and 4,877 describe men’s bodies (the remaining 814 are either gender-neutral or implicate both genders).

Results

The adjectival descriptors connected with women in my database are particularly revealing as to the construction of femininity in fairy tales. Of all the body references in my database, 48.9 percent are female and 43.7 percent are male. Of the nouns that refer to gendered bodies, 51.18 percent refer to women’s bodies (2,923) and 48.82 percent refer to men’s bodies (2,788). This disparity between men’s and women’s bodies increases when we consider adjectives. Of all the adjectives that refer to a gendered body, 54.75 percent refer to women’s bodies (2,530), while 45.25 percent refer to

men's bodies (2,091). The increasing percentages in the order listed also show that descriptive attention to women's bodies takes up more tale space than that relating to men's bodies: 48.9 percent of the body references in the corpus are female, 51.18 percent of the nouns are attributed to female bodies, and 54.75 percent of the adjectives refer to female bodies.

Certain words immediately leap out as clustering more around women than around men. These include nouns, adjectives, and themes. I used themes to classify actions that happened to bodies in a given text, such as when a character died or was transformed, but the specific words "death" or "transformation" did not appear in the text. Calculating the frequency of word use with the genders, however, is more complicated than it appears on the surface. I first had to take into account that more of the body words coded in the database appear with women than with men, which might skew results if I simply tried to use basic percentages. Some words are used so consistently with one gender but not with the other that basic percentages are still useful, such as how "beauty" is used with women 360 times and with men only 8. In other cases, however, additional useful information is obtained when the word usage is analyzed in context of the frequency of male and female references overall.

By listing some of the body-part nouns used more commonly with women than with men, I hope to give a sense of how women's bodies are represented in fairy tales. Some nouns are used entirely with women and never with men. These are listed in table 1, with each word followed by its frequency of use.

None of these words are sex-specific; the word "breast" is used with both men and women, though more with women, and "bosom" can appear in conjunction with either gender. It should be noted that some of these word associations come only from one tale. For instance, "liver" and "lungs" each appear three times, but every appearance is from the Grimms' "Snow White," when the wicked queen demands that the protagonist's liver and lungs be brought to her as proof of Snow White's death. "Sex" appears in only one collection—*Beauties, Beasts, and Enchantment: Classic French Fairy Tales*—and only in tales by female writers. "Sex" appears once in "Beauty and the Beast" by Gabrielle-Suzanne de Villeneuve; once in "The Blue Bird" by Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy; and twice in "Belle-Belle, or The Chevalier Fortuné," also by d'Aulnoy. In each of these cases, feminine gender (often that of the protagonist, and "sex" as a gloss for what we would now understand as gender) is commented on,

Table 1.

Noun	Frequency	Noun	Frequency
Tresses	14	Lungs	3
Bosom	10	Wrist	2
Cripple	9	Wrinkles	2
Sex	4	Elbows	2
Locks	4	Braids	2
Being	4	Spirit	2
Complexions	3	Stature	2
Lip	3	Strand	2
Liver	3		

ostensibly in contrast to the unmarked masculine norm. This is notable when viewed in light of the cultural context, as the female salon writers in early modern France were revising prevailing gender roles and assumptions about biology and genetics in their fairy tales.¹²

Other nouns in my data set appear with both women and men, but predominantly with women. For the purposes of this investigation, I am considering words that appear with women at least 60 percent of the time to be predominantly woman-associated words. This is visualized in table 2.

Many of these words are related to appearance and can be used to rate attractiveness (or lack thereof) by describing facial features. Only one is specifically feminine: “birth” (though “lap” is commonly used to refer to a woman’s seated position when holding or nursing a child). The association of women with extremities—“hands,” “finger,” and “fingers,” which appear in this list, and “thumb,” “heel,” “toe,” and “toes”—is interesting. These associations could be a reflection of women’s work, which in Western Europe has included housework and handiwork such as sewing and cooking and thus would require the attention to detail that dexterous hands and fingers grant.

The link between extremities and women’s bodies can be read in at least two ways: metonymically or in terms of symbolic and real dismemberment. The extremities could metonymically symbolize the marginalization of women in Western culture: the small and marginalized body parts associated with women depict the smallness and marginalization of women in a society where men hold the majority of the power. Another reading of these nouns that are predominantly used with women is that they emphasize surfaces and interiors, portraying women as images or as collections of dismembered pieces. This tendency to dismember women has been noted by visual culture theorists.¹³ Ann Schmiesing, in her discussion of disability and dismemberment in the Grimms’ tales, explains how “females are typically given disabilities that make them more passive, whereas males often—but not always—have disabilities that mark them as Other without significantly reducing their agency” (2014:83). Thus, women are often bodily Othered in multiple ways in fairy tales.

There are 93 adjectives associated solely with women (versus 88 adjectives shared between women and men, and 93 adjectives associated solely with men).¹⁴ Because there are so many, I will list in table 3 those that recur here (as with the nouns, counting those with two or more mentions).

Table 2.

