

## Sorting Out Donkey Skin (ATU 510B): Toward an Integrative Literal-Symbolic Analysis of Fairy Tales<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

*This article debates the merits of fairy tale interpretive frameworks that privilege the psychological and symbolic, versus those that utilize a literal and feminist orientation. Using ATU 510B as a test case, for its intriguing blend of real-world elements and the fantastic, the author suggests that a synthesis of literal and symbolic theories allows for the fullest understanding of the polyvalent meanings of tale, which is particularly problematic due to its depictions of incest. Drawing examples from canonical as well as contemporary versions of ATU 510B, various psychoanalytic and feminist interpretations of the tale type are put to the test, and ultimately combined to reach a more productive framework.*

**A**TU 510B, “Peau d’Asne” (also “Donkey Skin” and previously “The Dress of Gold, of Silver, and of Stars [Cap o’ Rushes]”), exists within a rich, international oral tradition and has attracted literary rewriters, from Charles Perrault and the Grimm brothers, to modern American novelists and short story writers. The tale has been problematic for publishers as well as scholars, however, due to its overt references to incest. As Kay Stone observes, ATU 510B rarely appears in collections “since the heroine is forced to leave home to avoid her father’s threats of an incestuous marriage” (1975, 46).

Scholars of this tale type must decide how to interpret the tale’s elements, ranging from those that appear in real life—family relationships, rings, and dresses—to those that are clearly fantastic, like the garments that shine as brightly as celestial bodies. Interpretations of this tale tend to focus either on its manifest or latent content; however, exclusive attention to surface details instead of deeper symbols, or vice versa, restricts the potential meanings of the tale and its possibilities to address a wide range of experiences. The purpose of this inquiry is to illuminate this full range of meaning in ATU 510B and, in doing so, to outline a flexible interpretive methodology that can better account for these multiple interpretive levels.

Classificatory scholarship on ATU 510B tends to focus on its divergences from the related tale type ATU 510A, “Cinderella.” Hans-Jörg Uther’s updated *The Types of International Folktales* describes ATU 510B’s plot generally: a king promises his dying wife that he will marry someone as beautiful as her (or who fulfills another condition), who turns out to be their daughter. The daughter delays the wedding by asking her father for magical garments, often three beautiful dresses and a coat or covering of rough fur or wood. The daughter escapes to another kingdom, works in the castle, and enchants the resident prince in her dresses. She taunts him with her secret identity, retaliation for his rude treatment of her servant persona. Finally, she slips him a token or he uncovers her, and they marry. The versions that Uther lists span the British Isles, Baltic states, Scandinavian countries, Germanic-speaking countries, Romance-language

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countries, Mediterranean countries, East European states, Slavic states, Middle East, some parts of Asia, and European-colonized locations in North and South America.<sup>2</sup>

Christine Goldberg's monograph on ATU 510B gives an outline of the tale's plot that positions the "Unnatural Father" and the "Love Like Salt" episodes as equivalent, for either one can provide the motivation for the daughter to flee and pose as a servant. Goldberg asserts that, because "the Unnatural Father (motif T411) is a character in AT 706, The Maiden without Hands," the incestuous father's presence cannot be used to distinguish ATU 510B from other types (1997, 31). Instead, she argues, "The essence of the Donkey Skin tale—its identifying qualities—are the heroine's disguise and her position as a servant" (1997, 31). Yet the same could be said of ATU 510A, or ATU 923 ("Love Like Salt").<sup>3</sup> Thus the reason for the heroine's flight must inform any consideration of this tale type as distinct from related tales.

As the threat of incest links many variants found under these tale types that chronicle the rise of an innocent persecuted heroine in disguise, an analysis of one should be informed by the others.<sup>4</sup> D. L. Ashliman's analysis and collection of Indo-European incest tales relies on intertextuality to discuss the tales in light of one another. His summary of ATU 510B on his webpage "The Father Who Wanted to Marry His Daughter" is useful, as it does not rely solely on motifs to define the tale, but instead breaks the tale down into plot elements rather like Holbek's moves.<sup>5</sup> Ashliman's comprehensive analysis includes ATU 510B in addition to ATU 706, brother-

sister incest tales, and other tales that are not as easily classified, reminding us that the boundaries between tale types are fluid.

In this paper, however, I primarily limit my analysis to examples of ATU 510B. I utilize some of the well-known texts found in Ashliman's online tale collection, "The Father Who Wanted to Marry His Daughter": Charles Perrault's (French) "Donkeyskin," the Grimms' (German) "All-Kinds of Fur" ("Allerleirauh" in German), Thomas Crane's (Italian) "Fair Maria Wood," and "Broomthrow, Brushthrow, Combthrow" from Austria. Ethnographically-collected texts in my analysis include Laura Gonzenbach's Sicilian "Betta Pilusa" (in Zipes 2004, 52-58), E. T. Kristensen's Danish "Pulleru" (in Holbek 1998, 552-53), Alessandro Falassi's Italian "Donkey Skin" (1980, 42-45), James Taggart's Spanish "Cinderella" (1990, 106-109), and Ibrahim Muhawi and Sharif Kanaana's Palestinian "Sackcloth" (1989, 125-30). Finally, I also draw on recent literary rewrites of the tale: Robin McKinley's *Deerskin* (1993), Jane Yolen's "Allerleirauh" (1995), and Terri Windling's "Donkeyskin" (1995). Though the above-mentioned tales are the only texts I will directly reference, I also make use of Marian Rolfe Cox's 1893 collection of Cinderella-type tales and Anna Birgitta Rooth's 1951 *The Cinderella Cycle*. Here, I take the view that it is more useful to view literary and ethnographic texts on a spectrum than to separate them completely in analysis.<sup>6</sup>

