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# Review of "Twice Upon a Time: Women Writers and the History of the Fairy Tale," by Elizabeth Wanning Harries"

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proach these questions with a haphazard survey. The data need to be rich and the analyses deep.

**Twice Upon a Time: Women Writers and the History of the Fairy Tale.** By Elizabeth Wanning Harries. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001. Pp. xiv + 216, bibliography, illustrations, index, notes.)

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Well crafted and carefully researched, Elizabeth Wanning Harries' *Twice Upon a Time* argues that the women fairy tale writers of seventeenth-century France—D'Aulnoy, Murat, and L'heritier—were silenced. Ironically, they were relegated to a domestic *literary* sphere, the salon, and Harries contends that this relegation has had a profound effect on contemporary notions of the history of the *literary* fairy tale. She asserts that this silencing must be acknowledged. Her use of the visual cultures of seventeenth-century France, eighteenth-century Germany, and nineteenth-century Britain support her claims that a beloved icon, the wizened, storytelling wet nurse by the fire, supplanted more accurate and respectful, and more literarily informed, representations of the aristocratic women of seventeenth-century French salons reading written texts.

In chapters 2 and 3, Harries examines how the works of D'Aulnoy, Murat, and L'heritier were appropriated and revised by Perrault and later translated into English by the Grimms—all of whom assert that the fairy tales were told to them by a mother figure of the service class, a "*raconteuse*," a "Mother Goose." Harries argues that this claim confused the history of the fairy tale, that fairy tales did not progress from storyteller to writer, as we have come to believe, but rather, from writer to storyteller. In so doing, she distinguishes the fairy tale, crafted for a highly literate audience, from the folktale, partially informed by those written tales and disseminated orally. Harries thereby separates literary and folkloristic scholarly ideologies, revealing a distinction central to her analysis:

that the fairy tale, crafted for a highly literate audience, is an act of creation, whereas the folktale, partially informed by those written tales and disseminated orally, is the act of storytelling.

Chapters 4 and 5 describe contemporary retellings of fairy tales, such as those of Sexton, Broumas, Byatt, Carter, and Atwood. It should be noted that Harries's focus is on contemporary women writers retelling fairy tales for adults (in contrast to such writers as McKinley, who writes for young adult readers, or Maguire, who is male). Harries asserts that these contemporary retellings by women writers, who questioned the literary canon even as they were inducted into it, are creative acts. She links their work to those of their female fairy tale forbears—as well as acts of transliteration—allowing their link to canonical literature to reestablish an appreciation for the literary fairy tale. As Harries notes in her conclusion, contemporary women literary retellers give a voice to those women literary fairy tale writers who were silenced.

Harries asserts that the silencing of the women fairy tale writers of seventeenth-century France must be acknowledged, but her argument ultimately falls victim to itself by depending on making an absolute distinction between literary fairy tales and oral folktales. To Harries, fairy tales are, finally, a literary genre—to confuse them with the productions of the folk is to perpetuate canon formation and formal definitions of genre. Or, simply put, because they were written by women in France and translated for British children roughly two hundred years later—*because they were by women for children*—fairy tales have been given the same secondary treatment and classification as the productions of the poor, the uneducated, the innocent, and the voiceless. Fairy tales were the product of privileged women who had voices but who were retrospectively silenced when associated with other, secondary citizens of literature.

Without the understanding that there are two subgenres here, the fairy tale and the folktale, we cannot truly examine the genre of the tale. Indeed, Mother Goose, the icon of that initial silencing, has a place of honor in folklore,

but folklore does not have a place of honor in literature. Harries's final argument is that those original, female-fashioned fairy tales should be raised to the standard of literary excellence their written words deserve rather than be allowed to muck about with the productions or the representations of the folk. Her argument for women writers of the literary fairy tale is successful; her argument for the oral folktales of poor and the uneducated, less so—the hierarchical nature of patriarchal canon formation in terms of genre is perpetuated. This book is, finally, superb *literary* criticism; folklorists take note.

**The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth.** By Laurel Thatcher Ulrich. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001. Pp. 501, notes, acknowledgements, index.)

JANE PRZYBYSZ

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On August 14, 1851, Reverend Mr. Horace Bushnell of Hartford, Connecticut, delivered a resounding speech as part of Litchfield County's centennial celebration. Unlike his esteemed colleagues, who recounted long lists of distinguished civic fathers associated with particular public events, Bushnell sang the praises of the anonymous kings and queens of the "age of homespun"—a time when America's unique republican character was shaped in the crucible of preindustrial, self-sufficient households inhabited by virtuous, thrifty, hard-working, and neighborly men *and* women.

Taking Bushnell's speech as her point of departure, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich sets out to understand the attraction that the mythos of an age of homespun held for nineteenth-century Americans and how that notion inspired and informed their efforts to record and preserve New England history. With an interest in both cloth making and history making at the heart of her inquiry, the author organizes each of the book's eleven chapters around one or two textiles or textile-related objects.

Drawing on object-centered anthropological models for thinking about the meaning of

things, as well as text-based methods honed by historians (including the texts of folktales documented by folklorists), Ulrich artfully teases out the multiple stories that converge in the objects she has chosen to illuminate—stories that the age of homespun mythos (as one of many competing cultural narratives) alternately embodied, misrepresented, and repressed. Attending closely to physical evidence of how items such as an Indian basket, an embroidered rose blanket, and a linen tablecloth were made and used, as well as to a broad array of textual materials—everything from probate inventories to diaries to the idiosyncratic, handwritten note that accompanied the gift of an object to a historical society—this book wonderfully complicates our understanding of the cultural contexts that shaped the production and consumption of textiles and of history in late-eighteenth and early nineteenth-century New England.

Ulrich concludes that home production of textiles was indeed central to the early nineteenth-century New England economy. But its importance to the rhetoric of the age of homespun had as much or more to do with the fact that "images of industrious, self-sacrificing and patriotic women domesticated and softened the often harsh realities of political conflict, economic uncertainty, and war" (p. 413). Images of republican women spinning and weaving repressed the facts that the cotton they spun was grown by slaves and that the cultivation of linen and of sheep for textile production was significantly implicated in the eradication of indigenous peoples' way of life and ability to sustain themselves economically.

For anyone who has experienced frustration with the scant interpretive labels that often accompany historical textiles in museum exhibitions, *The Age of Homespun* will become gospel for how to take seriously the textiles and the women and men who made and preserved them. These readers will cheer when Ulrich writes that "the history of textiles is fundamentally a story about international commerce in goods and ideas. It is therefore a story about exploitation as well as exchange, social disruption as well as entrepreneurship, violence as well as aesthetics" (p. 414).

This book disappoints only in its visual pre-