Noun	Frequency	% Used with Women		Noun	Frequency	% Used with Women		Noun	Frequency	% Used with Women	
Hair	144	71		Finger	49	65		Features	14	74	
Hands	101	63		Nose	20	61		Teeth	13	62	
Tears	75	69		Lap	18	86		Forehead	13	77	
Mind	62	70		Lips	16	62		Ugliness	11	73	
Blood	62	70		Cheeks	16	70		Side	11	79	
Birth	61	74		Fingers	14	64		Complexion	10	91	

Table 3.

Adjective	Frequency	Adjective	Frequency
Fairest	9	Broad	2
Prettiest	9	Chubby	2
Homely	7	Deceased	2
Thick	7	Haggard	2
Pregnant	6	Homelier	2
Loveliest	4	Honest	2
Poorest	4	Hooked	2
Prettier	4	Immense	2
Fairer	3	Miserable	2
Flat	3	Naked	2
Lazy	3	Proud	2
Slender	3	Scrawny	2
Tender	3	Smaller	2
Attractive	2	Sweet	2
Blonde	2	Ugliest	2
Blue	2		

Again, the number of appearance-related adjectives is striking, and, again, some caveats must be made. The two mentions of “broad” and the three mentions of “flat” can be traced to a single tale, “The Three Spinners” from the Grimms’ collection, in which the helper figures are three old, ugly women, including one with a broad, flat foot from treading while spinning. The words “broad” and “flat” are used solely to describe the old woman’s foot in this single tale, proving that not all of these adjectives can be taken generally to represent femininity in all of the six collections (and fairy tales in general). However, the fact that so many of the adjectives are related to appearance and physical attractiveness is useful information and indeed accounts for the variations across texts: the adjectives used to describe women may vary by place and language, but still these types of adjectives persist, even in translation.

The adjectives that appear predominantly—at least 60 percent of the time—with women are also worth discussing because they establish gendered patterns of representation. Here in table 4, I list those that have at least 10 mentions or more. The fact that most of the words have an evaluative or descriptive function related to appearance is striking. The evaluative words—“beautiful,” “fair,” “lovely,” “ugly,” and

Table 4.

Noun	Frequency	% Used with Women	Noun	Frequency	% Used with Women
Beautiful	418	98	Pretty	36	90
Old	411	61	Wise	21	91
Dear	68	62	Long	17	65
Golden	55	75	Evil	15	75
Fair	53	87	Younger	15	65
Ugly	52	80	Red	12	67
Lovely	46	94	Pale	11	73
Wicked	43	80			

“pretty”—appear with women at least 80 percent of the time, indicating that physical appearance is of great importance for female fairy-tale characters. Words that describe rather than evaluate appearances are used more frequently with women than with men, too, as words like “golden,” “long,” “red,” and “pale” appear in connection to physical descriptions of hair and skin. Additionally, “beautiful” was used so frequently that, of all the adjectives used with women, “beautiful” accounted for 16.52 percent of them. Approximately one in six times, if a woman is described as anything, she is described as “beautiful.” This supports feminist analysis of other fairy-tale texts found in the scholarly literature, and will be expanded upon in my analysis below.

As seen in table 4, “old” is the next most commonly used adjective describing women, after “beautiful.” Age and wisdom frequently relate in the figure of the fairy godmother, popularized in French fairy tales such as Perrault’s “Cinderella” and its subsequent mass-market versions (like Disney’s *Cinderella* film). Despite the fact that fairy godmothers occur less frequently in oral tradition, there still exist plenty of symbolic links between aged female figures, kinship obligations, and narrative traditions in early modern Europe.¹⁵ My prior work on fairy godmothers led to this observation: “The implied age and judgment of fairy godmothers, more than other donors/helpers, positions them to impart traditional wisdom, and to instill not just heroes and heroines but also tale audiences with aspects of worldview” (Jorgensen 2007:224). The data in this project implies that, even if fairy godmothers are not explicitly named as such, the correlations between traits support the existence of elderly female helper figures. The same is true of female villainesses: not every single one need be named a wicked stepmother or evil witch, but the frequency of descriptions of women as evil and wicked suggests that these types of women are very common in my data set. This also resonates with Schmiesing’s findings that “female villains are often depicted with a disability or other physical anomaly that is meant to further mark their wicked deeds without in any way compromising their ability to perform them, but this has the effect of casting female agency as wicked” (2014:84). Conflating agential female embodiment with disability or age is thus a problematic feature of fairy tales.

By examining adjectives that are applied frequently or exclusively to women as a whole, then, it becomes apparent that both descriptions and evaluations of physical appearance are highly patterned. My data set reveals that evaluative appearance words are used with men, but not with the same frequency, intensity, or breadth of descriptions. The adjectives used with women range from stand-alone adjectives to those used in connection with body parts. For example, in “The Ram” by d’Aulnoy, the enchanted ram who is the heroine’s counterpart tells her: “It was there that I saw you, beautiful princess” (Zipes [1989] 2009:395). In this case, “beautiful” is applied to the princess’s whole person, not to any particular body part. Later, when the exiled princess returns home unrecognized, the king is so taken with her beauty that he offers her “a golden basin and vase filled with water so that she might wash her beautiful hands” (398). Thus, “beautiful” is one of the adjectives that can be used to modify a specific body part or can apply to the entire person. This is the case with many of the adjectives, regardless of whether they serve evaluative or descriptive functions. However, a pattern has yet to emerge with word co-occurrences and types of adjectives. This is in part because while the terms “descriptive” and “evaluative” adjectives

are useful shorthand ways of describing the apparent functions of the adjectives, it is difficult to come up with a precise-enough definition to concretely separate instances of the two enough to get a count for statistical purposes. Additionally, since I am working with tales in translation, I do not wish to delve too deeply into the linguistic differences between descriptive and evaluative adjectives, as they may differ between languages.

