



"Little Red Riding Hood"
Illustrator: Maurice Leroy

Chapter 1

Toward a Theory of the Fairy Tale as Literary Genre

As is well known, there is a classical fairy-tale canon in the Western world that has been in existence ever since the nineteenth century, if not earlier. The tales that constitute this canon are "Cinderella," "Little Red Riding Hood," "Sleeping Beauty," "Hansel and Gretel," "Rapunzel," "Rumpelstiltskin," "The Frog Prince," "Snow White," "Bluebeard," "Beauty and the Beast," "Jack and the Beanstalk," "The Princess and the Pea," "The Little Mermaid," "The Ugly Duckling," "Aladdin and the Magic Lamp," "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves," and so on. In my previous works I argued that these tales became canonized because they were adapted from the oral tradition of folklore for aristocratic and middle-class audiences as print culture developed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and basically reshaped and retold during this time to reinforce the dominant patriarchal ideology throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Consequently, the most telling or catchy tales were reprinted and reproduced in multiple forms and entered into cultural discursive practices in diverse ways so that they became almost "mythicized" as natural stories, as second nature. We respond to these classical tales almost as if we were born with them, and yet, we know full well that they have been socially produced and induced and continue to be generated this way through different forms of the mass media.

Although I have always subscribed to the notion that the classical fairy tales tend to be overtly patriarchal and politically conservative in structure and theme and reflect the dominant interests of social groups that control cultural forces of production and reproduction, I have never been able to explain satisfactorily why the canonical tales stick with us and why they are so catchy when there are so many other fascinating and artistic tales that are just as good if not better than the canonical tales we tend to repeat and are predisposed to know. To my mind it is not sufficient now to argue as I have done in the past that the classical tales have been consciously and subconsciously reproduced largely in print by a cultural industry that favors patriarchal and reactionary notions of gender, ethnicity, behavior, and social class. There are other important elements or ingredients in the tales themselves as well as external factors that need more attention, for they might explain more fully how and why particular types are disseminated more than others. What is it in the generic nature of the fairy tale that accounts for its cultural relevance and its attraction? Why do certain tales appear to spread almost like a virus, not only in the Western world but also in the entire world?

MEMETICS AND THE EPIDEMIOLOGICAL APPROACH

In *The Great Fairy Tale Tradition: From Straparola and Basile to the Brothers Grimm* (2001),¹ I began trying to answer some of these questions by formulating more specific questions about origins and by proposing a social biological and an epidemiological approach to understanding the relevance of fairy tales. I asked: How did literary fairy tales originate? How did they spread? How was their great tradition formed? There are numerous theories about the origin of the fairy tale, but none have provided conclusive proof about how the literary fairy tale was formed. This is because it is next to impossible to know because the literary fairy tale is similar to a special biological species that was cultivated slowly in an oral tradition and then suddenly flowered at one point in history with the help of the printing press and new social and technological forms of transmission. By the end of the seventeenth century the literary fairy

tale erupted and began to evolve and spread indiscriminately and has continued to transform itself vigorously to the present day.

It may seem strange to compare the genre of the fairy tale to a natural form of species. Yet, there is a virtue to using a biological analogy to make sense of the great tradition of the literary fairy tale. In fact, the literary fairy tale has evolved from the stories of the oral tradition, piece by piece in a process of incremental adaptation, generation by generation in different cultures of people who cross-fertilized the oral tales with the literary tales and disseminated them. If we consider that tales are mentally and physically conceived by human beings as material products of culture, then it is possible to analyze how special forms of telling originated as species or what literary critics call genres.

