

How fantasy became children's literature

Historians of children's literature begin their narratives in a variety of time periods, and with a specific range of texts, but these choices are not value neutral: each choice, for period or genre, tells the reader something about the historian's or critic's understanding of what childhood is, or what children's literature is. Children's fantasy has far stronger roots in tales of the fantastic than it does in tales for children: the history of children's fantasy is essentially one of appropriation, both children appropriating texts, and those who have written for children in the last three centuries appropriating and adapting their material for children. The close relationship between these processes may be one factor in the disproportionate representation of fantasy among those children's book titles which retain their popularity – beyond nostalgia – into the reading lives of adults.

Seth Lerer, in *Children's Literature: A Reader's History, from Aesop to Harry Potter* (2008), begins with the ancients and identifies children's literature less as a body of texts – which was generally shared with adults – than as a mode of delivery: the children of educated classical Greeks and Romans would have been introduced to the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*, but would have been taught in excerpts, with an emphasis on memory, recitation and quotation, so that the well-rounded citizen could draw on a common culture of citizenry.¹ This tradition lasted well into the twentieth century in the great British public schools and is well portrayed in that classic of children's literature, *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857) by Thomas Hughes. In this model of children's fiction, fiction is a thing *for* children, but not *of* them. It is a route out of childhood and into the adult world which does not treasure the child or childhood as something precious, and in which children's reading is contiguous with that of adults: it is primarily moralistic and therefore, as with Greek and Roman education, primarily civic.

This approach is valuable to the student of children's fantasy literature because much of what has become the matter (the themes or substance)

of children's fantasy, particularly in the British tradition, is drawn from a core of texts never intended for children. One such text is the beast fable. The beast fable was intended for all: it did not socialize people into the *civitas* in the way Greek and Roman education might, nor into the religious and social order as did the transmission of biblical stories, but it did teach children the arbitrariness and cruelty of the world, and taught them the moral values that they were to share with the adults who told the stories. The beast fable came to the British from the Greeks via the Romans: Aesop's fables were first translated into English by William Caxton in 1484. Despite the pre-Christian origins of Aesop's fables, they were absorbed into the English canon, their classical antecedents granting them respectability.² In *Aesop's Fables* we see the taproot of many modern tales: 'The Tortoise and the Hare' and 'The Shepherd and the Wolf' are just two of the more popular fables that have become regulars in cartoons and picture books. The fables capture two of the qualities that come to be associated with stories for children: the moral lesson, and the anthropomorphization of animal characters. The latter allows the poor to laugh at their superiors and the child at adults without threatening the social order while gaining a moral perspective on irrational behaviour: 'The Fox and the Stork', for example, is an early lesson in spite and status-seeking. We can see this rather brutal understanding of the adult world later in the work of Hans Christian Andersen, as in 'The Tale of the Ugly Duckling' (1843), in which in order to get on, you must reject the people who cared for you; in many stories in which rightful inheritance beats striving or self-education every time; or in Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1894), in which the animals share the pleasures and pains of human servants.

A beast fable, *Reynard the Fox*, appeared in an English translation by William Caxton in 1481. Here, the trickster clearly represents something darker and more subversive than in *Aesop's Fables*. The fable opens with the declaration that the book is for the good of readers, 'as far as they in reading or hearing of it shall mowe understand and feel the foresaid subtle deceits that daily ben used in the world, not to the intent that men should use them, but that every man should eschew and keep him from the subtle false shrews, that they be not deceived'.³

They weren't and we are not. This is clearly a cover story, unlikely to convince anyone of any age with an ounce of common sense. As the fable begins, Noble the Lion – portrayed as a medieval king – calls everyone to the court to bear witness against Reynard the Fox. Reynard declines the invitation, conscious that all have complaints against him. Beginning with the Wolf, each animal then enumerates the various ways

that Reynard has done them wrong: everything from pissing on the Wolf's children and sleeping with his wife to murdering Chanticleer the Rooster's daughter. The Fox's nephew, the Badger, defends Reynard, insisting, not very believably, 'that he is a gentle and true man. He may suffer no falsehood. He doth nothing but by his priest's counsel.'⁴