Discussion

The results presented above can be considered in the context of the five topics related to women's bodies and constructions of femininity in fairy tales I have previously identified: beauty as a feminine trait; hair, eyes, and skin; bodily fluids; suffering; and morality.

Beauty

For purposes of classification in my database, I counted as nouns items I called "themes," since, technically, "beauty," "death," and "cannibalism" are nouns even though they do not refer to body parts. Beauty is the most frequently used theme with female fairy-tale characters: at 360 mentions in my database, it outranks all other themes and most other words, both nouns and adjectives. Men were connected with "beauty" only eight times in my database, meaning that "beauty" was used with women 97.83 percent of the times it occurred. Moreover, "beauty" was used so frequently with women that, of all the nouns used with women, both for explicit body-part nouns and themes, "beauty" accounted for 6.31 percent. "Beauty" is by far the most common theme used with women; the next most frequently used theme is "birth," with 19 mentions with women and 4 with men.¹⁶ The remainder of the themes are either used with men more than with women or in relatively equal numbers between men and women, or they are used in such small numbers that they provide supporting evidence at best. The frequency of "beauty" can be partially attributed to the fact that it sometimes appears as a character name. These instances include the titular character in the tale "Beauty with the Golden Hair" by d'Aulnoy (ATU 531), the character "Beauty" in the tale "Beauty and the Beast" by Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont (ATU 425C), and the character "Beauty" in "Beauty and the Beast" by de Villeneuve (ATU 425C). If I were working with a smaller sample of tales, I would be concerned that the presence of these titular characters would skew the results, but as the naming conventions in fairy tales include these sorts of names based on personal details and appearances, I believe that the inclusion of these tales contributes to an understanding of the overall patterning of bodies and identities in fairy tales.

But does "beauty" actually mean "beauty" in the sense of physical attractiveness, or are there other social and symbolic meanings being referenced in fairy tales? Isabel Cardigos believes "the 'beauty' of fairytale heroines is a transparent code for their fertility potential" (1996:48). In other words, fairy-tale heroines are described as the most beautiful when they are romantically and sexually available. Cardigos elaborates on this symbolic equation, stating that "the ugliness of the 'black bride' is

a male perception of the ‘wrong’ times of woman” (209). Vaz da Silva concurs with the equation of beauty with symbolic availability, stating that the famed fairy-tale tricolor complexion (red as blood, white as snow, black as ebony) as an expression of feminine perfection hints at far-reaching links between “trivalent goddesses and ideal womanhood” (2007:242). The association of beauty with the supernatural is another aspect of the symbolism behind feminine beauty in fairy tales. Vaz da Silva posits that “unearthly beauty discloses a ‘fairy nature’” and “specifically, the extraordinary beauty of Cinderella’s mother betrays her otherworldly origin” (2002:203). Beauty is a sign of not only otherworldliness, but also the cyclical transformations that occur in fairy tales: “The heroine relegated to temporary death by the stepmother taps then the life-giving aspect of her departed mother and consequently emerges beautiful—as a rejuvenated mother—from the death-connoting cinders” (202). According to these folkloristic interpretations, then, beauty is an index of symbolic positioning within the narratives, disclosing important information about where the heroine is in a cycle of enchantment or disenchantment, which thus dictates her availability for courtship.

The notion that beauty indicates a woman’s availability and attractiveness to men, however, is a deeply sexist and heterosexist view of the situation. It resonates unpleasantly with assessments from fields such as evolutionary psychology, wherein every facet of femininity and masculinity somehow must correspond to the ability to attract a viable heterosexual mate and thus pass on one’s genetic material. Gottschall et al. summarize the paradigm as such: “Men place great value on female physical attractiveness because it is a trustworthy indicator of relative fertility” (2008:176). They argue that, in this conventional view, men’s physical attractiveness is less important than women’s because “male fertility is much less variable than female, and those variances are much more difficult to detect” and because of the difficulties inherent in raising human young: “Women—unlike most female mammals—must balance preferences for physically attractive mates with preferences for parentally investing mates” (176). Despite the fact that this narrative is founded on a number of faulty assumptions—such as the supposed universality of monogamy in human societies, preoccupation with paternal investment, and selfishness lying at the heart of human interactions—those utilizing an evolutionary psychology or sociobiology paradigm project these assumptions onto everything and everyone. I find it striking that both Gottschall et al. (2003, 2008) and Cardigos, coming from different disciplinary perspectives, equate female beauty with fertility. Then again, if folklore is often a mirror of culture and we have wound up with a fairly sexist culture, is it any surprise if interpretations of that culture also appear fairly sexist? The next few sections of this article examine case studies that—fairly or not—link women’s body parts with specific attributes.

