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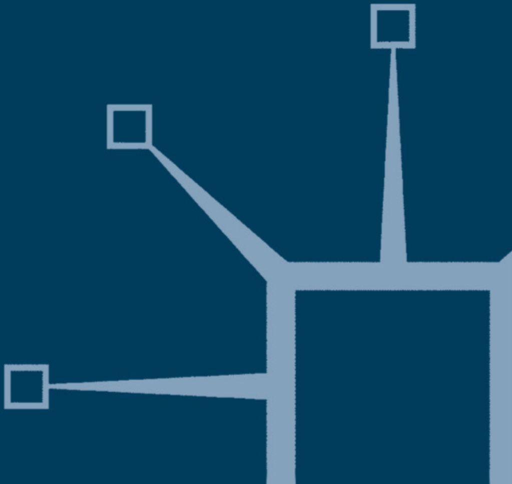
The Postmodern Fairytale

Folkloric Intertexts in Contemporary Fiction

Kevin Paul Smith



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Introduction

'The novel in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has always incorporated forms of myths and fairy tales', A. S. Byatt writes in *On Histories and Stories*, 'Fanny Price *is* Cinderella' (2001: 130). And Byatt is entirely correct, and perhaps even understates the case; the history of popular fiction, from Shakespeare to *Shrek*, is suffused with fairytales, those simple stories that function in the vernacular as a synonym for lies. In last three decades (1975–2005), however, there has been a perceptible shift in the use of the fairytale by novelists and filmmakers. Rather than being something that underlies a narrative and informs its structure, or a handy metaphor, the fairytale has become central to the work. Interrogating the fairytale, examining the way in which formulaic stories hold a grip over the human imagination has become increasingly popular among novelists and filmmakers, to the extent that it is necessary to examine precisely *why* the fairytale has become so important. That is the aim of this study. I will contend that the fairytale is being intertextually used for ends which can be called 'postmodern'.

The title of this book invokes three contentious categories: intertextuality, postmodernism and the fairytale. Each of these terms is a battleground of interpretation, and familiarity with the debates raging in each subject area leads me to think that attempting to settle upon a unitary definition of 'postmodernism', 'intertextuality' or, indeed, 'the fairytale' would be the work of an entire book, leaving little space for the study of those texts that piqued my interest in this area in the first place. For this reason, the understanding of postmodernism I will use within this study is derived primarily from 'historiographic metafiction', Linda Hutcheon's coinage in *A Poetics of Postmodernism,* although other theorists or critics of postmodernism will be mentioned when the need arises. Chapter 1 will demonstrate my approach to the term 'intertextuality', opting for a pragmatic view of how individual texts relate to others, rather than a view of all literature, all language in fact, as fundamentally interconnected. The main area that needs to be addressed in this introduction is precisely what I mean when I use the term 'fairytale'.

A working definition of fairytale

One of the problems of attempting to locate a fairytale intertext is that the term 'fairytale' itself is an ill-defined construction lacking any sort of stable definition, much like the terms 'intertext' and 'postmodern'. The term 'Fairytale' has been part of the English language since the mid-eighteenth century and is a translation derived from the French *Contes de fée*, first used in the title of Madame D'Aulnoy's collection of 1697. This was just one of the terms used to describe fantastic narratives based upon folkloric stories that caught on during the ascendancy of the fairytale as a fashionable form at the court of Louis XIV, and was used interchangeably with other terms such as *Contes des oye*. As all critics invariably point out, when defining the fairytale one of the main problems with the term is that many stories considered emblematic do not contain a single fairy (Thompson 1977: 8, Carter 2001b: ix). J. R. R. Tolkien addresses this problem when he writes,

> The definition of a fairy-story – what it is, or what it should be – does not, then, depend on any definition or historical account of elf or fairy, but upon the nature of *Faërie*: the Perilous Realm itself, and the air that blows in that country. I will not attempt to define that, nor to describe it directly. It cannot be done.
>
> (Tolkien 1965: 16)

For Tolkien, fairy tales take place in the realm of Faërie, a statement that suggests they would come under the category of the Marvelous in Tzvetan Todorov's infamous structuralist attempt to define the fantasy genre. If we assign the tales to an imaginary world where animals can speak and magic is accepted as normal, then the term 'fairytale' is a shorthand for a type of fantasy that predates the literary fantastic. This raises one obvious problem: it places magical events in an entirely other world, as though all listeners of fairytales assume that magic can only take place in such a place, ignoring the possibility that once upon a time perhaps the distinction between fairytale and realism was not so clear-cut. I will return to this problem when we address the thorny issue of magic realism in Chapter 2.