Unconvinced, the Lion sends a series of animals to bring Reynard in, forewarning each of them of the Fox's trickery. Reynard nevertheless succeeds in making a fool of each animal, playing on their vanity, gluttony or other vice. At one point Reynard agrees to make confession and recounts a long list of sins in delicious detail (one of the first examples we have of the gallows confession narrative, itself the beginnings of a new genre), but he soon returns to his immoral ways. Condemned to death by the King, the Fox, in his own defence, tells a long, involved and frankly preposterous tale in which he is positioned as the hero, attempting to save the King from the treachery of Bear and Wolf, and disclosing the location of a supposed treasure. Noble pardons Reynard and makes him an officer of his court. The tale continues at some length, with a series of variations on what has come before, and ends with the Fox triumphant, recounting his deeds to his wife and family.

This, as Roald Dahl demonstrated in his modern version, *Fantastic Mr Fox* (1970), is a tale designed to encourage emulation of the subversive; it teaches people to live in the world not through obedience, but through cleverness. Reynard tales vary, from simple trickster tales to ones of class warfare, and have proven far less tameable than the more realistic stories of Robin Hood. They point out and condemn vice, but they also show the sinner triumphant, using his golden tongue to talk his way out of trouble. These stories take pleasure in the subversion of the social order: the fifteenth-century German tale, *The Historie of Frier Rush*, first published in 1620 in England, which recounts the many comic high jinks of a devil who masquerades as a monk and wreaks havoc at a monastery, falls into a similar category: it is near the knuckle and is acceptable only because of its anti-Catholicism. The book's cover, which claims the work is 'full of pleasant mirth and delight for young people', reminds us that the accessibility of this material to the young was designed to inculcate in them *all* adult values, many of which involved hatred and contempt for others.

It seems clear that by the late sixteenth century, and well into the eighteenth century, virtually all the important works of literature available to adults were also being read to or by children of a surprisingly young age. Among these was a variety of literary works in many genres,

sometimes heavily redacted and modernized to make them suitable for contemporary audiences of various sorts, sometimes presented in abbreviated form in inexpensive chapbooks. These included romances, Christian allegories like John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), legends, fables, ballads, histories and fairy tales (*The History of Tom Thumbe* was published as early as 1621 and *Jack and the Gyants* in 1708) – indeed, any literary work with significant fantastic or adventure elements that might attract children. Worth mentioning here is even such a sophisticated work as Edmund Spenser's epic poem *The Faerie Queene* (1590) as well as the less complex (and now less well-known) *The Seven Champions of Christendom* (1596) by Richard Johnson. The first English-language translation of *The Arabian Nights* (1705), with its tales of Sinbad and Aladdin, was another among the many adult books quickly adopted by children.

The fantasy in many of these works may have been primarily intended (by those who made the books available to children) to be read as allegory or at least to be taken as morally serious, but it also seems probable that younger readers viewed Spenser's and Johnson's knights and dragons, and even the adventures of Bunyan's Christian, in a manner not all that different from how their modern counterparts see comparable characters in the work of J. R. R. Tolkien or Lloyd Alexander or in the deeply allegorical fantasies of C. S. Lewis. Renée Kennedy writes of Richard Johnson's *The History of the Seven Champions of Christendom* (1596): 'Although each of the Champions is accorded a title of sanctity, his heroic deeds and acts of virtue place him more in the company of knights and troubadours than among the beatified.'⁵ It is no surprise that Johnson's St George kills a dragon, but there is also a complex origin story for the saint that involves a Caesarean birth and kidnapping by a 'famous Enchantress', who raises the infant St George and later attempts to seduce him, and then gives him magical gifts before he uses his 'enchanted Wand' to trap her in a rock. The killing of the dragon is recounted with significant gusto:

Now as St. *George* entered the Valley, and came near to the Cave, the Dragon espied him, and sent forth such a terrible Bellowing as if all the Devils in Hell had been present. St. *George* was never a whit daunted, but spurred his Horse and ran outrageously at him; but his Scales being harder than any Brass, he shivered his Spear in a thousand Pieces; and withal smote St. *George* so hard with his Wings and Tail, that he struck him down from his Horse, and bruited him fore.⁶

The other saints, including Andrew of Scotland and Patrick of Ireland, have almost as much fun rescuing maidens in distress, killing monsters

and the like. *The Seven Champions of Christendom* was published as an inexpensive chapbook available to a wide variety of readers, including children.