Hair, Eyes, and Skin

If the feminist claims are to be believed, women’s appearances in fairy tales are that much more important than men’s appearances and thus get more descriptive time as

well as descriptions that converge along culturally normative lines (e.g., reinforcing a narrow ideal of doll-like feminine beauty).

The phrase “golden hair,” reputed to be stock in fairy tales, occurs 66 times out of 73 total mentions of the adjective “golden.” All but 14 of those “golden hair” phrases refer to women; of the 14 associations with boys/men, 5 apply to the supernaturally enhanced golden hair of the boy in “Iron Hans” (ATU 502 in the Grimms) and 9 apply to the Devil’s golden hairs, the object of a quest, in “The Devil with the Three Golden Hairs” (ATU 461 in the Grimms). Thus, men with golden hair get it from supernatural means (either by being supernatural creatures, as with the Devil, or by getting mixed up with supernatural creatures, as with the boy protagonist in “Iron Hans”). Women with golden hair, it is implied, are naturally that way, and moreover their golden hair is a special marker of beauty. In two cases, the golden hair is incorporated into the protagonists’ names: Beauty with the Golden Hair is sought after in the tale titled “Beauty with the Golden Hair” by d’Aulnoy (ATU 531), and “Golden Hair” is the female protagonist who escapes a hostile donor figure in the style of “Rapunzel” and later is turned into a frog in the tale collected by Massignon titled “Golden Hair, or the Little Frog” (a blend of ATU 310 and 402).

An additional 30 tales mentioned women’s hair that was not blonde or that did not have a specific color associated with it, and 19 tales mentioned men’s hair that was not color-specified. Comparatively, women were more likely to have golden hair than were men, but still, fewer than half of the female characters whose hair was mentioned had golden hair. Thus, golden hair does not occur as the norm, though it is the most commonly specified hair color on women. However, golden hair does have some symbolic resonances in the world of European folk belief: “Golden hair is of course a stable feature of fairies” (Vaz da Silva 2002:203). Hair in general being more associated with women than with men in fairy tales is indicative of the role hair plays in Western beauty standards, and this gendered connotation possibly dovetails with the taboo and ritual magic uses of hair (Holden 2000:116–7; Warner 1994:374).

In addition to golden hair, feminist scholars claim that fairy-tale heroines are supposed to have blue eyes and pale, perfect complexions (e.g., Warner 1994:362). In my data set, there were in fact remarkably few descriptions of “blue eyes.” One occurred in Perrault’s “Donkey Skin,” which contains a description of “her blue eyes, so large and sweet” (Zipes [1989] 2009:73). The other occurred in “The Blue Bird” by d’Aulnoy, where an enterprising queen is described as knowing “how to roll her large blue eyes” (321). It is, of course, significant that both of these mentions refer to women, but two instances out of 294 total eye mentions are not powerful indicators that blue eyes are popular in fairy tales. It is also important to note that both these tales were written by French intellectuals in the 1690s and that this movement represented a more complex, thickly descriptive strand of the literary fairy tale. Mentions of “eyes” did not significantly correlate to women, as eyes were mentioned 135 times with women and 145 times with men (the remaining 14 instances are gender-neutral). Beauty is not, according to my data set, the main reason for mentioning eyes, though there are occasional sentences such as “Then she turned her beautiful eyes to the captain of the guards” (in “The Ram” by d’Aulnoy, in Zipes [1989] 2009:389). In “The Goose

Girl at the Spring” in the Grimms’ collection, the princess, when finally vindicated, “emerged with her golden hair and sparkling eyes” (Grimm and Grimm 2003:525). More frequently, however, eyes exist to be gouged out, to be rolled, to close (indicating sleep), to open (indicating wakefulness), to implore, to squint, to be filled with tears, to be dazzled by someone’s beauty, to convey ill or good intent, or to be remarked upon (as in the famous exchange between Little Red Cap and the wolf in ATU 333 where she asks her “grandmother” about her large eyes). Thus, while eyes are a significant body part mentioned in fairy tales, their use does not conform to feminist claims about the specific kinds of eyes that are valued for women in Western culture.

There does seem to be a connection between women and the frequency of mentions of skin tone, especially paleness. There were 43 descriptions of men’s skin and 78 descriptions of women’s skin, displaying a clear pattern connecting women with pale skin. “White” was used to describe women’s skin 19 times (men’s, 4 times), “pale” was used with women 15 times (with men, 5 times), and other skin adjectives were used solely with women: “alabaster” (twice), “beautiful complexions” (twice), “ivory” (twice), “lovely” (thrice), “white and beautiful” (twice), and “whitened” (twice). These indicators of lightness and beauty were the most common types of skin words I documented; other words, describing darkness, redness, or goldness, were not used as frequently. Thus, it appears that the accusations by feminist critics that fairy-tale heroines are often portrayed with white skin are accurate; paleness occupies a privileged place in Western conceptions of beauty that date back to the disparate places and periods from whence these fairy tales came. Skin tone is an internationally known folk narrative motif, cropping up in the *Arabian Nights* as well as in contemporary body art practices such as skin lightening.

