Romanticizing the War Through the Imaginative Space of Fairy Tales

Introduction to The Allies' Fairy Book

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Children's Books and War, Fairy Tales

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Heroism, bravery, violence, romance, villainy and a love of the land are just some of the important themes found in fairy tales. These themes can also be seen in discourses surrounding the Great War. More specifically, such fairy tale motifs are integrated with the historical context of the Great War in The Allies' Fairy Book (Fig. 1), a compilation of fairy tales published in 1916 by William Heinemann and J.B. Lippincott, and illustrated by Arthur Rackham. Heinemann was a man in favour of the war effort, and J. Lippincott was a children’s publisher and author himself, which gives insight into their interest in this project (St. John 157; Kokkola). An edition of this text was also circulated in Toronto in 1916 by S. B. Gundy (“The Allies’ Fairy”). The Heinemann and Lippincott edition is housed today in the Children’s Literature Archive at Ryerson University.

Often, the influence of the Great War on both women and children is underestimated. However, children experienced loss of loved ones and were proven to be very much aware of and involved in the war (Gillis and Short). This exhibit will explore the imaginative space of the fairy tale as ideal for selling the themes of war to children. Although not explicitly, these particular fairy tales are resurrected from existing repertoires and employed as propagandistic tools to familiarize children with wartime ideologies such as violence. These tales of fantasy also serve as a form of reassurance for children of the Great War that eventual safety, security and a “happily ever after” are guaranteed.

Summary
The Allies' Fairy Book is a collection of thirteen fairy tales from eleven Allied nations of 1916. English, Welsh, Scotch, Irish, French, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, Serbian and Belgian countries each are represented by one tale, as well as three shorter Japanese tales. The introduction by Edmund Gosse claims that although these stories have been connected with the folk lore of many nations at different points in time, the form of each story chosen for this particular publication is characteristic of the country with which they are associated in the fairy book (Gosse ix). Although each collected tale is different, many of them share common themes and classic fairy tale tropes including the brave hero, the three part quest structure, the villain and the “happily ever after” ending.

Throughout the book are eleven full page colour illustrations and a frontispiece (fig. 2) depicting scenes from the fairy tales, as well as smaller monotone illustrations all created by Arthur Rackham. Rackham was one of the foremost illustrators of his time and with the onset of war, he was involved in numerous publications of a patriotic nature, like The Allies’ Fairy Book (Hudson 104).

Selling the War: Fairy Tales as a Tool of Wartime Propaganda

Often, literature is contextual in nature and may be used in different ways depending on socio-historical factors. Denise Escarpit as cited by Zipes, notes that, “According to how a tale was cloaked, it could assume very diverse forms that were functions of social and cultural imperatives” (Zipes 9). Although the fairy tales collected in The Allies’ Fairy Book are not written specifically for the purposes of wartime propaganda, popular children’s literature forms, like fairy tales or picture books, become invested with new meanings because of the surrounding context of war (Johnson 60). As the preface to The Allies’ Fairy Book states, “It is when the hearts of country folk are hushed and silent that the mysterious voices of goblins are heard calling...” (Gosse xii). Well known stories are therefore brought back in unstable times to serve a new, political purpose.

Wartime propaganda began in 1914 as an emphasis on values such as patriotism and duty (Simmonds 227). These meanings are latent in fairy tales and can be drawn out only by looking at the themes of these pre-established tales and matching them with similar wartime ideologies. For example, the themes of patriotism and allied interdependence are found in the Welsh tale, “Llud and Llevelys” (Fig. 3.) In this story, one brother rules over France, and one over Britain. When three plagues fall on Britain,
The child was expected to carry on as normal during the Great War on the home front, and these fairy tales provided a means of coming to understand and accept the effects of war (Gillis and Short). Thus children, presented early on with ideals of patriotism and nationalism, become familiar enough with war to stand in good faith if ever called to support their state (Johnson 65).