But some tales that are regarded as fairytales are less fantastic than others. In Charles Perrault's '*La barbe-bleue*' (translated as 'Bluebeard') there is little obvious magic: no witches, no spells, no talking animals, no wishes, and no fairies. To some influential fairytale critics, such as Bruno Bettelheim, this means that it is *not* a fairytale, but Bettelheim also believes that any story without a happy ending is also not a 'true' fairytale. This disqualifies Perrault's version of 'Little Red Riding Hood', where the wolf wins and need fear no fortunately-within-earshot woodsman who just happens to rescue the girl and granny. Bettelheim's exclusive application of the term 'fairytale' to those stories that centre around the numinous or uncanny is also taken up by Maria Tatar in *The Hard Facts of Grimms' Fairytales*, where she creates a binary division between 'marvellous' fairytales and folk tales, which are naturalistic in character (Tatar 1987: 33). This approach to the term 'fairytale' takes the term 'fairy' as a metonym signifying the otherworldly and magical, and sets up a binary opposition between what Tolkien would call those tales set in the realm of faery and those set in the real world. She argues that the term 'fairy tale [...] is above all reserved for narratives set in a fictional world where preternatural events and supernatural intervention are taken wholly for granted. A fairy tale can thus belong to the category of folktales, but it stands in contrast to the folk tale which is sharply biased in favor of earthy realism' (33).[1] Once again, the fairytale is defined as part of the fantasy genre, and a dichotomy is set up between those texts that are clearly fantastic and those which are not. In practice, this binary seems artificial and counterintuitive. Perrault's 'Little Red Riding Hood' is, apparently, no longer a fairytale but a folk tale, although perhaps the Grimm's 'Red Cap', in which the little girl and her grandmother are rescued from the digestive tract of the sleeping wolf, is a borderline case. As Stith Thompson highlights, 'It is not always easy to tell, in tales of the marvelous, whether we are dealing with magic or with mere exaggerations of actual qualities' (Thompson 1977: 81).

Some critics, especially folklorists, prefer to use the German term *Märchen* to refer to the fairytale. Thompson defines *Märchen* as 'a tale of some length involving a succession of motifs or episodes. It moves in an unreal world without definite locality or definite creatures and is filled with the marvelous. In this never-never land humble heroes kill adversaries, succeed to kingdoms and marry princesses' (1977: 8). However, although Thompson himself prefers the term *Märchen* to fairytale he undercuts any notion of the German term being more precise when he notes that it is used in the German language to cover not only stories like 'Cinderella', but also legends of saints, pious tales from the middle ages and jokes and anecdotes, much like the imprecision of the English 'fairy tale' (22). Despite the use of *Märchen* by folklorists, combined with the reassuring strangeness that the term has for English-speaking tongues, it does not resolve the problem of vagueness that we have with the more familiar 'fairytale', derived from the French. Because it does not have general currency in English, we may use the term to refer only to those tales that comply with the formal characteristics outlined by Thompson above. But this gain in specificity is a false one, and can also be seen as an unnecessary jargonisation of the critical lexicon, especially when German Folklorists like Max Lüthi use the term *Zaubermärchen* (or 'wonder tale') to refer to what Thompson would call simply *Märchen*.

Another problem muddying the possibility of definition is the use of 'fairytale' to refer indiscriminately to collected folklore that has magical characteristics, such as the Grimms' '*Aschenputtel*', along with literary tales authored by individuals such as Hans Christian Andersen's 'The Little Mermaid'. Several critics have offered up alternative terms to distinguish between tales derived from folklore and those that have an identifiable author with whom the tale originated. Gail De Vos and Anna E. Altman, drawing from the work of Maria Tatar and Max Lüthi, suggest a distinction between these different sources by referring to fairytales that have been written down and collected as 'book folktales' or 'book fairytales' and 'original literary fictions that draw on or imitate traditional folktales, like those of Hans Christian Andersen' as 'literary folktales' or 'literary fairy tales' (2002: 7–8). In his introduction to *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales* Jack Zipes suggests an opposition between the oral folk tale and the literary fairytale:

> In his first short monograph, [Jens] Tismar set down the principles for a definition of the literary fairy tale [...]: (1) [...] it is written by a single identifiable author; (2) it is thus synthetic, artificial, and elaborate in comparison to the indigenous formation of the folk tale [...]; (3) the differences between the literary [two] do not imply that one genre is better than the other; (4) [...] the literary fairy tale [...] can only be understood and defined by its relationship to the oral tales as well as to the legend, novella, novel, and other literary fairy tales that it uses, adapts, and remodels.
>
> (Zipes 2000: xv)

Tismar's definition is key to Zipes' own discussion of the fairytale as he too insists on an absolute difference between the fairytale as manifest in an oral culture, and the literary fairytale. Certainly, for my purposes, it is important to acknowledge that the fairytales manifested as intertexts in postmodern fictions have been shaped and influenced by the written genre of the fairytale. Oral transmission of traditional narratives is not a common activity in a culture that relies upon the easy dissemination of mass-produced fictions, and it is therefore necessary to realise that the fairytales we recognise are more part of a literary tradition than an oral one.

If the definition of fairytale is a major problem, so too is the plurality and over-determination of the fairytale. There are thousands of collected folktales, and many of those collected are variations on the same tale. I have already mentioned the difference between the Perrault's 'Little Red Riding Hood' and the Grimms' 'Red Cap'. This leads to the problem of which version of an intertext is being used. Not only are there variations between the different versions, but difference is also significant in the case of the Grimms, where the first edition of their collection, an academic publication, is significantly less punitive against wrongdoers and less literary in its style than the later editions that were aimed at children. Mahdi highlights the fact that the *Arabian Nights* in particular is a polymorphous and shifting collection, shifting significantly in terms of structure, amount of stories and even which stories are included every time it is edited. For example, the Sinbad tales, the most famous and recognisable tales for Westerners reading the *Nights*, were found and added by Antoine Galland and were not part of the 'original' manuscript he claimed to be translating (Mahdi 1995: 38).

Comparing literature with fairytale is problematic because there is *no definitive text* for any fairytale that has folkloric roots. Maria Tatar gives two examples of critics being misled in their interpretations of fairytales by assuming that they can treat fairytales in the same way as literature. Bruno Bettelheim's and Ernest Jones's interpretations of the 'Frog King' identifies the frog with 'clammy sensations' associated with the male sexual organ, overlooking the dozens of tales where the frog turns into a princess. Similarly, Erich Fromm's interpretation of 'Red Riding Hood' hinges upon the bottle she carried in her hand-basket despite the fact that many versions of the tale do not feature this object. Tatar uses these examples to illustrate the fact that

> [a]ny attempt to unearth the hidden meaning of fairy tales is bound to fail unless it is preceded by a rigorous, if not exhaustive, analysis of a tale type and its variants. That analysis enables the interpreter to distinguish essential features from random embellishments and to

> identify culturally determined elements that vary from one regional version of a tale to the next.
>
> (Tatar 1987: 43)

Of course, this problem is nullified in the cases of those identifiable authors who write 'original' fairytales, like those of Hans Christian Andersen, although even in this case there is the problem of 'versions' as the sources of many of Andersen's original tales were Danish folk tales collected and retold by his immediate predecessors J. M. Thiele, Adam Oehlenshläger and Bernard Ingemann (Zipes 2000: 14). Though, as literary critics, we may be certain that an individual image is pivotal in studying one of Andersen's texts, because we can identify it as a single version whose form is fixed (as long as we are studying the Danish version, translation is another minefield of meaning), it is also possible to look at the sources for Andersen's versions and study the differences between the collected folkloric version and the literary version.

Despite the problems with the term, in this study I will retain the use of the word 'fairytale'. I will not attempt to re-define what is and isn't a fairytale, by, for example, ruling out tales with unhappy endings or those fairytales that aren't magical enough. To my mind, this sort of tampering, although well intentioned, only further muddies the water, meaning that the general public and the scholarly community denote altogether different things when they talk about fairytales. Furthermore, these attempts always seem to involve a certain ideological attempt to specify an 'ideal' fairytale that may exclude tales that have been regarded as fairytales, printed in fairytale collections for centuries. To be told that according to Bettelheim's categories 'Little Red Riding Hood' isn't a fairytale because it doesn't have a happy ending (sometimes), or that 'Bluebeard' isn't a fairytale because it isn't 'magic' enough, seems a Canute-like attempt to turn the tides. Though we may yearn for more solid and clear-cut differentiations between the literary fairytale, oral fairytale, folktale, and myth, there is little to no chance that this more precise terminology will have any effect upon language outside the community of scholars who have time to argue about such things. In this study I will focus on well-known fairytale intertexts, rather than obscure or lesser-known tales. This is an important point: the fictions that I will analyse utilise fairytales that are easily recognisable by their target audiences as fairytales *because it is important that the reader catches the reference*. 'Bluebeard', 'Cinderella', 'Sleeping Beauty', 'Little Red Riding Hood', and the *Arabian Nights* will be the most frequently occurring fairytales in this analysis.