The contrast of these specific descriptive words with the overall importance of beauty for women in fairy tales is alarming, as it highlights the double bind of Western ideal femininity. Naomi Wolf describes this double bind in terms of the “beauty myth,” arguing that the problem is not specific beauty standards (though the more unattainable they are, the more oppressive they are), but rather women’s lack of choices ([1991] 2002:272). The double bind is that women who are not beautiful are punished for failing to adhere to the beauty myth, while those who try will inevitably fail once the standards shift, or they will fail once they are perceived to be trying in the first place. In Wolf’s analysis of the beauty myth, beauty is seen to “objectively and universally exist,” and the draw toward feminine beauty is “necessary and natural because it is biological, sexual, and evolutionary” (12). This language foreshadows Gottschall et al.’s work (2003, 2008) on gender in fairy tales and illustrates the need for nuanced attention to feminist criticism. While Gottschall et al. take for granted the existence of an evolutionary reason for gender essentialism (2003, 2008), Wolf interrogates it: “If the beauty myth is not based on evolution, sex, gender, aesthetics, or God, on what is it based? . . . The beauty myth is not about women at all. It is about men’s institutions and institutional power” ([1991] 2002:13). Applied to my findings, the importance of beauty for women in fairy tales is concerning because of the very vagueness of beauty. This is yet one more impossible standard for women to strive to meet and to inexorably be punished for failing at. And as we will see below, the punishments women face in fairy tales can be quite dire.

Bodily Fluids

In my data set, women are more associated with “blood” and “tears”—the only bodily fluids among the top 10 body-part nouns, regardless of gender—than are men. Cardigos and Vaz da Silva have both observed the significance of blood as a transformative substance in fairy tales. Cardigos, working primarily on Portuguese fairy tales, argues that women’s “three bloods” (menstruation, defloration, and childbirth) influence both the plot structures of fairy tales and their content, as these bloody cycles “appear as both a curse and a source of wonder” (1996:47). Vaz da Silva takes Cardigos’ arguments further, claiming that “the very process that constitutes disenchantment in fairy tales” involves a ritual period of 3 days (2002:179). Sometimes this disenchantment involves wounding a woman (symbolic defloration), or it can involve shedding animal skins or a loathly disguise (again, like Cinderella), which thematically parallels the shedding of blood of menstruation as the uterus sheds its lining. Because Cardigos and Vaz da Silva agree that women’s bloody cycles provide the symbolic language of enchantment and disenchantment that fairy tales utilize, it makes sense from a folkloristic perspective that women would be linked with blood.

However, feminist scholars have also discussed the connections between women’s bodies and fluids. Elizabeth Grosz summarizes this scholarship, moving from Mary Douglas on purity and pollution to Julia Kristeva and the abject, hypothesizing that “women’s corporeality is inscribed as a mode of seepage” (1994:203).¹⁷ From this perspective, it makes sense that women more than men in fairy tales are associated with bodily fluids and moreover that these fluids would be charged with cultural meanings. Certain branches of feminism consider fluidity a central issue. As Margrit Shildrick and Janet Price note, “what is at issue for women specifically is that, supposedly, the female body is intrinsically unpredictable, leaky and disruptive,” which has had the effect “that women remain rooted within their bodies, held back by their supposedly natural biological processes” (1999:2).

One of the feminist claims about women in fairy tales is that they are excluded from roles of power, sometimes violently, and for women who do seize power (e.g., evil stepmothers, witches, and crones), the punishments are quite dreadful. Dancing oneself to death in heated iron shoes and being devoured by reptiles in a vat are two of the punishments powerful women face in my data set (appearing in the Grimms’ “Snow White” and Perrault’s “The Sleeping Beauty in the Woods”). These certainly qualify as violent deaths. However, as Cardigos points out, despite the fact that women in fairy tales are associated with blood, there is an ambivalence surrounding blood symbolism and gender roles. Specifically, “the immediate association between blood and death is emphatically contradicted by the fact that in these cases [of defloration and childbirth] it is the blood of fertility (or potential fertility)” (1996:47). Thus, mentions of women’s blood do not automatically connote violence against women as a theme underlying the meanings of fairy tales. Rather, I have found through exploring my data set that violence is associated more with men than with women in fairy tales (Jorgensen forthcoming). Cardigos views narrative violence as a way for men to symbolically wrest the power of procreation from women by enacting bloody rites: “In typical hero tales the assertion of phallic power is focused, precisely,

on the shedding of blood that is caused by male intervention" (1996:47), such as the symbolic defloration of a maiden by slaying her serpentine guardian.

Since blood and violence are not necessarily synonymous in fairy tales, the depictions of women's bodies must be considered multivalent. Lüthi believed that blood only rarely appears in folktales: "Even when actual mutilations occur in folktales we are not allowed to visualize the physical body of the victim. . . . We do not see blood flowing or a real wound developing" (1986:12). However, blood appeared tenth among the most frequent nouns in my entire data set, and as it is used predominantly with one gender (appearing as the fifth most commonly used body noun with women), it is not only a stable feature of fairy tales, but also a significantly patterned one. Blood does seem to indicate unsuitability or inappropriateness when connected with women, as Cardigos and Vaz da Silva have posited, but the meanings are social rather than (or in addition to) symbolic. In the Grimms' "Cinderella" (ATU 510A), blood reveals that the stepsisters are false substitutes for Cinderella. They are physically mutilated in a bid to be the prince's bride, an act that limits their mobility and makes them unsuitable for any future working life.