We know that there were many different kinds of storytelling that existed thousands of years ago in antiquity, and they gave birth to types of "wonder" tales that prefigured the literary fairy tales. We also know that there were many kinds of fantastic and marvelous oral and literary tales that served to form the hybrid "species" of the literary fairy tale. As a result, we can trace a historical evolution of many of these tales by examining how bits and pieces of a story accumulated in different cultures and then eventually gelled to form a genre. We cannot say with historical precision when the literary fairy tale began its evolution, but we can trace motifs and elements of the literary fairy tale to numerous types of storytelling and stories of antiquity that contributed to the formation of a particular branch of telling and writing tales. In the Western European tradition this branching occurred some time in the early medieval period (perhaps even earlier) and led to the social institution of a special literary genre (*conte de fée*) in the seventeenth century that today we call the literary fairy tale.

I likened the evolutionary process of the specific form of the oral wonder tale and the literary fairy tale to a process of contamination and contagion—the motifs and plots of stories spread like viruses that eventually formed a clearly identifiable genre, species, or virus that we generally call the fairy tale. At the time that I was trying to develop my ideas, I was already familiar with Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson's relevance theory and Sperber's epidemiological approach to culture,² but I was unfamiliar with Richard Dawkins's concept of the meme, a cultural

replicator that has led to the rise of memetics⁴—a speculative theory that, I believe, complements Sperber's epidemiological approach to culture even though Sperber has misgivings about memetics.⁵

Dawkins maintains that there is one fundamental law of life that he believes is undeniable—"the law that all life evolves by the differential survival of replicating entities. The gene, the DNA molecule, happens to be the replicating entity that prevails on our own planet. There may be others. If there are, provided certain other conditions are met, they will almost inevitably tend to become the basis for an evolutionary planet."⁶ Indeed, Dawkins argues that there is another new replicator that he calls a meme, a unit of cultural transmission.

Examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches. Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense can be called imitation. If a scientist hears, or reads about, a good idea, he passes it on to his colleagues and students. He mentions it in his articles and his lectures. If the idea catches on, it can be said to propagate itself, spreading from brain to brain. . . . memes should be regarded as living structures, not just metaphorically but technically. When you plant a fertile meme in my mind you literally parasitize my brain, turning it into a vehicle for the meme's propagation in just the way that a virus may parasitize the genetic mechanism of a host cell. And this isn't just a way of talking—the meme for, say, "belief in life after death" is actually realized physically, millions of times over, as a structure in the nervous systems of individual men the world over.⁷

Much to Dawkins's surprise, his speculative remarks in the last chapter of *The Selfish Gene*, first published in 1976, led to the flowering of memetics, which has become one of the more controversial scientific theories in the twenty-first century.⁸ The theory of memetics generally maintains that a meme is an informational pattern contained in a human brain (or in artifacts such as books or pictures) and stored in its memory, capable of being copied to another individual's brain that will store it and replicate it. Susan Blackmore contends that a meme's major trait is its capacity to be imitated and to replicate itself, and it is also

what makes human beings different from all other animals. We copy and change all the time, and we are disposed to copying memes that want to be copied. "Memes spread themselves around indiscriminately without regard to whether they are useful, neutral, or positively harmful to us."⁹ The memes battle each other for a secure place in the brain, and in order for a meme to survive, it must exhibit three major characteristics: fidelity, fecundity, and longevity. A meme must be capable of being copied in a faithful way; it must be shaped or formed in such a way that many copies can be made; and it must be able to survive a long time so that many copies will be disseminated. In time some memes form a memplex, which is a group of memes that facilitates replication and can be likened to a genre. According to Blackmore, memes coevolve with genes, often influencing them, or are influenced by them. The dynamics will depend on the environment.

At a June 1999 convention of biologists, zoologists, geneticists, psychologists, linguists, anthropologists, and social scientists in Cambridge, England, the status of the meme was critically debated by the participants.⁹ Many questions were raised about the differences between genes and memes, whether memes can operate without constraints, how the brain filters memes, whether memes can be viewed as discrete identifiable units, and what happens psychologically when a meme is processed by the brain. Many of the social scientists rejected the notion of a meme as irrelevant for the study of culture, and many others regretted that there were no examples of "applied memetics."