### Interpretive Frameworks

How we interpret fairy tales depends a great deal upon how we conceive of their relationship to reality, and the nature of this

relationship remains contested. Although fairy tales' content may not be precisely mimetic, the scholarly treatments of them have often employed the metaphor of a mirror to describe a wide variety of relationships between these texts and reality. For instance, Stephen Swann Jones (2002) hypothesizes that fairy tales are cultural and psychological mirrors, while Kate Bernheimer's edited book *Mirror, Mirror on the Wall: Women Writers Explore Their Favorite Fairy Tales* (1998) is based on the premise that fairy tales offer people, especially writers, valuable sites of self-reflection. Bengt Holbek, by contrast, observes that it does not appear possible to keep the interpreters out of the interpretation, and hence that "texts are in fact mirrors in which we see our own faces rather than anything else" (1998, 402). Fairy tales do not always serve as simple mirrors, however. As Cristina Bacchilega demonstrates in *Postmodern Fairy Tales*, the mimetic strategies of fairy tales are ideologically motivated, making it crucial to ask not only how the fairy tale is framed, but also who is holding and manipulating that frame. Therefore, it is necessary to ask about cultural context, and to determine when fantasy can be interpreted as mirroring reality or distorting it.

That fairy tales have some connection to reality is undeniable. Vladimir Propp, for instance, notes: "Obviously, the tale is born out of life; however, the wondertale is a weak transcript of reality" (1984, 84). This remark implies that while tales may not be mirror-images of reality, they are still informed by human experience. Similarly, Lutz Röhrich argues that: "Reality underpins even fantasy; not even fantasy is independent of the

social conditions in the narrator's real life" (1991, 192). Holbek goes further in his *Interpretation of Fairy Tales* to claim that fantasy may even be the primary instrument through which social conditions can be discussed, mediated, and escaped (1998). Social context is an important part of folkloristic analysis, but it is not always clear whether this context should privilege internal (relating to the psychology or emotions of characters and narrators) or external reality (historical or actual events). This conundrum creates the divide between symbolic and literal readings of fairy tales.

Often the issue of performing literal or symbolic reading has broken down along the lines of those who see characters as exhibiting human emotions and reactions, and those who see them as flat details or psychological devices in service of a larger narrative. The question of whether characters in fairy tales represent real human beings and can be analyzed as such is subject to great variation. In the assorted versions of ATU 510B, for instance, we see behavior that ranges from earthy and human to abstract and archetypal.<sup>7</sup> This range is necessarily related to the tension between communal tradition and individual innovation, which is at the heart of folklore performances. Naturally, diverse narrators and audiences will relate to their characters differently, with several levels of projection and empathy. Given this range, it is most productive to view the behavior and humanity of fairy-tale characters on a spectrum, extending from conceptual to concrete.

Since the way in which we see fairy-tale characters—as symbols or humans—carries consequences for how they are

interpreted, this dichotomy of views on the nature of fairy tale characters has given rise to two distinct traditions of interpretation: psychological approaches, which interpret characters conceptually; and literal approaches, which interpret characters as concrete. I shall give an overview of both approaches in the scholarship on ATU 510B before presenting a more subtle synthesis of interpretive methods.<sup>8</sup>

### **Psychological Approaches to the Tale**

Scholars interested in symbolism claim that literal readings of fairy tales are simply not adequate, since the fantastic elements of tales must be accounted for. Symbolic readings of folk narrative can take many forms, of which the psychological approach is but one. However, given the comparative prevalence of psychological approaches in fairy tale studies, I have chosen to foreground these theories in my discussion of symbolic approaches.<sup>9</sup> According to Donald Haase, psychological approaches work on the assumption that “fairy-tale plots and motifs are not representations of socio-historical reality, but symbols of human experience that provide insight into human behavior” (2000, 404). This approach is useful in explicating incredible aspects of tales not found in real life. As Holbek notes: “If the meaning...of the marvelous features in fairy tales cannot be disclosed by a study of their historical origins, some kind of synchronic approach to interpretations becomes a necessity” (1998, 259).<sup>10</sup>

Psychological approaches to ATU 510B, however, do not always focus on the fantastic elements of the tale. More often, the interpersonal relationships within the tale are the focus of interpretation,

though how they are interpreted often breaks down along Freudian or Jungian lines.<sup>11</sup>

Freudian or psychoanalytic approaches to ATU 510B privilege the Oedipal drama, positing that the fairy tale is told from a child’s point of view. Any projection within the tale is thus on the part of the child protagonist. A few examples from related tale types will illustrate this tendency. Dundes, Holbek, and Bruno Bettelheim all focus on explaining the incestuous father-daughter relationship from the daughter’s perspective. Dundes begins his study of ATU 706, “The Maiden without Hands,” with a discussion of the Electra complex, relating a comment by early psychoanalyst Riklin on tales where fathers want to marry their daughters: “the initial death of the mother (queen) reflected wishful thinking on the part of adolescent girls who, in terms of the Electra complex, wanted to replace their mothers vis-à-vis their fathers” (1989, 138). From this view, the cycle of father-daughter incest tales is not actually about real-life incest, but rather the daughter’s desire for her father, disguised and embedded within the tale’s plot. Other Freudians arrive at similar conclusions. Bettelheim states that Cinderella’s “degradation—often without any stepmother and (step)sisters being part of the story—is the consequence of oedipal entanglement of father and daughter” (1975, 245). Ben Rubenstein connects young Cinderella’s “phallic strivings and penis envy” to “the sexual pursuit of the daughter by the father,” whom the daughter desires (1982, 225).