Suffering

Feminine patience and suffering is hinted at in the tales too. The word "tears" appeared 75 times with women and 33 times with men, implying that women do a lot more crying in fairy tales than men do. Additionally, the phrase "bitter tears" appears, almost always in conjunction with women. There are seven mentions of "bitter tears" with women and only one with men, leading me to hypothesize that women's suffering is more emphasized in fairy tales than men's suffering. Female characters realize their helplessness in the world, such as in this description of the protagonist, in "The Virgin Mary's Child" (ATU 710) in the Grimms' collection, who is expelled from heaven: "But it was a miserable life, and whenever she thought about how beautiful it had been in heaven and how the angels had played with her, she shed bitter tears" (Grimm and Grimm 2003:9). Gretel in the Grimms' "Hansel and Gretel" (ATU 327A) spends quite a lot of time weeping; she sheds tears three times, and twice they are "bitter tears." First, she weeps bitter tears when the children overhear their parents proposing to abandon them, then when they are captured by the witch and Gretel must do her bidding. It is notable that all the tales mentioning women's bitter tears, except one, appear in the Grimms' collection (these mentions are in "The Juniper Tree," "King Thrushbeard," and "One-Eye, Two-Eye, and Three-Eye"). This supports the hypothesis of several Grimms scholars, from Zipes and Haase to Tatar and Bottigheimer, that the Grimms were tailoring their tales to an agenda of not only civilizing and educating children, but also enforcing gender roles. The exception to all the female "bitter tears" occurring in the Grimms is in "The Ram" by d'Aulnoy, where the protagonist is exiled from her home and her companions are slain in order to protect the secret that she is still alive; then, she "wept such bitter tears over [them] that she became quite exhausted" (Zipes [1989] 2009:390).

Significantly, the one mention of a man's "bitter tears" also occurs in a tale by d'Aulnoy, "The Island of Happiness." The male figure who weeps bitter tears is not even

a human or a main character, but rather Zephir, the West Wind, who has supported the hero in his quest to seek a princess. When the hero dies, Zephir weeps “bitter tears” over him, but the princess, upon losing her lover, “uttered such bitter cries that they could have moved the most insensitive heart” (Zipes [1989] 2009:308). This is one good example of a body-part mention that is not gendered. And this occurred after lamenting his long absence, during which the princess “added a flood of tears to the flow of the stream” (308). Thus, female tears, even when not described as “bitter,” are prevalent in fairy tales and seem to suggest that women suffer disproportionately, whether they are represented as doing so in the fairy tales prescriptively (as with the Grimms) or descriptively (as with d’Aulnoy’s tales, which provided social commentary on the gender roles of her day). This analysis directly contrasts with Lüthi’s view that “tears are shed only if this is important for the development of the plot” (1986:13). I argue that it is essential to read the body in fairy tales both in terms of what the bodies mean for the plots and in terms of how the bodies are shaped by cultural meanings and ideologies, which necessitates going deeper than superficial textual readings and determining the associations informing the uses of bodies in fairy tales.

Morality

Feminists have argued that women’s bodies are inscribed with properly gendered behavior through the repetitive performances of identity that occur in fairy tales, especially when it comes to moral or “good” behavior. I found that moral evaluative words are frequently used with female characters. Of the times when “wicked” and “evil” appear, three-quarters are associated with female characters; when “wise” appears, 90 percent of the time it is associated with a woman. Despite the polarization of these terms, I would argue that they represent a thematic coherence whereby female figures in fairy tales, particularly those who are old (and “old” is used with women at least 60 percent of the time), tend to take on either the roles of donor figures or of antagonists/villains. As Scott Weingart and I noted in a previous article, when using not just word counts but also correlations and word co-occurrences, age figures prominently in relation to gender: “Old people and females were both described more than expected, given the distribution of nouns and adjectives. The most descriptions were attached to old females, and the least to young males” (Weingart and Jorgensen 2013:411). This type of language use Others older female bodies.

Measuring a character’s kindness or goodness using body descriptors has proven challenging; fortunately, while coding the database, I decided to cast a wide net by including words related to moral character, although this is not always precisely an embodied trait. It is telling that moral evaluative words like “wicked,” “evil,” and “wise” occur more with women than with men, indicating that female characters are polarized in terms of their goodness or badness. To study this, I used a “+/-” tag in the database to signify that a body mention or description had positive or negative moral connotations (what I call a moral evaluative tag, since there is an implicit or explicit moral evaluation happening at the textual level).