John Bunyan himself confessed a guilty love for *The Seven Champions* in his childhood, along with the equally exciting tale of *Bevis of Hampton*: 'Give me a ballad, a news-book, George on horseback, or Bevis of Southampton; give me some book that teaches curious arts, that tells of old fables; but for the holy Scriptures I cared not.' Admittedly, he made this confession in the work *A Few Sighs from Hell, or The Groans of the Damned Soul* in which, while admitting that fantastical tales appeal to children, he did not consider this a good thing.⁷ To the religious of his sort, books written for children were acceptable only if they were aimed at either the development of basic literacy skills or the teaching of Christian morals. Yet the Puritans did retain a taste for the dark and fantastic, as in Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), and for the allegorical, as in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), as well as a sense of wonder, as seen in the nature-worship poems in Isaac Watts's *Divine Songs Attempted in Easy Language for the Use of Children* (1715). *The Arabian Nights* on the other hand may have been seen as without redeeming moral value, which may have speeded its way into English culture, first through chapbooks and later in the racy and lower-class entertainment of the pantomime.

Perrault, fairy tales and the French court

Despite, or perhaps because of the rational turn of the Renaissance, a formalization and elevation of the folk tale began in the middle of the sixteenth century and carried on into the Enlightenment, first in Italy and then France. The great French historian Philippe Ariès points to the tremendous popularity of folk tales with the French nobility.⁸ Among the most significant collectors were Giovanni Straparola, whose *Le Piacevoli Notte* (1550–3) includes well-known variants of 'Puss in Boots' and 'Iron John'; Giambattista Basile, whose *Il Pentamerone* (1634–6) includes the first published version of 'Rapunzel'; Charles Perrault, whose *Tales and Stories of the Past with Morals* (1697), subtitled *Tales of Mother Goose*, includes well-known variants of 'Little Red Riding Hood', 'Sleeping Beauty', 'Puss in Boots' and 'Cinderella'; Madame D'Aulnoy, whose *Les contes des fées* (1697), many of which appear to be both her own creations and very clearly intended for adults, featured the first use of the term 'fairy tale'; and Charles-Joseph de Mayer, whose forty-one-volume

Charles Perrault (1628–1703) was born into wealth and opted for a career in government service. In 1669 he advised King Louis XIV to include more than three dozen fountains with sculptures of characters from *Aesop's Fables* in the new gardens at Versailles, thus beginning his association with the literature of the fantastic. Perrault is credited with initiating the long-running argument over the relative quality of ancient versus modern writers that was still being fought in Tolkien's day. He sided with the moderns. Perrault's *Tales of Mother Goose* made him famous beyond court circles and, although many of his stories are based on earlier published 'folk tales', it is his versions, along with those of the Brothers Grimm, that have come down to us in the present day. Among his best-known tales are 'Sleeping Beauty', 'Little Red Riding Hood', 'Puss in Boots' and 'Cinderella'.

Le cabinet des fées (1785–9) anthologized most of the significant tales published in the two previous centuries.

At one time such collections (with the exception, perhaps, of Madame d'Aulnoy's *Les contes des fées*) were regarded as comprising largely traditional tales, the result of the collectors having taken careful notes from the (generally) poor folk who had transmitted the tales down through the years in various supposedly authentic forms. However, most of these collectors rewrote their stories to varying degrees to make them more appealing to their primary audiences – in Perrault's case, an upper class that was in part bourgeois and in part aristocratic, and, in the Grimms' case, an almost exclusively bourgeois audience. Lerer suggests that the first published French fairy tales were 'exemplary fables for the courtier adults. They taught ideal behaviour ... They contributed to the mythology of courtliness and kingship'; he describes Perrault as 'the best and most widely read of these tale-tellers'.⁹ By the eighteenth century these collections were seeping into the English market: Perrault first appeared in English in Robert Samber's 1729 translation, while Madame d'Aulnoy's fairy tales were translated in 1752.

The prominent fairy tale scholar Jack Zipes argues that as the bourgeoisie gained increasing economic power in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in both France and England, and as their interests gradually merged with those of the aristocracy, fairy tales were one of the tools that proved useful in what was, in part, an educational process.¹⁰ Perrault sought to merge bourgeois and aristocratic ideas and produce a somewhat more homogeneous and controllable national culture (although evidently such merging could not bridge the class divides that culminated in revolution).