Binding the Allied Nations Through a “National Literature”

One propagandistic aspect of this book is in the title of the work itself. Naming the collection *The Allies’ Fairy Book* carries with it the suggestion of commonalities among the allied countries of 1916. The familiar “once upon a time” narrative is one that is native to the fairy tale genre in general, despite the individual national characteristics of different tales (“Once Upon” 47-48). The idea that a book of fairy tales has been created specifically for citizens of allied countries evokes a common heritage in their folklore. This is affirmed in the introduction by Gosse which notes that “We have not forgotten the almost universal distribution of fairy-tales, and the uniformity with which a certain tradition reappears in the legends of one country after another” (Gosse xii). The children who read this book could understand their own individual nation in relation with the other allied countries mentioned, and could imagine where they fit in on an international level.

The Brave Fairy Tale Hero and the Glorification of Violence

One of the main audiences for the text at the time of its production was young children as it was historically advertised as a beautiful Christmas book for children and was targeted to children in newspapers right through to 1918, the final year of the Great War (“Books for Children” 16). Ideals of the war could therefore be sold to children latently through these fairy tales.

Fairy tales are invested with new meanings due to the context of war, and thus the glorification of violence can be transferred from the pages of *The Allies’ Fairy Book*, to the real experiences of the child living through political and social upheaval. Cesarino valiantly slays the dragon and is met with celebration in “Cesarino and the Dragon” and the king’s son is thanked heartily for helping a raven defeat and behead a snake in a great battle between animals in “Battle of the Birds ” (Gosse). *The Allies’ Fairy Book* does not shy away from violence and in fact, celebrates the brave hero committing the violent acts. The question then becomes, how does this impact child readers living through the Great War?

On the one hand, the child is fascinated not by the upward social mobility in fairy tales, but by the avenging of dragons and the overcoming of plagues in the two brothers come together to free the land of the plagues and live in peaceful prosperity from then on. Although the allied connection was non-existent prior to 1914 when this tale was originally created, the contemporary child of the Great War may imbue the text with this meaning of international camaraderie between allied countries due to the historical moment they are living in.
Fig. 4. Arthur Rackham. “He Tumbled into the pit and made the very foundations of the mount to shake.” Illustration for “Jack the Giant Killer” in The Allies Fairy Book, p. 3.

Wartime Values in Rackham’s Illustrations

All editions of The Allies’ Fairy Book are illustrated by popular children’s literature illustrator of the time, Arthur Rackham. It was not unusual for Rackham to sign deals with both American and European publishers in order to increase the printing numbers and thus widen the geographical area of reception (St. John 105). Rackham was an important name to have attached to such a work and his illustrations proved to be a big selling point for buyers at the time. Evidence of this is seen in the fact that a special deluxe edition of only 525 copies was created and signed by Rackham to be sold to collectors (Hudson 169-170). It was common for Rackham to create these special editions on handmade paper, number and sign them and then sell them at a much higher price than trade copies which shows that people were willing to pay for an original and personalized Rackham work (St. John 105). Also, the fact that many historical advertisements have The Allies’ Fairy Book listed under headings such as “This Years’ Rackham” supports the idea that his drawings were indeed a main selling feature (“Heinemann’s” 535). Thus, one of the major targeted audiences for the book was collectors of the illustrator’s work.

However, there is also more to fairy tales than the external action. As Tatar suggests, there is a question as to whether fairy tales can serve as an antidote to feelings of defenselessness during the period of war (238). To this end, symbolic wish fulfillment or the “liberating potential of the fantastic” as Zipes calls it, plays a part as well (Tatar 242). In the imaginative space of the fairy tale, children can see their own experiences of danger and trauma located at a distance in the “once upon a time” of the fairy tale and see the potential for safety and security provided by the “happily ever after” (Tatar 242). For example, Little Peachling in the Japanese tale, “The Adventures of Little Peachling,” battles with a band of ogres and takes their king prisoner in order that the conquered ogres will hand over their treasures (Gosse 86). Little Peachling brings his winnings home to his foster parents and they all live in eternal peace. Although the story does not relate directly to the experience of war, the prospect of a peaceful outcome for the brave protagonist following violent battle serves as symbolic reassurance for the child living through a period of total upheaval.
Link to CLA catalogue entry for *The Allies’ Fairy Book*

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**Works Cited**


Female Dominance in a Fantasy World; Exploring the Fairy Hierarchy of Genders in Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens.