Since women characters in fairy tales tend to be split into opposing categories of the good, kind protagonist or the evil, wicked antagonist, I had expected to find

empirical evidence of some sort for this splitting phenomenon. Excepting five references that were to mixed-gender descriptions or gender-neutral bodies, there were 311 total moral evaluative tags, 237 applying to women and 73 to men. This was not a huge number, considering that there were 11,144 mentions in all, but it was patterned enough to be of interest. I found that while 76.21 percent of the moral evaluative references were to women and 23.79 percent to men—indicating that women were more likely than men to be assigned a moral evaluative phrase or function—the breakdown within the positive and negative tags was slightly different: 175 of the female references were negative and only 62 positive, while 47 of the male references were negative and 27 positive. That means that 73.84 percent of the moral evaluative references to women were negative and 26.16 percent positive, while 63.51 percent of the moral evaluative references to men were negative and 36.49 percent positive. Thus, women were more likely to be evaluated with negative words than men were, when men had a moral evaluation tacked onto them at all. This does not satisfy the challenges posed by feminists who claim that all fairy-tale heroines are saccharine-sweet and good, or if they are, those traits are established elsewhere than the body. Indeed, while other feminist scholars have observed the polarizing characterization of women in fairy tales, my analysis is unique for locating this judgmental process in descriptions adjacent to the body.

Conclusion

Discussions of beauty; hair, eyes, and skin; bodily fluids; and suffering and morality address the questions with which I began this article: Does the depiction of women's bodies in fairy tales support feminist assertions about gendered bodies? Using simple statistical methods and a hand-coded data set derived from a canonical corpus of translated European fairy tales, I examined five main claims, finding that some claims were overstated (e.g., the relative unimportance of hair color and eye color). However, a female fairy-tale character's beauty, and physical appearance in general, is in fact one of the most important features of her character. This pattern countermands Lüthi, who writes: "The popular idea that the folktale identifies the good with beauty and success and the bad with ugliness and failure cannot be accepted without qualification. Such correspondences frequently occur, but they are not indispensable; *the folktale is not bound to actual ideals of such a kind*" (1986:71; emphasis added). Clearly, the folktale and fairy tale do not always portray beautiful characters as good, and wicked characters as ugly; there are plenty of counter-examples. However, because this connection has been widespread enough to be noticed by critics, and because my data shows that beauty is highly correlated with female characters, I reject Lüthi's idea that the correlation is not related to ideals from the real world. On the contrary, narrative ideals and real-world ideals are inextricably bound, whether the subject of the ideal is beauty, normative femininity, or gender identity.

The concept of gender performance ties in neatly to the emphasis on and artificiality of feminine beauty discussed above (Butler [1990] 1999). If femininity were a given, something that naturally and inherently existed inside all women, then there would not be so much narrative, rhetorical, or ideological labor invested in naturalizing

women's beauty and acts of femininity. This labor is what the concept "gender performance" signifies at its heart. While gender performance has been theorized less in terms of narrative elements and more in terms of behaviors and acts (such as cross-dressing and drag), fairy tales provide excellent examples of gender performances since they combine social meanings with structural and symbolic ones. Kimberly Lau has articulated the latter connection, commenting on "the unique melding of the structural and the symbolic aspects of fairy tales, for it is precisely after the hero wins access to the symbol, that is to say, when the hero symbolically deflowers the princess, that the disenchantment and subsequent wedding occurs" (1996:238). Although Lau does not mention the importance of social values in the equation of structure and symbol in the fairy tale in this quote, she connects society to this equation later in her paper, and if these three things are taken as a whole, they illuminate the performativity of gender in fairy tales. That is, because fairy tales present an abstract and artistic portrait of culture, they obscure the ideological underpinnings of the gendered inequalities evident in their structures, symbols, and social meanings. And because repetition occurs on various levels in fairy tales—including verbal formulas, repetitive episodes (things coming in threes), and reiterated versions and variants of tales—the genre of fairy tales is well suited to analysis based on gender performance theory. As Cristina Bacchilega summarizes the issue, "gender is performative. The authority of the performative depends on repetition, which requires multiple performances. In certain hyperbolic cases, however, this authority produces twisted effects which expose the norm as fantasy and compulsion" (1997:22). When laid bare, the norms in fairy tales appear fantastic in their twisted emphasis on beauty above all else as a defining factor of femininity.

The performance of femininity plays out in fairy tales through the body, through the associations between women and their bodies, and through the remarking about women's beauty. By highlighting the narrative creation and fetishization of the "passively beautiful female character with very limited options" (1997:29), Bacchilega illustrates how the iterative performance of gender works to enact certain ideologies in fairy tales. Similarly, in my data set, the emphasis on beauty for women and the importance of traits like hair, eyes, and skin all function to inscribe femininity on the body. These enchanting portraits of beautiful female characters are all the more dangerous because they appear so natural while supporting restrictive social norms.