One possibility to apply memetics would be through a study of the evolution of the oral wonder tale and literary fairy tale. Indeed, a good example of a meme is a fairy tale, but not just any fairy tale, an individual fairy tale and its discursive tradition that includes oral and literary tales and other cultural forms of transmission such as radio, film, video, and the Internet. For example, "Little Red Riding Hood" has become a meme that has stuck in people's minds since at least the seventeenth century and has replicated and propagated itself throughout the world. Clearly this one classical fairy tale has managed to catch and plant itself in brains practically everywhere in the world, as I demonstrated in my 1983 study, *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood*, which I revised in 1992 and which has since then been followed by more recent

studies such as Sandra Beckett's *Recycling Red Riding Hood* (2002), Catherine Orenstein's *Little Red Riding Hood Unlocked: Sex, Morality, and the Evolution of a Fairy Tale* (2003), Alessandra's Levorato's *Language and Gender in the Fairy Tale Tradition A Linguistic Analysis of Old and New Story Telling* (2003), Anne-Marie Garat's *Une faim de loup: Lecture du Petit Chaperon rouge* (2004), and Walter Fochesato, *Lupus in fabula* (2004),¹⁰ not to mention numerous other essays on the topic. Even this scholarly discussion is memetic, that is, it is bound up with the transmission of memes that only survive if they are relevant or made relevant and stabilized through cultural institutions.

But it is perhaps too easy to accept memetics, a catchy theory, which is becoming more and more popular, when there is no conclusive scientific evidence that proves how memes are either biologically absorbed or transmitted to our brains and retained so that we become disposed to replicate them. There are other psychological, cultural, and social factors that need to be considered if we are ever to have a judicious and credible theory about the origin and transmission and "stickiness" of fairy tales. Nevertheless, the concept of the meme, which needs to be qualified, is, I believe, a valid term and starting point for considering the evolution and relevance of the fairy tale as a genre, and I shall use the term meme here in a broad sense to indicate a public representation or cultural replicator.

At this point I want to turn to Sperber's epidemiological approach because it offers a sounder theory of cultural communication and transmission than Dawkins's notion of the meme's transmission, while not totally dismissing memetics. In his book *Explaining Culture* (1996) and several essays such as "Culture and Modularity" written with Lawrence Hirschfeld and "Why a Deep Understanding of Cultural Evolution Is Incompatible with Shallow Psychology,"¹¹ Sperber has spelled out in great detail what he means by an epidemiological approach to culture. He begins with the premise that

Members of a human group are bound with one another by multiple flows of information. (Here we use "information" in a broad sense that includes not only the content of people's knowledge, but also that of their beliefs, assumptions, fictions, rules, norms, skills, maps, images, and so on.) The information is materially realized in the mental representations of the

people, and in their *public productions*, that is, their cognitively guided behaviors and the enduring material traces of these behaviors. Mentally represented information is transmitted from individuals to individuals through public productions. *Public representations* such as speech, gestures, writing, or pictures are a special type of public productions, the function of which is to communicate a content. Public representations play a major role in the information transmission.¹²

The fairy tale as public representation (meme) must also be understood as relevant. That is, when the fairy tale is articulated in a communication of some kind, it is made relevant through the brain that operates efficiently and effectively to draw the attention of the listener/reader to the inferred meaning of the communication. A fairy tale as meme wants to be understood in a particular relevant way, otherwise it will not stick in the recipient who is *intended* to replicate it. Sperber and Deirdre Wilson elaborate this process in their book *Relevance* (1986) in great detail, and in a recent article, they explain:

The central claim of relevance theory is that the expectations of relevance raised by an utterance are precise enough, and predictable enough, to guide the bearer towards the speaker's meaning. The aim is to explain in cognitively realistic terms what these expectations of relevance amount to, and how they might contribute to an empirically plausible account of comprehension.¹³

I shall return to relevance theory later when I discuss "Cinderella" in Chapter 3. What I want to insist on at this point is that a meme must be made relevant to stick, and as a fairy tale it has been made relevant in an evolutionary process.

