

offers a case in point. A boy who knows no fear is deemed by his father to be a simpleton and is therefore disowned. The father sends him away with instructions to tell no one who his father is. Once on his own, the boy's fearlessness serves him well, and he earns the hand of a princess. The conflict between the hero and his father is soon forgotten, for after the boy establishes his independence, he never looks back.

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See also Childhood and Children

Further Reading

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Feminism

Feminism has occupied itself with an interdisciplinary critique of patriarchal literary and cultural practices and looks at the conditions within society that restrict women's access to the public sphere and denigrate their activities in the private realm. Of special interest to feminists in folktale and fairy-tale studies are the processes of canon formation, the production and reception of folktales and fairy tales, and the representation of **women** in these traditions. The feminist critique has deeply influenced folktale and fairy-tale research and has led to a reevaluation of canonical traditions, disciplinary constructs, and a valorization of traditions by women writers. Feminists embrace women's contributions to scholarship and expressive culture.

Spurred by the feminist debates of the early 1970s, the modern feminist critique of the fairy-tale tradition began with the women's movement in the United States and Europe. Literary and social historians began to look at the negative stereotypes within the canonical tales and how those images conditioned female acculturation. Feminists viewed the most popular fairy tales as a primary site of contention within the civilizing process and argued that the most popular stories shaped the sexual, **gender**, and social **politics** of modern society and kept women subordinate to **men**. Addressing both literary production and

reception, feminists studied the **collecting** and editorial practices in the **Grimms' *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*** (*Children's and Household Tales*, 1812–15) and examined how editorial interventions shaped a message of those tales to create an increasingly restrictive image of womanhood. To counter those negative images of women, feminist scholars began anthologizing fairy tales—from both the canonical and other, relatively unknown traditions—with strong, independent, and brave females. The role of women as **informants** and contributors to the canonical tradition also received much attention, while other scholars looked at female traditions that had preceded or paralleled male-authored collections but had been eclipsed by male contemporaries or had received no modern critical or scholarly attention. Within the canonical tales, feminists often focused on the female voices—of nubile heroines silenced through semantic shifts and careful **editing**, and of mature, powerful women endowed with the evil loquacity of **witches**. In search of the genuine female voice in fairy tales, major recovery work was done on previously unstudied or ignored traditions of women that show a continuity of feminist concerns across national borders and over centuries. Anthologies of alternate or countertraditions, from the tales of the French *conteuses* (female authors of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries) to nineteenth-century contemporaries of the Grimms, also began to appear. With the new feminist wave, contemporary feminist writers rejected, rewrote, and responded to the canonical tradition and, as early female writers had done, used the subversive potential of the genre to criticize the patriarchy and its messages of female subordination.

Many of these same concerns have informed the feminist critique of folktale research. Feminist scholars argued that **folklore** studies were amazingly apolitical and unconcerned about gender issues, but three broad areas of feminist concern—the conditioning effects of negative images of women projected in verbal folklore, the female use of folklore, and the valorization of female folk performers and artists—closely parallel the critical agenda of their peers in fairy-tale studies. Since the late 1980s, feminist folklorists have been evaluating the genres of expressive culture that have received scholarly attention, as well as women's

representation as informants and published scholars. A bibliography on women and folklore appeared as early as 1899 in the *Journal of American Folklore*, but a study of the 100-year publishing history of that journal indicates that topics on women had been limited to birthing, charms, quaint folk remedies, and the like, while superior-quality research by female scholars was often overshadowed by inferior scholarship of male colleagues through the editorial practices of the journal boards. Feminist research also has revealed a preference for **performance** contexts favoring genres of male expressive culture and has shown that field researchers sought materials from a female informant only when no male was available. Interesting studies have appeared that frame the male collector's recollection of his encounter with a female informant in terms of a tale of marvels in which the long-silent woman is awakened to the value of her stories and given a voice by the male field researcher and scholar.

An important aspect of feminist fairy-tale and folktale research has been the dismantling of their scholarly apparatus and disciplinary tools. Feminist critics have studied the entries in such seminal works as Antti **Aarne** and Stith **Thompson's** *The Types of the Folktale* (2nd rev. ed., 1961) and Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (rev. ed., 1955–58) and uncovered inherent gender biases. In folklore studies, feminist scholars have revealed the effects of the gender divide and how public versus private plays out in research agendas: since men's expressive culture is typically public and hence more accessible than women's more-private domains, it is often assumed to be the dominant or only area where expressive culture occurs. Feminist scholarship is beginning to create a space to evaluate the expressive culture of women.

For all its efforts to elevate the position of women in every aspect of society, the feminist critique itself has not been immune to criticism. There have been charges that white feminist scholars have used their privileged position in academies to press an agenda that does not represent women in non-Western contexts. Scholarly articles on traditions outside of the Western focus have recently attempted to redress such concerns. Feminism has broadened the interdisciplinary approaches to folktale and fairy-tale research and

continues to expand the understanding of women's roles in these creative forms.

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See also Feminist Tales; Queer and Transgender Theory; Sex, Sexuality

Further Reading

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Feminist Tales

Depending on how they are defined, feminist tales can encompass either a vast corpus, quantitatively and historically, or a limited body of more-recent tales. In the latter case, feminist tales could be understood as a response to the rise of **feminism** in the 1960s and 1970s and, thus, as an explicit critique of both the patriarchal structures in many of the best-known Western fairy tales and the socialization of **gender** norms they perform. But in the former case, they might include a broad array of both folktales and fairy tales that are concerned with the diverse roles and challenges that face **women** across a variety of cultures. Whether or not such tales qualify as "feminist" is open for debate; but there is hardly a consensus about the meaning that label carries, and even some recent authors of what are commonly understood to be "feminist" tales reject it. To gain the broadest possible historical perspective on the phenomenon, "feminist tales" will refer here to those narratives that question the patriarchal oppression of women, either in subtle or explicit ways, before and after the rise of modern Western feminism.

From their beginnings, oral folklore and the **literary fairy tale** have been closely associated with women. How deeply the West has gendered such narratives can be demonstrated by the mythic origins attributed to the **storytelling** of old wives, **Mother**