The study of social norms (including those governing gender) offers an important reason to utilize quantitative methods. As Tangherlini reminds us, "we must recognize that computational approaches can help make sense of the often hidden patterns that characterize human expressive culture at scale . . . and provide us with tools to tackle research questions that previously may have seemed intractable" (2016a:10). These hidden patterns are present not only in the deep structures of expressive culture, but also in the social attitudes contained therein. Assembling the data on bodies from six collections' worth of fairy tales may not have been impossible without the aid of technology, but it would have been a long and challenging process, and I preferred to let the technology assist with locating patterns where it could. With the aid of quantitative methods, I have shown that, in many cases, the feminists were right: fairy tales present an uneven view of the genders, representing femininity as morally

polarized and imbricated with notions of beauty and with an emphasis on certain features such as hair, skin, blood, and eyes. This empirically disproves critics, such as Bruno Bettelheim ([1975] 1989), who have claimed that gender in the fairy tale does not matter. Not only does gender matter in terms of how it is inscribed on the body, but it also matters in different ways for men and for women. This is a normative imposition, in the sense that feminists Shirley Castelnuevo and Sharon R. Guthrie explain it: “The ‘normal’ feminine body in contemporary Western societies is one that conveys vulnerability, accommodation, and seductiveness whether it be through gesture, movement, or occupation of space” (1998:137). The “normal” feminine body in fairy tales, with its emphasis on beauty, adjectival descriptors, and morality, imposes a whole set of normative values upon women, ones which, as Bacchilega has observed (1997) and I have substantiated, are often passed off as “natural” and desirable.

Quantitative approaches to fairy tales offer a corrective means to support the largely subjective methods folklorists use to interpret data and to shore up comparative approaches (such as the historic-geographic method) that have long been significant in our discipline. Being attuned to tradition already keys us into social norms, and my analysis both legitimizes existing scholarship and points in new directions for merging feminist concerns with folkloristic ones. I have not confirmed every point that feminist scholars have made about women’s bodies in fairy tales, but I have validated the general sense that women are portrayed in scripted ways. My research suggests that folk narratives model normative gendered bodies in ways that ultimately reinforce existing stereotypes and conform to patriarchal expectations (such as the double bind of femininity). With this understanding, we can continue to forge new models for understanding the interactions of gender, the body, and expressive culture.

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Notes

1. For more details on this trajectory, see Haase (2004).
2. In a recent dissertation, Folgert Karsdorp demonstrates that the most “culturally successful” of the Grimms’ fairy tales (i.e., which fairy tales are most likely to stick, and why) are those featuring animal characters, characters with names referring to family relationships, and characters with extraordinary/supernatural powers (2016:84–8).
3. This assertion is not, of course, universally accepted; Alison Lurie (1970) and Bruno Bettelheim ([1975] 1989), among others, have contested the idea that the gender of a fairy-tale protagonist matters in terms of the reader’s ability to absorb the tale’s meaning and significance. See Stone (1985) and Haase (2004) for further discussion.
4. Lüthi writes: “Only a few things and persons are distinguished by a color term, and so they contrast all the more strongly with those that are colorless” (1986:28). Clearly, in the aesthetics of the fairy tale, it is possible for people to be described simply and in few words, and hence be “colorless”; however, the social

reality of the Western world does not allow for colorlessness. Whiteness is often the invisible, privileged state, whereas any other skin color is marked and laden with ideological judgments.

5. Obviously, the connection between beauty and goodness is a culturally relative one. For an example of a medieval European Christian association of beauty with spirituality, see Munns (2011).

6. Granted, the classic status of fairy tales is often established in retrospect, so part of what this project is after is a sense of fairy-tale bodies as we in the present perceive them in a constructed past. Notably, some of the most thorough data on gender, beauty, and bodies in fairy tales is based on interviews with children (Stone 1985).

7. While I subscribe to the view that many written tales are derived from or inspired by oral tales, which may in turn pass back into oral tradition, in this project, I primarily focus upon written or collected texts and the worldviews that they convey.

8. Because I am not working under the assumption that there is a single origin that I should be seeking or that some tales are more “pure” or “contaminated” than others, it is acceptable to utilize translations with an awareness that some body motifs may have been replaced, while others were not.

9. This is one of the unique aspects of my project and one of the reasons folklorists should be doing digital work on fairy tales, because we can draw on the insights from our discipline to sift through the data better than an outsider can.

10. Due to constraints on both time and money, I was the sole coder for this data set. I was working off the idea that having a subject expert as the sole coder ensures that the materials are being handled sensitively and consistently. While individuals will doubtlessly make different choices when deciding how to frame a study, the most important thing is that scholars be balanced in their understandings of their methods and materials.

11. I did not utilize N-grams (words that appear directly next to each other), but rather looked for instances where a word denoted or qualified a body or body part, and attended to those connections.

12. See Tucker (2003); Seifert (1996); and Hannon (1998).

13. See Mulvey (1999).

14. These numbers have changed slightly due to updates in the database that occurred after writing this analysis in Jorgensen (2012), but I retain them here to show how the numbers shaped my interpretations.

15. See Vaz da Silva for many of these symbolic links (2002), and also Warner on the kinship affiliations that led to the rise of godmothers in both social reality and tale traditions (1994).

16. I use an exclamation point when a theme or act has clearly taken place or has been described in the text without explicitly naming it. For example, I entered into the database “birth!” when someone was born but the word “birth” was not used, “death!” when someone died but the word “death” was not used, and so on. I should also note that both “birth” and “birth!” are anomalous when it came to recording the relevant gender, since if the focus was on the woman giving birth, I recorded it as female, but if the focus was on the boy having been born and recounting something about his birth, I recorded it as male. When the gender of the baby was unclear and nothing was said of the mother’s experience, I left the gender blank.

17. See Grosz in particular for a tour of some of the most important points in feminist scholarship on women’s bodies as leaky (1994:187–98, 202–10).

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