In contrast, Jungian approaches to fairy tales eschew the infantile sexuality hypothesis, focusing instead on

universalized masculine and feminine values. Marie Louise von Franz's approach is typical in that she does not address incest or conditions of power and abuse in real life in her discussion of ATU 706, "The Maiden without Hands." All of the characters in this tale represent inner figures within a psyche, with the father as the destructive animus and the future husband as "a collective dominating positive spirit" (1993, 95). Marion Woodman also views the father-daughter tension as part of a soul's journey. In *Leaving My Father's House: A Journey Toward Conscious Femininity*, she uses the Grimms' version of ATU 510B as an organizing metaphor for every woman's voyage from patriarchal trauma to contact with the eternal feminine.<sup>12</sup> This analysis focuses on collective experiences with individual testimonies woven in. The fairy tale is meaningful only insofar as it expresses the Jungian paradigm of feminine development that Woodman follows.

Holbek surveys Freudian, Jungian, and other psychological approaches to fairy tales, claiming to reject each one owing to his inability to "pronounce any one of them more 'right' than the other" (1998, 319). However, in his own analysis, Holbek resorts to what Vaz da Silva criticizes as "fairly standard Freudian symbolism" which attempts "to reduce all symbolic expressions to emotional impressions" (2000, 7). The tendency for psychological approaches to be reductionistic is one problem with applying them to fairy tales, which are by nature polyvalent. Additionally, most of the psychological theories applied to folklore were created to be used in therapy and not the interpretation of cultures

and texts. So this must also be taken into account. Thus, the origins and uses of psychoanalysis in particular should be questioned before their relevance to fairy tales is unconditionally accepted.

For example, the Electra complex is instrumental to the psychoanalytic interpretation of ATU 510B and kindred tales, and is an especially contested idea. Kilmartin and Dervin point out that, because Freud did not see the developments of males and females as analogous, "the Electra complex and the Oedipus complex should not be represented as parallel" (Kilmartin and Dervin 1997, 269). In fact, they continue, "the Electra complex is actually not much more than a footnote in psychoanalytic history, rejected by the father of the field (Freud) and later ignored by the very person who coined the term (Jung)" (Kilmartin and Dervin 1997, 269). Today, even Freudian scholars such as Alan Dundes have questioned whether the Electra Complex's underlying notion of "penis envy," Freud's idea that a girl would reject maternal identification and desire to be with/like the father, "isn't simply a form of male projection" (1982, 220). Casting the existence of penis envy into doubt thus threatens the legitimacy of the Electra complex, which would invalidate most psychoanalytic interpretations of ATU 510B.

In addition to problems with the terminology associated with psychoanalysis, there are feminist concerns about the validity of psychoanalytic principles. Initially articulating his "seduction hypothesis," which concluded that his female patients actually were telling the truth when they said they had been sexually molested,

Freud later shifted his views, dismissing these claims as fantasies (Warner 1994, 350). This shift has had repercussions for the fields of psychology, therapy, and any discipline that employs Freudian ideas. The authors of "The Emergence of Child Sexual Abuse from the Shadow of Sexism" examine "the attitudes and prejudices that blamed the victim, minimized her experience, and held her accountable" in light of "Freud's legacy... which has pervaded our conception of child sexual abuse for nearly 100 years, informing medical, legal, and psychiatric treatment" (Bayer and Connors 1988, 12). In the evolution of Freud's ideas from the seduction hypothesis to the Oedipus and Electra complexes: "The real experience of sexual abuse, which was the basis for the earlier theory, was turned into a fantasy of longing and seduction in which the child is transformed from a victim of adult power to a willing participant in the sexual fantasy" (Bayer and Connors 1988, 13). It is an interesting twist on wish-fulfillment that Freudian ideas like the Electra complex "reinforce feelings of self-blame on the assumption that children's *feelings* are responsible for the alleged trauma" (Bayer and Connors 1988, 14, italics in original). In the case of ATU 510B, the protagonist's desire for her father's love can be seen as the motivation for the tale's plot, but only if the entire tale is understood as fantasy, not mimesis. That is, any incestuous feelings on the part of the girl toward her father would seek an outlet through a fantasy that exculpates her from responsibility for taboo desires.

Projection and identification present further problems with the psychoanalytic approach to fairy tales. For instance,

Francisco Vaz da Silva asserts that projection cannot be attributed to fairy tale characters at all. Instead, he declares, "there cannot of course be such a thing as projection on the part of a fairy tale character" which means "projection is to be ascribed to narrators identifying with" characters (2000, 5). In Vaz da Silva's view, then, projection can be seen as an artificial construct imposed by narrators upon characters, or worse, as a theoretical frame forced by the interpreter.

Another concern with projection is the difficulty of determining *who* is doing the projecting upon whom. Specifically, the premise that fairy tales are told from a child's perspective raises issues of culpability and authority. Maria Tatar notes that people are drawn to readings of fairy tales that blame children's sexuality for what befalls them "in part out of a desire to avoid facing the 'unpleasant truths' that emerge once we conceded that some of the events staged in fairy-tale fictions can be as real as the fantasies they seem to represent" (1992, xx-xxi). In tales like ATU 510B, where the protagonist is threatened with incest that she supposedly desires from a psychoanalytic view, the incest that is present in the text is thereby dismissed as a subconscious fantasy, not something that might be present in real life. If tales of abuse are not, as psychoanalytic interpreters assume, told from the children's perspective, then they mean something very different about power relations. Jack Zipes claims that fairy tales, along with other folk narrative genres, express an adult perspective on power and the family (1995, 220). That is, they rationalize the self-serving actions of adults, while portraying

the consequences for—not the desires of—children. Interestingly, Otto Rank, a member of Freud's circle in Vienna, viewed father-daughter incest stories as fantasies from the father's perspective (1992), hinting at a more culture-reflective view of the tales' content.