As part of this process, by the end of the seventeenth century, childhood was conceived of as a state of natural innocence, and therefore potentially corruptible, and the civilizing of children – a process of social indoctrination through anxiety-provoking effects and positive reinforcement – operated on all levels in manners, speech, sex, literature and play. Instincts were to be trained and harnessed to sociopolitical values. The supervised rearing of children was to lead to the *homme civilisé*. Thus it was ‘not by chance that Perrault and the women writers of the 1690s created their fairy tales for the most part to express their views about young people and to prepare them for roles that they idealistically believed they should play in society’.¹¹ This is of central importance. This role for the fairy tale helps to explain why it became an entry point for women into literature, as the perceived responsibility for the moral education of children was gradually shifting from men to women.

Although Perrault often appears as the towering figure engaged in this work in France, of equal importance were the aristocratic women who created and popularized fairy tales in the salons of the seventeenth century. Among those now largely forgotten women are the above-mentioned Madame d’Aulnoy, Madame de Murat, Mademoiselle L’Héritier and Mademoiselle de La Force. Zipes (citing Renate Baader) points out that while the tales of Perrault and other male fairy tale producers generally emphasized wifely obedience, women ‘commonly refused to place themselves in the service of social mobility. Instead, they put forward their demand for moral, intellectual, and psychological self-determination.’¹² In doing so, they operated in the one sphere that was theirs, child-rearing.

Ariès writes that even as fairy tales were gaining popularity in the French court in the late seventeenth century, there was significant debate over the extent to which such stories were appropriate for adults or for children. Perrault’s tales, Ariès insists, were, at least in principle for children, though widely loved at court, while other collections were ‘more serious work meant for grown-ups, from which children and the lower orders were excluded’.¹³ Yet there is a clear sense in the collections of Madame Leprince de Beaumont that children – or at least older children – *were* the intended audience. De Beaumont, then living in England and working as a governess for the children of the Prince of Wales, first published ‘Beauty and the Beast’ in her *Le magasin des enfants* in 1756 (it appeared in English in *The Young Misses Magazine*, 1765), a publication specifically aimed at upper-class girls, and it was intended to teach good manners.

The tale itself was not original. It had already taken on a recognizable shape in Madame Gabrielle de Villeneuve’s ‘Beauty and the Beast’ (1740),

which served as the basis for de Beaumont's tale. In de Villeneuve's version of the tale Beauty is but one of six children of a wealthy merchant. Her two sisters are less beautiful than she is, and less sweet-natured, though little is made of this. In de Beaumont's retelling, however, we are specifically told that Beauty's sisters are not as good as she is because they are beset by pride. 'They gave themselves ridiculous airs, and would not visit other merchants' daughters, nor keep company with any but persons of quality. They went out every day upon parties of pleasure, balls, plays, concerts &c. and laughed at their younger sister, because she spent the greatest part of her time reading good books.'¹⁴ The older sisters snub appropriate suitors, telling them that they will marry no one beneath the rank of earl, whereas Beauty thanks her suitors, but 'correctly' tells them that she is as yet too young to consider marriage. When the merchant loses almost everything, his older daughters forsake him, mistakenly assuming that their lovers will still marry them without their wealth, and the narrator tells us that 'every body' castigates them, saying 'we are very glad to see their pride humbled; let them go and give themselves quality-airs in milking the cows and minding their dairy'.¹⁵ Beauty, however, is pitied by that same 'every body', because she is 'a charming, sweet-tempered creature' who speaks 'kindly to poor people'.¹⁶ She continues to refuse suitors, who would happily marry her though she is poor, and goes to live with her family in a small 'country-house'. The merchant, although much reduced, is still far from destitute, even owning a harpsichord, which Beauty plays, though only after all of her chores are done. Her sisters, of course, will do nothing but complain and the tale continues in this manner at some length. Beauty has her expected romance with the Beast and the story concludes with her visit home – where she discovers her sisters happily married – the delay of her return to the Beast, and her resolve: 'It is true, I do not feel the tenderness of affection for him, but I find I have the highest gratitude, esteem and friendship; and I will not make him miserable: were I to be so ungrateful, I should never forgive myself.'¹⁷ De Beaumont thus sets forth the ground rules for making decisions about marriage; 'tenderness of affection', what we would call romantic love, is not necessary, nor are wits or good looks, so long as one feels gratitude, esteem and friendship.