© December 24, 2011 ▶ 2011, Fairies 🌝 Arthur Rackham, J.M. Barrie, May Byron, Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens ⬅ jminaker

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May Byron’s Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens: Retold for Little People, illustrated by Arthur Rackham, is a retelling of J.M. Barrie’s iconic and popular fairytale, Peter Pan. Published in 1930 and found in the Children’s Literature Archive, this story explores the many adventures of Peter Pan, the boy who doesn’t want to grow up, as a baby in the enchanted Kensington Gardens.

Talking animals, magical creatures and mystical fairies introduce Peter Pan to a fantasy realm. The role of fairies is an extremely prominent element in the book. Through various illustrations and text descriptions of the fairies, the reader is shown a matriarchal society in which the female fairies are empowered and dominant. In
In the first section of this Biblio-Digital presentation, Rebecca Butcher explores the relationship between the text descriptions and illustrations of fairies, focusing on the female dominance within the fairy realm. In the second section, Jamie Minaker examines the historical context of the perception of females in the Edwardian society. This Biblio-Digital presentation demonstrates the stark contrast between the fantasy matriarchal society of the fairies within the story and society's actual patriarchal supremacy during the Edwardian period.

Curatorial Commentary on Category

Female fairies within May Byron’s Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens: Retold for Little People, are portrayed as dominant and empowered compared to their male counterparts who are shown as inferior and weak. The female fairies are represented as magical, mystical creatures that rule the Gardens at night. Female fairies are a constant theme within the text and illustrations, which help the reader become aware of the matriarchal society in which the fairies live. Ruled and governed by Queen Mab, the predominant female society of fairies favours the female gender and considers them to be of higher class. The sharp contrast between hierarchy and genders is depicted throughout the story with multiple text descriptions and various illustrations created by Arthur Rackham.

Illustrations

In the majority of the illustrations, the differences between the genders of fairies are extremely noticeable. Arthur Rackham defines the genders of the fairies by using extreme opposite characteristics. By using different illustration techniques to show the contrast of genders, Arthur Rackham is able to portray to the readers the hierarchy within the fairy society. This can be seen in Fig. 1.

The female fairies in this illustration are depicted as elegant and embody the perfect Victorian beauty; perfectly proportioned, thin-limbed, white-skinned with long, curly auburn hair (Riley 29). The female fairies are wearing long, flowing gowns with flowers in their hair. They are portrayed as natural and delicate beauties. Although they are mystical creatures, their facial features resemble those of a human woman. The hierarchy between the genders of fairies is very noticeable in this illustration with women wearing stylized female dresses and hairstyles while the males wear lower class attire (Riley 27). Clearly the female fairies are considered to be from a higher class than male fairies. This shows the female dominance over males. In many illustrations, the male fairies are illustrated as having grotesque features and tiny-framed bodies. Compared to the joyous, positive smiles of the female fairies, the male fairies wear mischievous grins or brutish frowns, suggesting the male fairies are a source of negative energy and behaviour (Atzmon 67). A number of the male fairies have elongated facial features, which resembles more of an animal than a human man. The males do not appear to be powerful or strong. The female fairies are considerably taller than the male fairies, creating a sense of empowerment and authority.
Arthur Rackham’s conspicuous placements of the fairies within the illustrations also help show the female fairies as the dominant gender. This is portrayed in Fig. 2. This illustration shows the female fairies in the foreground, with the male fairies behind a barred fence in the background. Since the female fairies are placed in the foreground of the illustration, the reader’s eyes are directly drawn to the fairies, causing the reader to become aware of their existence and importance. This simple placement makes sure the reader is drawn toward the female fairies first, then the male fairies afterwards. The reader’s attention is attracted to the female fairies first, creating a sense of higher importance over the males. The female fairies are dancing along the pathway, free of any restrictions, while the male fairies are behind a barred fence. This contrast in placement suggests that the female fairies are free and independent and the males are restricted and of lower class. Also in this illustration, the fairies are the only elements that have colour. The colour appears bolder in the illustrations of the female fairies, another technique which draws the eye of the reader directly to them. In various illustrations, male fairies do not appear at all, focusing the attention onto the female fairies. By excluding the male fairies from multiple illustrations, the focus is predominately set on the female fairies, creating a sense of importance. Throughout the story, Arthur Rackham’s illustrations depict a fantasy world where the female fairies are the more dominant and powerful gender, which is opposite of how females were actually perceived in reality’s Edwardian society.