Jungian interpreters have, at times, completely ignored any reality of violence, instead viewing the fairy tale as a journey of the soul, disconnected from any reality of sexual abuse. Woodman, for example, acknowledges that physical incest occurs, but uses ATU 510B to address psychic incest, which she believes is more prevalent and requires women to re-evaluate how they relate to femininity and masculinity—rather than addressing the underlying social and sexual problems of living in patriarchal societies. At their worst, psychological analyses of fairy tales not only ignore realities of abuse, but also rationalize them. For example, Bettelheim's Freudian explication of the protagonist's punishment in ATU 510A, "Cinderella," uses the problematic idea of masochism: "deep down a child who knows that she does want her father to prefer her to her mother feels she deserves to be punished for it—thus her flight or banishment, and degradation to a Cinderella existence" (1989, 246). This mentality can be used to justify violence against children, as in Ben Rubenstein's analysis of his young daughter's behavior in the context of the Cinderella story and psychoanalytic theories of masochism. He writes that his daughter's "unconscious constructed a beating phantasy [sic] arising sharply out of her castrated feelings" (1982, 226). Further: "It was obviously her wish that I would come and beat (attack) her. I had,

many times, been quite impressed by the obviousness of this wish" (1982, 226-27). This interpretation exemplifies many of the problems with psychoanalytic approaches to fairy tales—its dogmatic lens that departs from the text, and its reliance on the ideologically skewed roots of psychoanalysis—in addition to offering a disturbing glimpse of how a fairy tale can be read to justify one's own power by blaming the victim.

### **Literal Approaches to the Tale**

By contrast, scholars such as Jack Zipes reject psychological approaches to fairy tales in favor of highlighting the realities of "child abuse, neglect, and abandonment" in fairy tales (1995, 220). Literal-minded scholars are also aware that psychological interpretations can detract from the sobriety of problems like sexual abuse by transforming them from social crimes into harmless and universal developmental issues. A literal interpretation of ATU 510B highlights the incest motif as reality, not symbol. Though in many versions of ATU 510B the incestuous act is threatened rather than carried out, I consider even the threat of sexual violence to be damaging and thus worthy of discussion.<sup>13</sup> In this light, the magical elements become metaphors for the heroine's experience of abuse, as well as reflections of a patriarchal society that condones such abuse by veiling or ignoring it. Often, literally-oriented scholars draw attention to the problems inherent in viewing the father in the tale as faultless, as psychoanalytic interpretations seem to portray him. Indeed, all motivations—of characters in tales, and of the interpreters themselves—are questioned. As Alice

Miller points out, psychoanalysis has generally had a one-sided view of the parent-child relationship: "The way parents actually feel about their children is brought out very clearly in fairy tales...In psychoanalytic literature, on the other hand, parents' feelings towards their children are hardly ever the subject of research" (1984, 237). Projection and power remain key issues in literal interpretations of ATU 510B, though seen from a different angle than in psychological interpretations.

Two approaches to literal interpretations of fairy tales are the historical and feminist perspectives, which are complementary but with differing assumptions and goals. I characterize as "feminist" those approaches that not only focus on women's perspectives, but also actively theorize the connections between gender, sexuality, society, and power.<sup>14</sup> Some of the historical approaches to incest tales border on myth-ritualism in their attempts to elucidate the inclusion of incest in folklore; Dundes characterizes these approaches as attempting to explain away the "monstrous" incest motif with rationalizations that reach far back into ancient times (1989, 136-37).<sup>15</sup> In Holbek's methodological remarks on socio-historical approaches to fairy tales, he concludes that all the sources he surveyed "pointed to a connection between the contents of the tales and the living conditions of the narrators" (1998, 400).<sup>16</sup>

Helen Pilinovsky deals with the literal possibility of incest in her essay "Donkeyskin, Deerskin, Allerleirauh: The Reality of the Fairy Tale," in which she traces recent literary transformations of ATU 510B as well as the symbolism

found within oral tradition. Pilinovsky focuses on the tale's potential to convey the heroine's positive responses to danger: "Although the princess in each version of tale type 510B does face the possibility of sexual abuse, she is portrayed as being able to avoid it through a combination of unlikely luck...and unrealistically achieved accomplishments" (2001). Pilinovsky does not take into account psychoanalytic scholarship, dismissing the possibility that the heroine desires her father's attention by stating that abuse is never the victim's fault. She rejects psychoanalytic theory on the basis of its "number of problematic qualities," only acknowledging "examples in the genre of the fairy tale have been said to serve a therapeutic psychological function" (2001).

Literal approaches tend to follow the culture-reflector theory of folklore, which, in the case of ATU 510B, would state that the manifest details of the tale reveal something about the culture in which it is told. D. L. Ashliman, in his essay "Incest in Indo-European Folktales," refers to the cultural context which sustains the plot of ATU 510B: "Reflecting the patriarchal values of the society that used them, these folktales seldom challenge a father's authority to do with the members of his household whatever he pleases" (1997). This is congruent with the context-sensitive approach that Ibrahim Muhawi and Sharif Kanaana use in their study of Palestinian-Arab folktales, which include a variant of ATU 510B, "Sackcloth." Muhawi and Kanaana interpret the heroine's plight thus: "the sexual awareness begins even before the girl leaves home, producing feelings of confusion, shame, and guilt, especially



since she seems to arouse a most unnatural passion in her father. Hence her desire to cover her body completely, so as to appear to be not only of the opposite sex but also a horrible freak whom no one would want to touch" (1989, 145).

Some literally-oriented scholars incorporate psychological approaches, even while acknowledging skepticism toward the power structures contained within. Ashliman states, "folktales dealing with father-daughter incest often reflect a psychological projection of unresolved Oedipal issues" (1997). Further, "the description of the fleeing daughter's 'rescue' gives further credence to a psychological projection interpretation of type 510B tales" because "the man who discovers and ultimately marries the runaway princess closely resembles the girl's own father. He too is a king, exerting despotic, patriarchal authority over his household" (1997). Ashliman also examines the rhetorical devices that transfer culpability from the father or obscure his role in the incest. Examples include the promise extracted by the king's dying wife to remarry under certain conditions, or the daughter's initiative in trying on her mother's ring (or shoe in some versions).