De Beaumont's 'Beauty and the Beast' is set within a larger, more or less realistic narrative or framing device in which a governess, Mrs Affable, tells stories or teaches lessons to a group of girls under her care, Lady Charlotte, Lady Witty and others. After she finishes telling them 'Beauty and the Beast' the girls discuss the tale, going over and agreeing

with its lessons, and one of them, Miss Molly, notes in support of the story and apropos of ugliness that when her father 'first took a little black to be his foot-boy, I was afraid of him, and hid myself when he came in; but by little and little I grew used to him, and now he lifts me into the coach when I go abroad; I never so much as think of his face'.¹⁸ Although popular in its day, de Beaumont's tale was also criticized for its focus on feminine virtue and its willingness to let children be children: the idea that fairy tales were *for* children was still somewhat uncomfortable.

A Grimm business in Germany

Which brings us at last to the Brothers Grimm. It may come as no surprise to any experienced teacher of children's literature that, when asked to discuss the original version of many fairy tales (or *Märchen* in German), from Cinderella to Snow White to Sleeping Beauty to The Little Mermaid to Beauty and the Beast, most college students taking children's literature classes will automatically assume that the teacher is referring to the Walt Disney versions of those tales. So deeply has the Disney dream-machine infested Western culture that the actual creators or collectors of these stories, from Perrault to de Beaumont to the Grimms to Andersen, are seen by most non-scholars as secondary creators. Our students have usually heard of the Grimms and may vaguely

Jacob (1785–1863) and Wilhelm Grimm (1786–1859) had what might be the ideal childhood for men bent upon literary success. Raised in moderate wealth by a hard-working lawyer father, they received a classical education. Then their father died abruptly when Jacob, the eldest of six children, was just eleven, leaving the family in dire poverty and forcing both him and Wilhelm to grow up rather quickly. Two years later, however, a well-to-do aunt secured them a place in a prestigious *Lyzeum* as well as financial support for the family. Contemporary evidence shows that the boys were under great pressure to succeed. Mistreated as scholarship boys, they developed, moreover, a keen appreciation of class differences and political oppression. Because of their low social status, they were only allowed into law school at the University of Marburg by special dispensation, despite outstanding grades. There they once again faced discrimination. Although both brothers had studied law, they also had a predilection for literature and in 1806, at the request of Clemens Brentano, a well-known author of the time, they began collecting both oral and literary tales. In a few years both men had established themselves as scholars of folk literature with significant publications, and in 1812 came their first volume of collected tales, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, complete with copious scholarly annotations.

be aware that they predate Disney, but for most of them this is irrelevant. Yet there was a time when the Grimms bestrode the world of fairy tale every bit as much as Disney does today, and were given the credit they deserved – sometimes more than they deserved – for their work.

The Germany in which the Grimms grew up was fragmented into many small principalities, some of whose rulers were despots, and the country suffered much from the violence of the Napoleonic Wars. Jacob and Wilhelm were deeply invested in the idea of a unified and peaceful Germany and Jacob was politically active as early as 1814, when he became a member of the Hessian Peace Delegation. Later both brothers became professors at the prestigious University of Göttingen where they carried on their careers as important scholars of folklore and linguistics, though both were forced to resign for their part in a political protest in 1837. This pattern continued for much of their lives: scholarly success and liberal political activism, followed by political repression as a consequence. Both brothers saw their work on German folklore and linguistics as patriotic, part of an effort to foster a just and united Germany.

Popular belief has it that the Grimms went out into the countryside like modern collectors, taking accurate dictation from the common folk. This, however, is not the case; they invited both amateur and professional storytellers to visit them and tell their tales. Most were well-educated young women who told stories they had heard from their servants or nursemaids. The Grimms were thus, more often than not, collecting at at least one remove from the actual folk. Some related tales that they had read in their childhood – stories at least two generations removed from their oral roots. Further, the Grimms took some of their narratives from already published materials, which they rewrote to their own satisfaction.