Critical approaches to the intertextual use of fairytales

There are a number of standard ways of examining fairytales in contemporary literature. One of these is to study a particular tale and how it is used intertextually in contemporary fiction. Casie Hermansson's *Reading Feminist Intertextuality through Bluebeard Stories* is one of these, where the author identifies one particular tale as particularly important and then proceeds to build up a monograph about that particular tale and its intertextual uses by feminist writers. The same strategy is used to a lesser extent in Cristina Bacchilega's *Postmodern Fairy Tales*, where each chapter tackles a particular fairytale: one chapter for 'Snow White', one for 'Red Riding Hood, one for 'Bluebeard' and so on.

Another approach is to concentrate on an individual author's use of fairytale intertexts, as in Sharon Rose Wilson's *Margaret Atwood's Fairy-Tale Sexual Politics*. This would take the form of either an entire work about the uses of fairytale in one author's oeuvre, or perhaps one chapter on how, say, Angela Carter uses her fairytale intertexts, followed by one on how Salman Rushdie uses his.

This study could easily have been conceived along lines relating to a particular critical theory: for example, as an examination of fairytale intertexts as they appear in post-colonial works, feminist works, positing a 'group' of 'feminist' or 'postcolonialist' writers who may or may not constitute a 'school' and then attempting to find commonalities or differences between members of this school and what this means about their works. Such a technique is used in Zipes's *Don't Bet on the Prince*, a collection which presents a group of feminist fairytale revisions, and feminist fairytale criticism.

Finally, it is conceivable that a historical approach could be taken as an organising principle, beginning with the 'first' postmodern texts that utilise intertexts and then charting the spreading influence chronologically, perhaps beginning with Ann Sexton's poetry, moving through Carter's short stories, until we reach a cut-off date if a cut-off date for postmodernism can be found.

I have rejected these approaches for various reasons, but mainly because I find the intertextual use of the fairytale in postmodern fiction to be too diverse and unpredictable to comfortably fit into any of these arbitrary divisions. Organising the book around individual tales is not feasible because my interests are less to do with the revision of individual tales, and more to do with the use of the fairytale as a genre. Sticking to one particular author is not appealing because what interests me is the *range* of *different* authors, all of whom use the fairytale in considerably different ways.

In Chapter 1, I will investigate the crucial issue of intertextuality, utilising and expanding upon the theories of Gerard Genette and Mikhail Bakhtin, in an attempt to find a way of making intertextuality a useful critical tool that can help me define my object of study. This chapter will sketch out eight different 'elements' of intertextuality, providing textual examples for each category, and then attempt to highlight which of these elements are particularly important for the postmodern texts that I will be examining. Chapter 2 will follow on from an area of interest raised by Chapter 1, looking at the mode of magic realism, and taking Kate Atkinson's *Human Croquet* as an example of a magic realist novel where the magic realism is formed in no small part by its use of fairytale intertextuality.

Chapter 3 addresses a narrative situation which depicts a kind of 'fairytale within the text' that is based upon the frame story of the *Thousand and One Nights*. I call this narrative situation 'the storyteller', and this chapter is primarily concerned with defining 'the storyteller' and providing examples of texts where this storytelling frame, which depicts characters telling 'the fairytales of their lives', is important. I then go on to explain the importance of the storyteller with relevance to critical theory in order to explain why the storyteller is a postmodern trope. Storytelling is an essential human activity, and the way in which storyteller operates in the texts under analysis highlights the importance of storytelling as a way of understanding one's life and place in the world.

If Chapter 3 sees the fairytale as a liberating framework that allows postmodern subjects a form flexible and easily adaptable for them to narrate their life stories, Chapter 4 shows how the fairytale can also operate as what Roland Barthes called 'myth', and be a repressive and normative mechanism.