Literal interpretations convincingly highlight power imbalances within patriarchal family structures, but they do not account for all of the tale's features. Forcing certain details that appear in any one version of the tale to conform to a case study of incest is difficult at best. Isolated aspects make sense, but others are too marvelous or too unique to fairy-tale structure to be interpreted in a realistic light. For instance, why would a tale depicting the trauma resulting from

incest seek to exculpate the perpetrator, and not punish him as so many female villains are cruelly punished in other tales?

### Synthesis

Claude Lévi-Strauss famously criticized attempts to artificially splice together psychological and literal explanations of folklore. In these attempts, Lévi-Strauss points out, a piece of narrative data is either made to fit a society directly—"mythology reflects the social structure and social relations"—or if the data does not directly fit the society, made to fit indirectly: "should the data be conflicting, it would be readily claimed that the purpose of mythology is to provide an outlet for repressed feelings" (1965, 83). This dichotomy, which Lévi-Strauss portrays as a way for scholars to map their theories to their data, may not actually be an irreconcilable opposition. Rather, it is possible to view psychological and literal explanations as opposite yet complementary, just as there are many levels of meaning that coexist within fairy tale texts.

While certain studies have been critiqued for placing too much weight on either the manifest or the latent content of incest fairy tale texts,<sup>17</sup> some folklorists have already begun to show how it is possible to integrate literal and symbolic approaches to father-daughter incest tales. Below, I shall argue why this strategy is essential. As Tatar notes, "to see a daughter as wholly detached from the drama of her father's desire is just as absurd as labeling her 'guilty of the original incestuous thought' when it is the father who makes the advances" (1992, 126). In fact, Tatar and Ashliman

both incorporate psychoanalytic theory to describe some reasons for the appeal of these tales. Tatar explores the characters of the seductive daughter and the collusive mother, who have emerged in folktales and literature, predating psychoanalytic theory (1992, 130). This observation parallels Dundes's argument that the "folk" have been using Freudian symbolism long before Freud put a name to it (2007, 319-320). Ashliman agrees that "projective inversion...has contributed to the broad dissemination of the folktales dealing with father-daughter incest" (1997). Though he agrees that these tales can "provide positive emotional responses to diverse problems" and "could indeed bring psychological comfort to a young woman troubled by unresolved Oedipal issues," he does "not want such a reading to deflect attention from the principal source (in [his] opinion) of the tales' popularity and longevity: their depiction of problems ensuing from the sexual abuse of a child" (1997). Marina Warner's common-sense observation seems to cover all the aspects of an interpretation of the tale: "the 'Donkeyskin' type of story yields a common insight into minds and experiences of young women growing up, and into erotic fantasies on both sides, the father's and the daughter's, conscious as well as unconscious" (1994, 350).

Context is key in determining how to evaluate the usefulness of an approach to interpreting a fairy tale. For instance, although feminists are justifiably wary of psychoanalysis, as mired as it is in sexism, Juliet Mitchell notes in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*:

A rejection of psychoanalysis and Freud's works is fatal for

feminism. However it may have been used, psychoanalysis is not a recommendation *for* a patriarchal society, but an analysis *of* one. If we are interested in understanding and challenging the oppression of women, we cannot afford to neglect it (1974, xv, italics in original).

Thus, if the Electra complex is at all present in ATU 510B, it is helpful as a descriptive, not prescriptive, model. Other feminists have critically employed psychoanalytic concepts in order to explain the sexist phenomena they observe in society. Gayle Rubin modifies Lévi-Strauss's kinship theories to argue that the essence of kinship systems lies in an exchange of women among men. Rubin's theory, along with Judith Butler's writings about the performativity of gender, pairs psychoanalytic insights (like Freud's work) with structuralism (like Lévi-Strauss) to reach a feminist scholarly synthesis<sup>18</sup>.

Psychological approaches to fairy tales do in fact have a subtle contribution to make to literal-minded scholars of fairy tales. Psychoanalysis, like analytic psychology, presents itself as revealing universal truths—about subconscious drives in the former case, and ties to archetypes and the collective unconscious in the latter, each of which is translated into symbols that ostensibly populate fairy tales. Both systems suffer from a lack of cultural context, but then, each of these systems reveals something about the worldviews of its adherents. If psychoanalysis is a patriarchal and sexist system of thought, and if its content can illuminate fairy tales, then these connections will indicate something about patriarchal values in and around

fairy-tale contexts.

In contrast, one of the downsides to literally interpreting fairy tales is that it ties them very closely to their particular cultural contexts, making it difficult to extract theoretical statements that can be generalized to other conditions. Viewing fairy tales within the context of transmission is useful to a point, and this is when the scholar must step in to try on different exoteric theories. Remaining close to the text by prioritizing the manifest details of the tale, though, prevents the interpretation from straying too far into abstraction (or wrong-headedness). It is crucial to integrate symbolic and literal approaches to fairy tales in order to ensure that an interpretation is not one-sided. And perhaps surprisingly, psychological and literal interpretations of ATU 510B do converge very neatly.

### Converging Interpretations

Tatar persuasively suggests that not only narrators, but also audiences and readers, of tales are drawn to privilege certain readings of tales over others, according to where they would like to assign blame and agency (1992, xx). This matters because, among other things, fairy tales offer models for how to interpret beliefs and actions in the real world. The history of interpreting “Bluebeard” as a tale chastising curious women—rather than chastising serial killer husbands!—set against a background of domestic assault in the West is a prime example of the relevance of fairy tale logic in the real world (see Bacchilega 1997, 104-112). The “folk” as well as interpreters of folklore utilize multiple strategies for identifying and assigning blame and agency within the tales. These strategies include the

instrumentalization and conflation of tale roles, as well as the constellation of symbols involving the heroine’s skin covering.