The enthusiasm with which the tales have been received by children, however, may reflect precisely the degree to which they are *not* suitable but rather transgressive, at least in the minds of their child readers, touching on matters that adults may think are naughty or taboo. One example of this inappropriateness is 'The Story of the Youth who Went Forth to Learn what Fear was'; this story, of a boy seeking to learn how to shudder, could be the ancestor of all scout campfire tales as well as R. L. Stine's *Goosebumps* series (1992–7). 'Hansel and Gretel', with its tale of abuse and abandonment and the dangers of having a stepmother, is rooted in a commonplace situation, due to the period's high childbirth mortality (higher than in previous eras thanks to the participation of doctors with multiple patients). The German *Märchen* seem to delight in a studied brutality and remorselessness. The daughter in the Grimms'

version of Cinderella (Aschenputtel) is brutalized by her father as well as her stepmother.

English fairy tales, Mrs Teachum and Mrs Trimmer

Turning away from stories that were not created with children in mind, we will now discuss literature which was specifically *designed* for children. Jack Zipes argues that 'it is absurd to date the origin of the literary fairy tale for children with the publication of Perrault's tales'.¹⁹ Zipes instead references the later publication of inexpensive chapbooks of fairy tales in the 1720s as the true origin of published work of this sort for young audiences. Yet the texts discussed so far, however much they were enjoyed by children, were not child-directed texts but written for adults; and sometimes they were not texts at all but oral narratives accessible to all. As reading became an increasingly important skill in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – moving from a professional skill to an indication of elite status, then to a key requirement for accessing the new Protestantism and artisan or middle-class status – the tools of teaching became more formalized.

The first tools of literacy with which most English children of the sixteenth century would have become familiar were hornbooks, containing their ABCs, or perhaps what were known as 'abcie books' which might contain not just the alphabet and basic numbers, but a catechism. Eventually a variety of books designed to teach proper grammar began to appear, starting with John Hart's illustrated primer *A Methode, or Comfortable Beginning for All Unlearned* (1570). Works of educational theory, in some cases using that term very loosely, were also increasingly common, most importantly Roger Ascham's influential *The Schoolmaster* (1570), which centred on the teaching of Latin but emphasized the necessity for teachers to be firm and persuasive rather than abusive in their methods.²⁰

A century or so later educational theory reached a high point with John Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), which became the most influential English-language book on educating children in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Locke's book, although written for gentlemen and not entirely original in its ideas, presented the notion that we are all *tabulae rasae*, blank slates, at birth, thus implying that anyone, even a commoner, has the ability to learn and be successful. Further, writing in clear, easy-to-understand English, he popularized the idea that other things besides the classics were worth reading and learning. Finally,

Locke emphasized that even small children should be treated as rational beings. Thus there was a gradual change in the mid seventeenth century from material exclusively aimed at children who could read Latin to works like James Janeway's pioneering, pre-Lockean *A Token for Children* (1671), which told didactic stories about good children in English, and William Ronksley's *The Child's Weeks-Work* (1712), which featured a variety of verses, riddles, jokes and short fables. Locke's philosophy was increasingly reflected in such works.

A candidate for the role of first popularizer of fairy tales directed at children, at least in English, is Robert Samber, whose 1729 English-language version of Perrault's work, *Histories, or Tales of Past Times told by Mother Goose*, helped transform public opinion on this issue. Sarah Fielding's *The Governess; or The Little Female Academy* (1749) was the first novel written expressly for children and contains within it 'The Story of the cruel Giant Barbarico, the good Giant Benefico, and the pretty little Dwarf Mignon', a beauty-and-the-beast type of story which predates the publication of de Beaumont's 'Beauty and the Beast' by more than a decade. In Sarah Fielding's work we encounter what would become a nineteenth-century trend, the remaking of fairy tales in the interests of children's literature. In a closed narrative or club story (a tale told within a frame story), Mrs Teachum allows the fairy tale to be told by Jenny, a student, as a reward for her good behaviour. In the tale the giant Barbarico is totally evil, a murderer and a cannibal, while his smaller compatriot, Benefico, despite being a giant, is entirely good, and has devoted his life to trying to repair the damage Barbarico does. Coming upon a pair of lovers, Fidus and Amata (a gesture by Fielding towards the pastoral tradition), Barbarico scares the latter to death and carts the former off to his cave for torture. Fidus soon meets the giant's kind slave, Mignon, who consoles him with the promise that both will one day escape Barbarico's clutches. Eventually Mignon discovers a magical fillet (or headband), which he manages to tie around the giant's neck, rendering him helpless before freeing the giant's many other prisoners and sending for the good Benefico to cut off Barbarico's head.