Before Chapter 4 the fictions I examine are all based in the real world, even if they do cause us to question what reality is, and the extent to which the real is intertextually constituted by pre-existing stories, what Barthes would call the already read or *déjà vu*. The analysis of fantasy literature is still somewhat frowned upon, due to it being seen as escapist or, as Lucie Armitt correctly suggests, a 'mere narrative formula' (Armitt 2000: 15). In Chapter 4, which closely analyses the use of fairytale in Terry Pratchett's *Witches Abroad*, we will see how these 'mere narrative formulae' actually work to shape and structure our understanding of the world.

1

The Eight Elements of Intertextual Use of Fairytales

The fairytale has always been a popular form of literature, and it is possible to find examples of works throughout the canon that utilise fairytale intertexts. If we were to make a list of every text that contained a reference to fairytale plots we would end up with a list of thousands containing samples from every genre and every period. However, it is my thesis that the fairytale has been used as an intertext in interesting ways for various purposes by a certain group of writers whose work is typically called 'postmodern'. In order for me to make this claim, I must be able to differentiate between texts in which the fairytale intertext is important and contributes a significant amount to our understanding of the story, and those texts in which the fairytale is simply one intertext among many, and does not affect our reading of the text to a great extent.

In defining the ways in which these intertexts operate, I will draw upon various theories of intertextuality. My exploration of intertextuality will be mostly informed by the theories of Gerard Genette, due to his attempts to differentiate between different types of intertextuality or, as he calls it, 'transtextuality'.

Genette differentiates between five sub-categories of transtextuality: 'Kristevan' intertextuality, which covers allusion as well as quotation and plagiarism; paratextuality, which covers the relations between the 'text itself' and its titles, epigraphs, illustrations, and even factors which we usually judge as separate to the text itself, for example reviews and author interviews; metatextuality, which concerns the relationship between commentary and its object; architextuality, the relationship between a text and its nominal genre, a tacit, perhaps even unconscious gesture to genre demarcations; and hypertextuality, which is the relationship between a late-coming text and its pre-text (Still and Worton 1990: 23)

These different categories rarely exist in isolation, but the focus of this inquiry will concentrate on hypertextuality, 'a field of literary works the generic essence of which lies in their relation to previous works' (Allen 2000: 108). Drawing upon Genette's categories, I suggest that there are eight identifiable ways in which the fairytale can operate as an intertext within mass-produced fictions.

1. **Authorised:** Explicit reference to a fairytale in the title
2. **Writerly:** Implicit reference to a fairytale in title
3. **Incorporation**: Explicit reference to a fairytale within the text
4. **Allusion**: Implicit reference to a fairytale within the text
5. **Re-vision**: putting a new spin on an old tale
6. **Fabulation**: crafting an original fairytale
7. **Metafictional**: discussion of fairytales
8. **Architextual/Chronotopic:** 'Fairytale' setting/environment.

I will call these eight categories 'elements', in order to reflect the complexity of intertextuality and to reflect that they can be found in numerous different combinations. The *OED* defines an element as 'a component part of a complex whole', which I find a satisfactory label for these eight types of intertextuality.

In order to demonstrate the eight ways a fairytale intertext can be used, I will concentrate on one of the most popular fairytale intertexts in contemporary fiction, 'Bluebeard'. The fairytale 'Bluebeard' has been used as an intertext in many fictions in recent years and has proved a fertile field of criticism for feminist critics due to its explicit patriarchal message. The fact that 'Bluebeard' criticism is a well-ploughed furrow is here an advantage rather than a disadvantage. By using a single fairytale, the exposition of the different ways that fairytales can be used as an intertext does not rely on the reader's knowledge of dozens of significant fairytales, and the criticism can, to some extent, excuse me from repeating arguments about 'Bluebeard' again here, which are covered in depth in studies such as Casie Hermansson's *Reading Feminist Intertextuality through Bluebeard Stories* (2001). Before I go on to discuss in further detail the eight ways in which fairytales can be used as intertexts, it is necessary to provide a little historical information about 'Bluebeard'.

'Bluebeard' made its literary debut in Charles Perrault's *Histoires ou contes du temp passé* (1697). Perrault was not a 'collector' of fairytales, like the Grimm Brothers, and he freely adapted and changed oral tales for his own purposes. His collection was also one of the first to address a double audience of adults and children. Before Perrault, most literary fairytales were written by and for adults, ranging from the medieval bawdy of Boccaccio and the risqué tales of Basile and Straparola to the works of the erudite and aristocratic *Saloniers* Madame D'Aulnoy and Madame L'Héritier; the concept of the fairytale as educational children's literature did not arise until the nineteenth century, although we can certainly recognise Perrault as a precursor of this trend. While supposedly written for children, the writer takes up a faux naïf style of narration that winks knowingly at adult readers. Although Perrault's precise sources are unknown, it is generally agreed that the tale(s) that Bluebeard was based on was/were well known, and existed for some time before Perrault's adaptation.