With regard to the evolution of the literary fairy tale, we can consider its generator as the oral folk tale, in all its generic forms, as a meme that carries vital information for adaptation to the environment. In the process of gathering information in the brain, storing it, making it relevant, and then sharing it, humans tended and still tend to privilege certain data and to use them in specific circumstances. Recently, two European scholars have presented very useful explanations of how memes, when competing with other memes, are processed to become effective replicators. In his essay, "What Makes a Meme Successful? Selection Criteria for Cultural Evolution," Francis Heylighen maintains

To be replicated, a meme must pass successfully through four subsequent stages: 1) assimilation by an individual, who thereby becomes a host of the meme; 2) retention in that individual's memory; 3) expression by the individual in language, behavior or another form that can be perceived by others; 4) transmission of the thus created message or meme vehicle to one or more other individuals. This last stage is followed again by stage 1, thus closing the replication loop.¹⁴

Heylighen carefully outlines the mechanics of the replication process, and what is most important is his emphasis on subjective criteria that Blackmore and other memeticists neglect. Novelty, simplicity, coherence, and utility form some of the criteria that might influence the recipient's selection, as well as intersubjective criteria that determine to what extent the meme will fit group conditions and expectations. At the same time, the meme has its own criteria of self-justification, self-reinforcement, intolerance, and proselytism without which it would not be fit for replication. Both the stages and criteria can, I believe, be applied to how a particular fairy tale is processed and replicated by an individual or groups of individuals when they hear, read, or see a fairy tale. In addition, there are other sociocognitive mechanisms to be considered.

In Cristiano Castelfranchi's essay, "Towards a Cognitive Memetics: Socio-Cognitive Mechanisms for Memes Selection and Spreading," he pays special attention to the role of norms in meme spreading, the role of social identity and membership, and intergroup differentiation.¹⁵ He argues that a decision is made by the individual (agent) who hosts a meme:

A cognitive agent activates, selects, prefers, pursues, gives up goals on the basis of what it believes. In other words, it has "reasons" for what it does; a cognitive agent is a goal-directed agent (endowed with intentions, planning, and deliberation abilities, ...); its behaviour is in fact "action" aimed at certain anticipated results (mental representations) and is controlled and motivated by them (these representations).¹⁶

According to Castelfranchi, there are three mechanisms for meme adoption and replication: the practical problem-solving mechanism, the normative character of cultural transmission, and the social identity mechanism. In other words, the spread or contagion of a meme (fairy

tale) does not depend solely on the meme itself, but also on decisions dependent on subjective and external (environmental) factors.

Castelfranchi and Heylighen provide qualifications about the operations of memes that reveal how much more complex a meme is. Imparting knowledge through language and artifacts is an efficient and relevant mode that contributes to the formation and continuity of groups and societies and their specific cultural rites, norms, and customs. We tend to shape and form information as a public representation in special ways that can be categorized socially and aesthetically, and as the human species has evolved, we have cultivated specific art forms linguistically, cognitively, and physically to express and communicate our beliefs and also our wonder about reality and the supernatural.

In her book *What Is Art For?* Ellen Dissanayake discusses the significance of "art as a behavior: making special as behavioral tendency that is as distinguishing and universal in humankind as speech or the skillful manufacture and use of tools."¹⁷ Her notion of making something special to designate art can be related to Sperber and Wilson's notion of relevance or how the human mind functions linguistically and psychologically through modules in the brain to make something relevant and meaningful. Dissanayake states:

Making special implies intent or deliberateness. When shaping or giving artistic expression for an idea, or *embellishing* an object, or recognizing that an idea or object is artistic, one gives (or acknowledges) a specialness that without one's activity or regard would not exist. Moreover, one intends by making special to *place the activity or artifact in a "realm" different from the everyday*. In most art of the past, it would seem, the special realm to be contrasted with the everyday was a magical or supernatural world, not—as today in the advanced West—a purely aesthetic realm. In both, however, there is a sort of salvation of quantum leap from the everyday humdrum reality in which life's vital needs and activities—eating, sleeping, preparing or obtaining food—occur to a different order which has a different motivation and a special attitude and response. In both the functional and nonfunctional art an alternative reality is recognized and entered; the making special acknowledges, reveals, and embodies this reality.¹⁸

Certainly the conception and use of the folk tale as an oral art form constituted a special manner of public representation in which value was enunciated—value was placed on content and selected to be communicated as a symbolic act. The stories told, in fact, were socially symbolic acts, as I have argued elsewhere,¹⁹ using Frederic Jameson's notion of the individual literary work as a symbolic act, "which is grasped as the imaginary resolution of real contradiction."²⁰ However, a story may not resolve any or every thing; it is more a communication with words as symbols that impart meaning in sentences and gestures. As Jean Aitchison has pointed out, "language possesses the property of generativity—the use of a finite number of elementary parts to produce a potentially infinite number of forms and sentences. Generativity may be a basic property of the human mind: The generative nature of language is probably parasitic on the generative nature of human cognition."²¹ Specific forms of language regenerate themselves. If a form of telling became highly special and relevant, it was remembered and passed on. If the contents were crucial for adapting to the environment, they too were disseminated time and again in forms that were recalled and transformed. Imitation and transmission are, indeed, key for understanding the evolution of a specific form of oral folk tale that was picked up by a print culture in Europe and gave rise to the institutionalization of the literary fairy tale.

Sperber has carefully explicated how the transmission of a meme or public representation, which can be equated with a particular tale, occurs. According to his theory, there is a language faculty or module²² in the brain that enables humans to acquire language and other inputs, to copy and process them, and then to reproduce them in communication with other humans who share and can decipher their linguistic codes and cultural meaning. All this occurs in a causal chain of culture, which Sperber and Hirschfeld outline in "Culture and Modularity":

The basic structure of the causal chains of culture consists ... [of] an alternation of mental and public episodes. How can such an alternation secure the stability of the contents transmitted? Two main types of processes have been invoked: imitation and communication. Imitation decomposes into a process of imitation of observation and a process of public or re-production of the behavior or of the artifact observed. In

between these two processes, there must be a third, mental one, that converts observation into action. Communication decomposes into a process of public expression of a mental representation and a process of mental interpretation of the public representation. Between these two processes, there must be a third environmental process whereby the action of the communicator impinges on the sensory organs of the interpreter. Ideally, imitation secures the reproduction of public productions (behaviors or artifacts) while communication secures the reproduction of mental representations. Imitation and communication may overlap or interlock when the imitator acquires a mental representation similar to that which guided the behavior imitated, or when the interpreter reproduces the public representation interpreted.²³

It is important to stress that imitation and communication are not simple copying mechanisms in the causal chain of culture. Whatever the brain acquires through a stimulus is remembered, interpreted, adopted, and reproduced to contribute to the formation of a community and culture. For instance, a tale that draws a person's attention and is recorded in his or her brain will not be told again as a communication, whether oral or written, in exactly the same way, but the person will tell it because he or she feels it is relevant in a certain sociocultural context. It will also not become part of a cultural tradition or canon unless it is vital to the survival of a community and the preservation of its values and beliefs. When members of a community "latch on" to a folk tale and conserve it so that it sticks, they do so because it provides relative stability for the community and its culture, and they will continue to retell it and transmit it in a variety of ways. As Sperber and Hirschfeld argue:

[T]he contents of cultural representations and practices must remain stable enough throughout a community for its members to see themselves as performing the same ritual, sharing the same belief, eating the same dish, and understanding the same proverb in the same way. We are not denying, of course—in fact we are insisting—that culture is in constant flux and that its stability is often exaggerated. Still, without some degree of stability, nothing cultural would be discernible in human thought and behavior. In fact, a wide variety of representations, practices, and artifacts exhibit a sufficient degree of stability at the population scale to be recognizably cultural. ... Anthropologists (and, today, also "memeticists" developing the suggestions of Richard Dawkins) take generally for

granted that human imitation, communication, and memory abilities are sufficiently reliable to secure a faithful enough reproduction of contents through communities and generations. "Faithful enough" does not mean absolutely faithful, of course; it means faithful enough at the micro level to explain the relative stability we observe at the macro level.¹⁴

Stability is key to understanding why fairy tales stick. But a particular tale such as "Little Red Riding Hood" does not remain fixed in the brain nor will it last forever. Its condition is relative and determined culturally and biologically in a historical evolutionary process that reveals how we value things through mental and public representation. Sperber suggests that we can understand how memes are produced and transmitted if we view the modular organization of the brain as constituted by a variety of domain- or task-specific cognitive mechanisms called modules. There are innate learning modules that are "biological adaptations that perform their functions by drawing on cognitive inputs to generate acquired modules. Acquired modules have an innate basis and have derived biological functions and direct cultural functions. With cognitive adaptations and modules articulated in this manner rather than equated, the massive modularity thesis should become much more plausible and acceptable."¹⁵

In the case of the oral folk tale, an acquired module, derived from an innate learning module, has developed in the brain that enables us to determine first what kind of artifact the mind is recording and then enables us to begin to distinguish it. The innate learning module helps us classify and comprehend the tale, but if the tale acquires a certain cultural significance through repetition or special attraction, it may generate an acquired module that recognizes certain formal conditions that an input has to meet. For instance, in the case of "Little Red Riding Hood," it may have at one time simply been recognized by the brain as a folk tale with certain distinguishing features such as a wolf that attacks and devours a girl. But as the tale acquired cultural significance and was repeatedly told, printed, and reproduced in other artistic forms, the brain was stimulated through a particular innate module or even through two or three innate modules working together to recognize the memetic quality of the tale through an acquired module. As long as the tale continues to fulfill both cultural and biological conditions for

recognition and relevance, it will regularly be transmitted to provide relative stability to a culture.

Oral tales, as I have already stated, are thousands of years old and it is impossible to date and explain how they were generated, but they must have become vital for adapting to the environment and changes in the environment as soon as humans began to communicate through language. Whether there was such a cultural artifact as an oral wonder tale or fairy tale as we know it today in an oral form cannot be determined, although we do know through all kinds of archaeological evidence such as cave paintings, pottery, tombs, parchments, manuscripts, and scrolls that tales with fantastic creatures, magical transformation, and wondrous events were told and disseminated in tribes, groups, communities, and societies. As many of the tales became irrelevant and anachronistic, they were forgotten. But those that continued to have cultural significance were "imitated" and passed on, to be sure, never in the exact way they were first told. Bits and pieces, what we may call motifs, characters, topoi, plots, and images, were carried on and retold during the rise of early European civilization in Latin and vernacular languages and in many cases written down mainly by male scribes, many of them religious. Gradually, as tales were used to serve specific functions in court entertainment, homes, and taverns, on public squares, fields, and work places, and during rituals such as birth, marriage, death, harvest, initiation, and so on, they were distinguished by the minds of the members of a community and given special attention. Engendered as cultural artifacts they formed generic traits that made them appropriate for certain occasions. The cultural requirements were never so strict to prevent the tales from mixing with one another, becoming mixed, or borrowing from one another. There was never a pure oral wonder tale, myth, legend, or fable. But as humans became more discerning and their brains developed the cognitive capacity to recognize, refine, and retain specific narratives that spoke to the conditions in their environment about survival, they began to group, categorize, and shape diverse stories artistically to make better and more efficient use of them. All of this occurred long before print culture came to dominate artistic production in Europe.