After hearing the tale, Mrs Teachum insists that 'giants, magic, fairies, and all sorts of supernatural assistances in a story, are only introduced to amuse and divert: for a giant is called so only to express a man of great power; and the magic fillet round the statue was intended only to shew you, that by patience you will overcome all difficulties'.²¹ The fantastical, it seems, is only valid as a teaching device, and has little or no legitimacy or moral value in its own right. This warning is also repeated later, for, as

Mrs Teachum insists, 'if the story is well written, the common course of things would produce the same incidence, without the help of fairies'.²² Thus the use of the supernatural should be seen as amusing but, at the same time, as an indicator of the storyteller's immaturity or lack of skill. What is noticeable, however, is the shift from the random and malicious punishment in the earlier stories to something much more controlled and set within the social order. This taming of fairy stories became a trope in the nineteenth century as a clear trend to turn the fairy tale towards a discrete child audience.

Benjamin Tabart's *Collection of Popular Stories for the Nursery* (1804) was the first volume of such tales specifically advertised as for children; Tabart also published the first known version of *Jack and the Bean-Stalk* (1807). Like Tabart, later collectors and eventually Andrew Lang (beginning with *The Red Fairy Book* in 1890) tended to shape their tales in ways either more likely to appeal to children or, perhaps, less likely to make the parents of child readers nervous. Thus nineteenth-century folk and fairy tale collections meant for children were written in somewhat simpler language and with less emphasis on romance and abstractions, while at the same time reflecting the middle-class morality of their day. The Victorians themselves had an explanation which seems correct as far as it goes, but which doesn't go far. They said it was simply a reflection of moral progress in the real world.

A new group of censors was arising, the most influential of whom were the conservative and prolific children's writer Sarah Trimmer (1741–1810); Thomas Bowdler (1754–1825), who published a *Family Shakespeare* (1807) carefully edited to remove all obscenities, leading to the term 'bowdlerize'; Maria Edgeworth (1768–1849), who also had a major impact on American children's literature; and Mary Sherwood (1775–1851), who produced an edition of Fielding's *The Governess* in 1820 which increased its religious content while revising its fairy stories to more closely reflect the morality of the day. Although these writers and editors differed in their views on the fantastic (not to mention in their actual literary talent), their tendency to disapprove of it is clear. Fielding may have felt that the development of the imagination played a legitimate role in the education of the young, but others, particularly the self-appointed guardians of children's literature, disagreed. The influential (and aptly named) Mrs Trimmer, the first critic to review children's books on a regular basis, and in fact the first to attempt to set up a canon of children's literature, did not entirely despise fairy tales, if they avoided violence and had properly Christian morals, but very few such works fulfilled her criteria. She was

unable to 'approve of those [tales] which are only fit to fill the heads of children with confusing notions of wonderful and supernatural events, brought about by the agency of imaginary beings'.²³ Although she could remember the interest with which she read or listened to 'Red Riding Hood' and 'Blue Beard' in her 'childish days', she wanted to save future generations from this experience because 'the terrific images which tales of this nature present to the imagination, usually make deep impressions, and injure the tender minds of children, by exciting unreasonable and groundless fears'.²⁴

Mrs Trimmer was even more hostile to the excesses of *Cinderella*, which 'paints some of the worst passions that can enter into the human breast',²⁵ and she was deeply critical of the fairy tale collections of Perrault, d'Aulnoy and Tabart. Despite the growth of Romanticism in the literary culture of her day, Mrs Trimmer's stated goal was to replace the fairy tales that even she remembered fondly with only the most moral and non-violent of fables and Bible stories. Paradoxically, however, her viewpoint, which tended to denigrate the fantastic as inappropriate for both children and adults but never actually forbade it, still left it available (if sometimes in what the French sometimes called *livres châtrés* or castrated books) for those of all ages who were less worried about being appropriate in their reading. Some years later, the ever-so-practical Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, founded in 1826, did its best to eradicate the Gothic in children's literature for all social classes.