Various historical sources have been suggested as the basis of the tale, from the murderous Baron Gilles De Rais, who confessed to murdering 140 young boys and burying their remains about his castle, to Cunmar (or Comorre, the spelling seems to vary) the accursed, who decapitated a succession of wives as soon as they became pregnant (see Warner 1994a: 261, Windling 2002: 14–15). It is possible that Perrault knew of the legends surrounding these historical figures and incorporated details from the legends to add to his own tale, or it is just as possible that he knew similar stories that we now have no record of. Whatever his sources it is generally agreed that the remarkable facial hair of the murderous husband was Perrault's invention. A version of Perrault's tale, including the titular blue beard, was also reprinted in the 1812 first edition of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's *Kinder und Hausmärchen* (*KHM*), but was removed from later editions, according to Maria Tatar, because its obvious French heritage clashed with the illusion of a uniquely German folklore that the Grimms were attempting to portray (Tatar 1987: 157). It is ironic, then, that in her article on Bluebeard in the *Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales*, Maria Tatar identifies two tales in the Grimm collection as representative of the pre-Perrault French Bluebeard stories:

> The French versions of 'Bluebeard' that pre-date Perrault's story reveal a close relationship to two tales recorded by the Brothers Grimm. The first of these, 'Fitcher's Bird', shows the youngest of three sisters using her 'cunning' to escape the snares set by a clever sorcerer [. . .] The heroine of 'The Robber Bridegroom also engineers a rescue, mobilizing her mental resources to thwart the thieves with whom her betrothed consorts.
>
> (Tatar 2000: 56)

The Grimms' 'Fitcher's Bird' (*KHM* 46: AT 311), and 'The Robber Bridegroom' (*KHM* 40: AT 955) have been linked with Bluebeard for many years. In the introduction to the 1888 edition of *Perrault's Popular Tales*, Andrew Lang highlighted the similarities between Perrault's tale about a murderous husband and those collected in the *Kinder und Hausmärchen*. We will return to the question of how we identify the relationship between fairytales later, but the fact that Lang in 1888 felt it necessary to spell out an intertextual kinship between these tales is important.

1. Authorised

Element one, the fairytale as an authorised intertext is the most obvious use of fairytale as an intertext. The use of a proper name of a fairytale in the title acts as an authorial sanction that the text is to be understood in its relevance to a prior, pre-existing fairytale. No one's knowledge would be greatly enhanced by an article 'revealing' the importance of 'Bluebeard' to Margaret Atwood's Bluebeard's Egg, for example. There are numerous examples of this relationship that one may cite: Kurt Vonnegut's *Bluebeard*, Max Frisch's *Bluebeard*, Donald Barthelme's *Snow White*, Margaret Atwood's *The Robber Bride* and Robert Coover's *Briar Rose*. However, although there are thousands upon thousands of collected folk tales that can be categorised as fairytales there are relatively few fairytales that are known by a proper name,[1] and there is therefore a sliding scale of recognition with the Disney popularised titles such as *Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella*, and *Beauty and the Beast* operating as extremely explicit references, and with lesser-known tales such as *Briar Rose* and *The Girl Who Trod on a Loaf* operating at the more ambiguous end of the scale. This difference can be seen in Atwood's *The Robber Bride*, where one of the narrators of the text describes the story of the Grimm fairytale 'The Robber Bridegroom'. Because this fairytale intertext is not as obvious or well known as the most popular fairytales that have been adapted by Disney, it is necessary for the author to explain or make the intertextual title explicit within the text itself by explaining it. Furthermore, it is entirely possible that an author may mislead the reader: a text may, in theory, be called *Snow White* and yet have absolutely nothing to do with the fairytale.[2] This suggests that the difference between elements one and two is arguably one of degree and not of type.