From a structural perspective, the father in ATU 510B serves as a catalyst for the heroine’s flight, and also a hostile donor figure to the heroine (Holbek 1998, 417). Vaz da Silva points out that the father usually gives the gifts as a result of the promise made to the mother, and sometimes the heroine takes items belonging to her deceased mother (2002, 217 n. 3). The mother’s role in motivating the incestuous intent that occurs after her death can be read in a number of ways. Ashliman notes that the technique of shifting the blame from the incestuous father to the dying mother often appears in conjunction with an episode in which the daughter tries on her deceased mother’s shoes, clothes, or ring, thus seeming to invite engagement from her father. Amelia Rutledge suggests in her reading of the novelization of ATU 510B, *Deerskin*: “The promise to the wife can be read as an attempt to mitigate paternal culpability by suggesting his misguided fidelity; the promise also aligns both parents against the daughter” (2001, 175).

Though absent, the mother can mean many things in tales of father-daughter incest, and she continues to exert a large influence over not only the story’s plot, but also the interpretations thereof. Alan Dundes interprets the absence of the mother in 510B-type tales as a case of wish fulfillment for the girl who theoretically wants to marry her father, given that the mother is out of the picture at the story’s start (1982, 236). Yet a dead mother could also signify a

girl's conscious feelings of abandonment in an incest situation. As Judith Herman and Lisa Hirschman note in *Father-Daughter Incest*, female incest survivors often feel abandoned by their mothers in their roles as protective adults (1981, 31). Many of these women also reported feeling hostile toward their mothers. This corresponds to the villainization of the mother in ATU 510B which, according to Tatar, results from the dying mother's wishes being used to justify the father's attempted seduction (1992, 128-29). This interpretation works with both psychological and literal approaches: from the daughter's perspective, psychoanalytically, the mother really *is* the villain in the Oedipal drama, or read in light of real-world incest, the mother is the villain in abandoning her child to the sexual predation of the father, or further, providing him with the incentive to sexually pursue his daughter.

Within the tales, however, the mother-daughter relationship is much more complex than villain-victim. Taggart analyzes the version of ATU 510B he collected in Spain by using some psychoanalytic concepts (the Oedipal triangle and the concept of split projections) but he does not simplify his data to make it fit the psychoanalytic model. He states that the (female) narrator's telling

...illustrate[s] that the heroine's entanglement with her father and her emergence from that entanglement come about as a result of her complicated relationship with her mother...On the one hand, the narcissistic and controlling mother instructs her husband to marry only another woman who looks like her and

unwittingly places her daughter in the Oedipal situation. The widowed father follows the wishes of the heroine's mother and proposes marriage to his daughter because she is the only woman who looks like his dead wife . . . On the other hand, the mother, symbolically recast as the female neighbor, helps Cinderella extract herself from her Oedipal entanglement by giving her advice and the pelican suit, by which she escapes her father's incestuous proposal of marriage (1990, 110).

It is interesting that Taggart does not scrutinize the father's role in following the death-bed premise, only portraying him as a pawn of the mother. Among the tales I have selected to analyze, the death-bed promise appears in the majority: Perrault's "Donkey Skin," "Fair Maria Wood," the Grimms' "All Kinds of Fur," "Betta Pilusa," Falassi's "Donkey Skin," "Cinderella," *Deerskin*, Yolen's "Allerleirauh," and Windling's "Donkeyskin." The criteria given for the selection of a new bride include marrying someone who looks like the mother in "Cinderella" (Taggart 1990, 106), someone as beautiful as the mother in *Deerskin* (McKinley 1993, 20), someone as beautiful and with the same golden hair in the Grimms' "All Kinds of Fur" (Ashliman 1998), someone whom the mother's ring fits in "Fair Maria Wood" (Ashliman 1998), and someone whom a ring belonging to the mother fits in Falassi's "Donkey Skin" (1980, 42) as well as in "Betta Pilusa" (Zipes 2004, 52).

With regard to the beauty conditions, it is the father who decides that only his daughter is as or more beautiful than her mother, and thus proposes marriage

to her. These tales give narrative agency to the father, transforming the girl into a victim, whereas in the tales that require fulfillment of a condition, the girl often acts in a way that seems to invite her father's attention, because she is emulating her mother. In "Donkey Skin," the girl tries on her mother's wedding ring and comments: "Look, father, how nice it looks on me...mother's ring" (Falassi 1980, 42). Similarly, in "Betta Pilusa," the girl tries on her mother's ring, but with an unexpected effect: "The ring slid very easily onto her finger, but when she wanted to take it off, she could not manage to do it" (Zipes 2004, 52). The girl becomes frightened, and wraps a piece of cloth around her finger so her father will not see, but he becomes angry and rips the cloth away, then declares his intention to marry her. In this tale, the ring's magical staying power illuminates the flow of desire from two angles: it exculpates a girl who may desire her father and traps a girl who may fear her father's desire. Both dynamics can coexist within an individual's psyche, just as both possibilities exist within the scope of the tale's variations.

In "Fair Maria Wood," the father tries the wedding ring on various women, and then puts the ring on his daughter's finger against her will.<sup>19</sup> Yet this version is anomalous, because she consents to marry him, and the wedding actually takes place prior to the donor sequence, whereas in most versions the heroine obtains gifts from her father and leaves home before they can be wed. Here, the father asks her what she wants on the day of the wedding, and then provides her with four silk dresses and a wooden dress, with which the daughter escapes—

but not until her father is referred to in the text as her husband. This version is unique in hinting that actual incest has occurred, which supports the notion that ATU 510B deals with sexual abuse in addition to psychological development issues. Similarly, in Windling's "Donkeyskin," the father acts on a promise to his deceased wife to marry only a "maid...better than the Queen," who turns out to be their daughter (1995, 298). By juxtaposing the fairy tale and a realistic account of an abused girl, Windling concretizes the issue of incest. A related thing happens in Yolen's "Allerleirauh," wherein the father succeeds in marrying his daughter, leading to a chilling conclusion: "But this is not a fairy tale. This princess is married to her father and, always having wanted his love, does not question the manner of it" (1995, 39). The resolution of this literary version addresses both the actual and the psychological realities of incest, already present in oral tellings of 510B, implying that modern authors detect both levels of meaning and view them as inextricable.