Defending the imagination

For every Mrs Trimmer or Thomas Bowdler, terrified that children's minds might be damaged by the dark and the fantastic, there were other, perhaps less respectable, voices raised in defence of the imagination. It seems probable that fantasy literature in the modern sense, whether written for adults or children, comes mostly from Romanticism and its interest in various folk traditions.²⁶ *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) by Coleridge and Wordsworth, and Coleridge's *Christabel and Other Poems* (1816), are particularly significant texts. In Germany, Ludwig Tieck, Wilhelm Hauff and other Romantics began to write their own literary folk tales, aimed primarily or exclusively at an adult audience but, again, available to and of interest to children. Writers as diverse as Samuel Johnson and Thomas Carlyle remembered their youthful reading of fairy and folk tales with great and unrepentant pleasure and Samuel Taylor Coleridge in a letter to Thomas Poole, dated 16 October 1797, strongly defended the value of

the fantastic, writing that 'from my early reading of fairy tales and genii, etc., etc., my mind had been habituated to *the Vast*'. He then went on to state rhetorically, 'I know no other way of giving the mind a love of the Great and the Whole. Those who have been led to the same truths step by step, through the constant testimony of their senses, seem to me to want a sense which I possess. They contemplate nothing but *parts*, and all *parts* are necessarily little. And the universe to them is but a mass of *little things*.'²⁷ For Coleridge the reading of fantastic literature was quite literally necessary, both for children and adults, to open their minds to the most important metaphysical and presumably religious issues of all.

Unfortunately, by the mid to late eighteenth century the increasing demand for literature acceptable to parents had led to the denaturing of challenging adult works in versions specifically for child readers (rather than, as before, in versions for a more refined class). This practice was not entirely new, of course; abridged editions of *The Pilgrim's Progress* had been commonly given to children to read for many years. Literary works like Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726, amended 1735) became available not only in condensed chapbook form but in shortened, expurgated editions, deemed safe for children's more susceptible minds.

Perhaps the most notable example of the denaturing of a classic work of the fantastic imagination occurred with *Gulliver's Travels*. In its original form the book is a barbed, often obscene and sometimes very dark satire on the politics of Swift's day and on human nature in general. Recognized as a classic soon after its publication, *Gulliver's Travels* managed to avoid bowdlerization for many years: it went through some sixty editions between its initial publication in 1726 and the end of the eighteenth century, none of which were expurgated or amended. But in the early nineteenth century, this all changed. Between 1800 and 1900 it went through another 150 editions, more than half of which were cut, mostly to expurgate the satire and the scatological humour, until in the twentieth century many children only encountered the first two of Gulliver's voyages, in contexts which suggested that both were intended as parables of childhood.

Shakespeare was as significant a purveyor of fantasy as Swift, and at the beginning of the nineteenth century he too was bowdlerized. Charles Lamb (1775–1834) and his sister Mary Lamb (1764–1847), in the much-loved *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807), toned down, rendered obscure or removed entirely all of Shakespeare's explicitly or implicitly violent or sexual elements. The result is that as we enter the nineteenth

century both children's literature and the fantastic were becoming shaped by ideologies of confinement: both were being restricted to the domestic sphere and to a narrow moral compass.

Yet the movement was not all in one direction. The Gothic novel began its rise to popularity in Britain at exactly the same historical moment as the fairy tale: even as fairy tales were being expurgated to make them suitable to a new notion of the child as innocent – as needing shelter from premature exposure to adult society – the rise of the Gothic, some felt, was undermining the purity of the teen reader, and in particular the emerging girl reader, as literacy rates among women began to climb. As Anna Jackson and her co-editors argue in *The Gothic in Children's Literature*, despite all attempts to suppress such stories and provide more edifying substitutes, 'Children ... have always had a predilection for what we now categorize as the Gothic, for ghosts and goblins, hauntings and horrors, fear and the pretence of fear.'²⁸ The Gothic novel has its schlock classics, like Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and Mrs Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), but also its Great Classics, such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847). In place of the brutality of folk tales it offered corruption; in place of moral guidance it proffered temptation.