**Text Descriptions**

Within the text, there are many descriptions of the female fairies that portray them as being the authoritative gender. When referring to the fairies as a collective group, Byron refers to them as “she” instead of the more prominently used “he”. This instills into the readers that the dominant gender of fairies are female. Another reference within the text that creates the dominant female representation of fairies is the introduction of the fairy Queen Mab. The matriarchal society of fairies is revealed to the readers when Peter Pan discovers the fairy world for the first time. The text describes Queen Mab’s palace, the first mention of a female ruler within the fairy world. Having a Queen to rule and govern the fairies clearly shows the empowerment of females within their society. There is no mention of a King or a husband to Queen Mab, which further portrays the female gender as superior.

The representation of female fairies from both the verbal descriptions and illustrations portray them as superior and dominant over the male fairies. This representation of fantasy female empowerment within the fairy society is contrary to how females were perceived in the Edwardian era.

**Curatorial Commentary on Context**

May Byron received permission from J.M. Barrie to retell his story, with the sole
intention of creating a more appropriate adaptation for children. In the process, she made changes to many core principles about children and growing up that were previously established by J.M. Barrie. With that being said, she remained true to one key ideology in the original 1906 version, which was how the Gardens were ruled by the dominant superiority of female fairies. Our contextual analysis bears homage to the original version of Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens because of the historical significance found beyond the text.

**Historical Context**

In the real world, outside of Kensington Gardens, women belonged to the domestic sphere. This is a result of the beliefs stemming out of the Victorian period in the 19th century. The role of a woman was to strive to be the perfect motherly figure, which entailed bearing and raising children. In the original book, J.M. Barrie talks about when the fairies discover Peter’s nightgown being used as a sail (Fig. 3). Because the female fairies take notice right away they, “straightway loved him, and grieved that their laps were too small… such is the way of women.” (Barrie, 49) It is quite apparent that the original book is a product of its time. J.M Barrie emerged from a period where women were denied simple rights. In fact, women were nothing more than domestic possessions of their socially representative counterpart. In other words, women were not considered to be persons at all. Their days were filled with endless obligations and limited freedom outside of the home.

**Social Change in the Edwardian Period**

The start of the 19th century was traditional in the sense that women were no more than subordinate domestic possessions. In, ‘The Female Tradition’, Elaine Showalter presents that, “the middle-class ideology of the proper sphere of womanhood, which developed in post-industrial England and America, prescribed a woman who would be a Perfect Lady, an Angel in the House, contentedly submissive to men, but strong in her inner purity … queen in her own realm of the Home.” (Showalter, 1108) However, after being suppressed to this ideology for most of the 18th and 19th centuries, the beginning of the Edwardian period was the time when women began speaking out about these social injustices that were forced upon them for centuries. This began widely known as the suffragist movement. Women sought to create a constitutional change, whereby women would be privileged to basic rights. Many women believed that because the ‘role of a woman’ was in the home, she should not be denied a say in legislation that directly or indirectly influences laws, which impact the home. Women did not approach this social change with any violence, or force. This is unlike men, who have a history of using violent measures as a means to obtain peace or equality. This is alluded to in the book as it stated, “the men- fairies now sheathed their weapons on observing the behavior of their women, on whose intelligence they set great store, and they led him civilly to their queen.” (Barrie, 49) Women used determination and cunning tactics to raise awareness, and although it took a long time women’s rights were eventually vindicated in the
Although it took a long time women's rights were eventually vindicated in the legislation of the Persons Case of 1929.