Clearly, the generic nature of the literary fairy tale is related to the general evolution of oral folk tale types. Numerous scholars have set their studies of oral and literary tales in a sociohistorical context to arrive at definitions, categories, and types of the fairy tale. The focal points of these studies and their conclusions vary a great deal, and some even contradict one another; yet, they all *historicize* the conception of the fairy tale as a literary genre. Though it is clear that it is virtually impossible to date the "birth" of the literary fairy tale and to ascertain one single oral *Urform* that gave rise to it, we can certainly grasp those crucial social factors that contributed to the rise of the literary fairy tale as genre. This was the primary purpose of my early book *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*, in which I made use of Norbert Elias's ideas in *The Civilizing Process* to demonstrate how the literary fairy tale assumed a socializing function within the development of social codes, norms, and values. And this function can be considered one of its major generic attributes up to the present and may in part account for the fairy tale's widespread dissemination. However, I did not explore how the genre developed as a speech act or how it was stamped by "textual communities" during the Renaissance and baroque period in Italy, which may account for the consolidation of certain fairy tales as memes. I want to here return to the "origins" of the genre and consider its place in the civilizing process via insights provided by Mikhail Bakhtin, Tzvetan Todorov, Brian Stock, Jean-Michel Adam, and Ute Heidmann in an effort to contribute toward a theory of the literary fairy tale as genre that has in part been constituted by memes, depending on the cultural relevance of particular tales. Though it might be more prudent to use the term public representation to talk about the classical fairy tales, I shall continue to use the term meme in the broadest possible sense to denote a particular fairy tale that has been canonized in the Western world and become so memorable that it appears to be transmitted naturally by our minds to communicate information that alerts us to pay attention to a specific given situation on which our lives may depend.

At the heart—or should I say—brain of my theory is the proposition that the literary form of the fairy tale derives from speech acts that became significantly conventionalized and encoded within a community of like speakers who appropriated oral narratives in their own interest to

explore and discuss the rational bounds of social constructs of their own making that curb their instincts and to voice their desires and social and political concerns. As we shall see, the symbolic order established by literary fairy tales is not static, but it is certainly marked continually by recognizable recurring motifs, topoi, and conventions and has been framed by male hegemonic concerns. Within the borders of the oral and written frame there is a dialogue concerning gender-oriented rituals, social initiations, or the appropriate manner of behavior in specific situations. A product of civilization, the literary fairy tale, in contrast to the rough and raw folk tale, is very "civil." Paradoxically, the fairy tale creates disorder to create order and, at the same time, to give voice to utopian wishes and to ponder instinctual drives and gender, ethnic, family, and social conflicts. In doing so, it reflects upon and questions social codes to draw a response from readers/listeners. It communicates information. It selects that which has become relevant in a community to inform members of that community what has become crucial for adaptation to the environment in the most effective manner possible that might be entertaining and instructive. The writers/speakers of this genre knowingly play upon a scale of memorable and notable motifs, conventions, and topoi to engage the audience in a dialogue that harks back to a tradition of oral folk tales and literary fairy tales and refers to present and future social conflicts. The fairy tale acts through language to depict all kinds of issues and debates that concern socialization and civilization. Once a fairy tale has gelled or been artistically conceived so that it is ostentative, it seeks to perpetuate itself indiscriminately. Like the selfish gene, a fairy tale as meme is concerned with its own perpetuation and will adapt to changes and conflicts in the environment. Conditioned by fairy tales, we insist that the fairy tale act out these conflicts through conventionalized language and codes that stimulate a play with ideas.

We act as though fairy tales have always been with us. But this is not the case. There was a point in time when literary fairy tales were not expected and used in the manner that we expect and use them. To understand why this is the case means understanding the history of the genre, and it is at this point that I would like to turn to Bakhtin, Todorov, and Stock to clarify my position and to prepare the ground for an examination