In "Broomthrow, Brushthrow, Combthrow," "Sackcloth," and "Pulleru" the father elects to remarry of his own initiative, without the mother setting conditions. Holbek only provides an abbreviated version of "Pulleru," but in it, after the mother dies, the father "wants to marry another woman like her" and thus proposes to their daughter, who resembles her (Holbek 1998, 552). In "Sackcloth," the father wishes to marry his daughter simply because: "No one seemed more beautiful in his eyes, so the story goes, than his own daughter and he had no wish to marry another" (Muhawi and Kanaana 1989, 125). In this tale, the

father goes so far as to ask his daughter to call him "cousin," which Muhawi and Kanaana explain is a culturally relevant detail because in Palestinian society, endogamy in the form of parallel first cousin marriage is "ideal" for a number of reasons (1989, 16). In "Broomthrow, Brushthrow, Combthrow," the mother and daughter both have golden crosses on their foreheads, and the father decides to only marry a woman with a mark like that. This biological determinism can be read in two ways: the inevitability of the Electra complex in girls who have been socialized in a patriarchal society, or the certainty of a father's right to consider his daughter his property in a patriarchal society.

As Tatar observes, fathers in ATU 510B and related tales are rarely portrayed as evil or punished for their incestuous desires (1992, 131). Considering that the mother in 510B texts has already been punished by death, it is incongruent that so few fathers are even reprimanded. This fits with Tatar's observation that in fairy tales more generally: "Even when they violate basic codes of morality and decency, fathers remain noble figures, who rarely commit premeditated acts of evil" (1987, 151). For instance, in "Fair Maria Wood," the father—on the day of his marriage to his daughter—is named a gentleman for gratifying his daughter's wishes for silk dresses. This positive view of fathers resonates with Herman and Hirschman's data collected from incestuous families: "most of our informants had some fond memories of their fathers. Although they feared their fathers, they also admired their competence and power" (1981, 82). Since incest survivors as well as Electra-phase girls can be reluctant to blame their

fathers for their actions, and due to the frequency with which fairy tales espouse patriarchal values, it makes sense that in these tales, fathers would rarely, if ever, be punished.

When the heroine flees her father's incestuous advances, she often has a helper. In Perrault's "Donkey Skin" as well as Falassi's "Donkey Skin," she has a fairy godmother to help her; in "Pulleru" she gets advice at her dead mother's grave; in Taggart's "Cinderella" she receives advice from a neighbor; and in "Betta Pilusa" she receives advice from her father confessor. These various helper figures all signify different aspects in the meaning(s) of the tale: the fairy godmother and neighbor can assimilate with the mother to represent a maternal figure, whose aim is to prevent incest from occurring (be it out of protectiveness or jealousy). The father confessor can represent an authority higher than the father, which is a direct challenge to the father's rule of the family. This intervention is in the girl's interests, but still locates the tale within a patriarchal frame. "Sackcloth" also features a religious figure, an Islamic *cadi*, whom the father asks in metaphorical terms whether marriage to his daughter is acceptable. The *cadi*'s support of the father's bid to marry his daughter demonstrates the potential complicity of patriarchal authority figures with the familial authority of the father. The girl is her own helper in the following tales: "All Kinds of Fur," "Fair Maria Wood," "Broomthrow, Brushthrow, Combthrow," and "Sackcloth." These tales may represent an optimistic view that the girl is able to move past her Electra desires, or the abuse she either feared or endured, and essentially save herself.

Another point of convergence between psychological and literal interpretations, and one that is manifestly present in many versions of the tale, is the eerie resemblance between the heroine's father and future husband. In the Grimms' version of the tale, there is practically no differentiation of the two men (Ashliman 1998; Tatar 1992, 134; Vaz da Silva 2002, 299). On a symbolic level, Vaz da Silva argues that themes in Iberian versions "reveal continuity between the old man and the young one who replaces the former in marrying the juvenile avatar of the deceased wife" (2002, 103). From a Freudian point of view, this makes perfect sense. In breaking free of her Electra attachments, the heroine seeks a substitute that closely resembles her father. This also tallies with a feminist view of things, as in Gayle Rubin's description of how women are traded among men, in an effort to maintain homosocial alliances without lapsing into homosexuality (1975).

In "Pulleru," the prince hits the heroine with a boot and later a towel, and she then teases him with these details at the dance. The heroine of "Allerleirauh" has to endure daily beatings over the head with the king's boots, which she must pull off for him each night before bed. The abuse is even more severe in "Fair Maria Wood." At first the master of the house merely abuses the heroine verbally, but when she asks for permission to attend the second dance: "He grew angry then, and took a stick and began to beat the poor servant" (Ashliman 1998). As might be guessed from the title of "Broomthrow, Brushthrow, Combthrow," the prince angrily hurls each of these objects at the heroine one day after another, and she teases him by hinting at those objects at the balls.

Details from these versions of ATU 510B support a literal interpretation parallel to the psychoanalytic interpretation. Because the heroine marries her husband regardless of his abusive tendencies, Tatar pessimistically questions "whether this is really a story that charts a course from incest averted to the legitimate fulfillment of desire" (1992, 135). Ashliman laments the cruel exploitation the heroine often encounters in her new home, commenting: "Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of 'All-Kinds-of-Fur' and other tales of this type is the apparent passivity with which the heroines accept the verbal abuse, the physical blows, and the sexual harassment dealt to them by their future husbands" (1997). The transition from an abusive parent to an abusive spouse, repeatedly found in ATU 510B, is reminiscent of a real-life pattern observed by therapists and caseworkers. Herman and Hirschman state based on clinical evidence, that "incestuous abuse has also been frequently associated with a tendency toward repeated victimization in adult life" (1981, 29). Framing every version of ATU 510B as a portrayal of repeated victimization is not necessarily true, however.