Due to the importance of the title of a work to the way in which we understand it, the examples above act as an exaggerated form of what happens any time a recognisable fairytale name appears within a text. A critic might argue that Frederick Clegg in John Fowles's *The Collector* is a Bluebeard figure, but without a direct reference to the fairytale such an assertion lacks explicit authorial sanction.[3] The critic would have no such problems in trying to link the protagonist of Max Frisch's *Bluebeard* with the eponymous fairytale ogre. The case of Kurt Vonnegut's *Bluebeard* is also illuminating. In this text there are several characters that may be likened to Bluebeard. As Casie Hermansson points out, the hyper-realistic advertising artist and Mussolini-admirer, Dan Gregory, to whom the narrator is apprenticed, even has his own forbidden chamber (Hermansson 2001: 179), 'Your loving Papa asked just one thing of you as an expression of your loyalty: "Never go into the Museum of Modern Art" ' (Vonnegut 1988: 166). This odious character whose violence, conservatism, misogyny and fascism seem to be in character with the monstrous nature of the fairytale villain is a complete contrast to the curmudgeonly, but likeable narrator, Rabo Karabekian, whose identification with Bluebeard is assured when he utters the words 'I am Bluebeard, and my studio is my *forbidden chamber* as far as *you're* concerned' (47).

The explicit use of a fairytale name in the title of Vonnegut's *Bluebeard* allows the reader to see the narrator as Bluebeard despite the fact that neither he nor Dan Gregory is a serial killing maniac who preys on young women. The use of the fairytale title as the title of the novel, allows the reader to generate a reading of the text that appears uncontentious and even common sense. It also allows a degree of ambivalence, for despite his identification with the fairytale ogre, the narrator appears as a wholly sympathetic character and we may object that it is perhaps Gregory, or even Gregory's abusive mentor Beskudnikov, who is the real ogre in the tale. This readerly ambivalence over role allocation, to make the new version (hypertext) fit with its predecessor (hypotext), is neatly highlighted in Barthelme's *Snow White* when the narrator forces the reader to acknowledge one character as a version of the Prince:

> QUESTIONS:
>
> 1. Do you like the story so far? Yes ( ) No ( )
> 2. Does Snow White resemble the Snow White you remember? Yes ( ) No ( )
> 3. Have you understood, in reading to this point that Paul is the prince-figure? Yes ( ) No ( )
> 4. That Jane is the wicked stepmother-figure? Yes ( ) No ( )
>
> (Barthelme 1996 [1965]: 88)

The title of Barthelme's *Snow White* refers the reader instantly to one of the most popular and recognisable (and Disneyfied) fairytales, and the novella features a character called Snow White,[4] whose resemblance to the Snow White we remember is in question. In the extract above, Barthelme makes the reader consider characters in the light of the fairytale, placing Paul up against the prince (a comparison that doesn't much help Paul) and Jane against the wicked stepmother. If we had not the above clarification, we could argue about which characters fulfil those roles, but the author's playful intervention helps relate the novella to the fairytale and allocate characters to familiar roles.

An explicit intertextual reference within the title, then, sets up a whole set of mechanisms whereby the reader automatically assumes that this intertextual reference is somehow relevant to the following text, the default setting may indeed be to assume that the new text is a version of the earlier, identically titled text. This is the most obvious sign of an author explicitly indicating the intertextual relation between his or her text and a predecessor. It is also a fairly rare phenomenon, due to the problems of copyright law, marketing, and the concept of originality. Though we may not see any problem with an author titling his or her text *Bluebeard, Sleeping Beauty* or *Briar Rose*, or even *Ulysses*, it is likely that we, and the courts, would find a new novel taking the name *The Great Gatsby* or *Midnight's Children* a more problematic situation.[5] In the cases where a new novel does take on the plot of a previous tale, if the new text does wish to refer itself to its predecessor it is more likely to signal this intent through the use of element two.

2. Writerly

Element two, an implicit or writerly reference within the title, may seem a contradiction in terms but the difference is one of reference. A direct reference to a well-known fairytale in the title, as we have seen above, instantly generates an interpretation of the text that carries a certain authority (because it obviously has the author's overt sanction), but the use of a more implicit reference allows for some interpretation. For example, John Fowles' *The Collector* has been read as a version of 'Bluebeard' (see Grace 1984 and Hermansson 2001), and in this argument its title can be used to substantiate this claim. Bluebeard is a collector of wives, and by this interpretation the unhinged protagonist of Fowles' text can be viewed as a latter-day Bluebeard. However, by being at one remove from an explicit reference, the title allows more ambiguity: though we might argue, as Sherrill Grace does, that *The*