**Contrasting Ideals between Fantasy and Reality**

However, this generates the following questions. Why is there a matriarchy-based system in Kensington Gardens? Why has J.M. Barrie, a writer out of the 19th century, decided to put women at such high regards in a social sphere? Perhaps the original story by J.M Barrie was in tribute to the fact that women with such power are ideas that belong in works of fiction alone. The depiction on the cover shows male domination and superiority above all else. Although the female fairies may dominate the fairy world, that is where it ends. The reality of it is Peter Pan is a product of the real world beyond Kensington Gardens. The fairies only dominate the restricted boundaries of the Gardens in the absence of people. In the cover illustration alone, even though the female fairies are bigger in size than the male fairies, it is apparent that Peter Pan is larger than them all. In a sense, reality trumping fantasy. Or, was he conceivably acknowledging the fact that females have the capability to stretch beyond the social norm, outside of the boundaries set upon them by man? It is a possibility that the author’s original intent was to stir up controversy in the reader. This idea that women could be considered equals outside of the home. Jack Zipes believed “that, to be liberating, [fairy tales] must reflect a process of struggle against all types of suppression and authoritarianism and project various possibilities for the concrete realization of utopia.” (Zipes, 312) Maybe Barrie wasn’t so crazy to have Arthur Rackham illustrate women in such a dynamic light. Barrie’s text and Rackham’s illustrations stayed true to so many physical elements pertaining to women outside of the book. It is almost noteworthy to consider why they chose to have such a contrasting element of empowerment within the book.

**Conclusion**

J.M. Barrie’s book was published in 1906. It is very possible that while the reader took the book at face value, they may have subconsciously been made aware of the possibility of female empowerment within a patriarchal society. The iconic and admired story of Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens has demonstrated how illustrations and text can create a fantasy world that is contrary to society outside of the book.

**Works Cited**


The Allies' Fairy Book contains a selection of traditional fairy tales from the participants of World War One – compiled and edited by Edmund Gosse in 1916. It includes the tales of: ‘Jack the Giant Killer’ (English); ‘The Battle of the Birds’ (Scottish); ‘Lludd and Llevelyss’ (Welsh); ‘The Sleeping Beauty (French); ‘Cesarino and the Dragon’ (Italian); ‘What came of picking flowers’ (Portuguese); ‘The Tongue-Cut Sparrow’ (Japanese); ‘Frost’ (Russian); ‘The Golden Apple-Tree and. INTRODUCTION. IN presenting a selection of the fairy stories of the Allies we make not the slightest pretence of being logical or historical. We are conscious of all the objections which may be brought against us by the learned, and we do not seek to rebut them. The Langs’ Fairy Books are a series of 25 collections of true and fictional stories for children published between 1889 and 1913 by Andrew Lang and his wife, Leonora Blanche Alleyne. The best known books of the series are the 12 collections of fairy tales also known as Andrew Lang’s “Coloured” Fairy Books or Andrew Lang’s Fairy Books of Many Colors. In all, the volumes feature 798 stories, besides the 153 poems in The Blue Poetry Book. The Allies of Humanity is being presented to prepare people for a whole new reality that is largely hidden and unrecognized in the world today. It provides a new perspective that empowers people to face the greatest challenge and opportunity that we, as a race, have ever encountered. The Allies Briefings contain a number of critical if not alarming statements about the growing extraterrestrial intervention and integration into the human race and about the extraterrestrial activities and hidden agenda. The purpose of the Allies Briefings is not to provide hard evidence about the reality of the