In "Betta Pilusa," the heroine suffers no abuse at the hands of her master—in fact, he is kind: "The king went to her every day, brought her delicious bits of food, and conversed with her," and he is the one to invite her to his wedding ball (Zipes 2004, 55). In Taggart's "Cinderella," the heroine does not even come into contact with the king's son until she attends the ball. The initial encounter in Perrault's "Donkey Skin" is one-sided, privileging the male gaze: the prince glimpses the heroine in her lovely dresses by spying

on her humble lodgings. Likewise, in Falassi's "Donkey Skin" and Muhawi and Kanaana's "Sackcloth," the king does not abuse the heroine, but rather is curious about her upon hearing reports of her beauty. It is tempting to speculate, that since women narrated most of these non-abusive versions (barring Perrault's), these narrators were projecting into the tales their ideal concepts of marriage partners—men who are not abusive. These versions make sense in light of Marina Warner's statement that "in the 'Donkeyskin' cycle, [the heroine's] rebellion means she chooses between father and lover, and they do not conspire" (1994, 325). If taken to mean that father and future husband do not conspire to abuse and oppress the heroine, this is an optimistic model for feminine development, for it implies that a girl can mature to the point of moving beyond her (Electra) attachment to her father and thus seek a suitable replacement.

Thus, abuse in the heroine's new home is not a requisite definition for ATU 510B. The spectrum of possibilities in both oral and written versions makes it clear that, for some of the "folk" abuse is an issue that needs to be addressed in some form, while for others, it is not the primary issue in the tale. Regardless, the connection between the father and the husband parallels an oscillating identification of the heroine's two personas in the tale. As Vaz da Silva notes:

The heroine under her hide is, quite literally, an enigma to be unraveled... as she hints, at the balls, that she is the same lowly wretch the prince loathes and mistreats at home...no one can unveil the riddle in her until

her hide falls off. The gist of this theme is, then, that the hidden maiden appears as two separate persons, the final identification of which leads to marriage (2002, 213).

The husband's ability to identify these "two separate persons" is an inversion of the father's inability to recognize his daughter as an unsuitable spouse. While the father tries (and fails) to conflate wife with daughter, the husband succeeds in meshing two personas that are a good match for him: a servant-provider and a woman who conspicuously presents herself as sexually available. What Vaz da Silva's analysis omits, though, are the sexual politics of the heroine's oppression and the fact that rather than "her hide" simply falling off, in varying versions of the tale she is often stripped of her protective covering by force.

The heroine's skin covering is an important part of ATU 510B. One way to approach its meaning(s) is to use Arnold Van Gennep's work on rituals, as a frame for understanding the heroine's donning of the skin as a separation from her world (i.e., a journey to the spirit world) before being reincorporated into a nuclear family structure (1999). As noted earlier, the heroine transitions from living with her father to marrying a man somewhat like him. While she is between the two states of attachment, she exists in a liminal place, which her disguise makes material. Her disguises vary idiosyncratically, but they have central characteristics in common. Margaret Yocom discusses the disguise in a broad international selection of ATU 510B tales, demonstrating how with "the multiple skins of her ambiguous body, she sometimes disgusts but always intrigues those who meet her" (2012, 97).



W. F. Nicolaisen describes instances of naming as linguistic cloaking in versions of ATU 510B:

The female protagonist, while nameless as a princess, bears the name of the rough and unbecoming coat she has to wear as a fugitive from persecution; she consequently has to live out her new coat-given identity by being relegated to do the most menial tasks. One cannot be a princess or beautiful or both when one bears humble or even ugly names such as "Katie Woodencloak," "Donkey Skin," "All-kinds-of-fur," "Cap o' Rushes," "Ruuchklaas," or "Catskin" (1984, 261).

Of the tales in my sample, the following are named for the heroine's disguise: all three contemporary literary transformations ("Allerleirauh," "Donkeyskin," and *Deerskin*), "Betta Pilusa" which translates to "Hairy Bertha" (Zipes 2004, 55); "Sackcloth," both Perrault's and Falassi's "Donkey Skin" versions; the Grimms' "All Kinds of Fur," "Fair Maria Wood," and "Pulleru," which Holbek describes in his summary of the tale thus: "They called her *Pulleru* because she looks *pulleret* (tousled, messed up)" (1998, 552). These names are inflicted upon the heroine along with her servant status. They align her with nature, since many are animal skins or other natural substances, such as wood or barely-processed materials like rough cloth.<sup>20</sup>

That the function of such a disguise might conceal the heroine's sexual shame works equally well in both symbolic and literal interpretations. In a Freudian reading, the girl cannot stand to recognize her unconscious desires, just as in a literal reading the heroine

would be traumatized by the possibility if not the occurrence of incest. Warner illuminates the underlying similarities between the psychological and literal interpretations: "Although [the heroines] have suffered wrong in all innocence in the fairy tales, they accept the taint and enact it on their own persons. Shame and guilt do not prompt different reactions, and in this the victims behave exactly like penitents" (1994, 358). Whether the heroine's actions express shame or guilt, ATU 510B is a tale about surviving certain aspects of childhood and adolescence and maturing, with the mediation of a protective skin covering. If one is inclined to recognize an Electral attachment binding father and daughter, the heroine's flight is necessary once she realizes that her father is not a suitable husband for her. Recognizing that it would be an unhealthy arrangement for her to actually marry her father, the heroine initiates the plot of the tale by withdrawing from her nearly fulfilled wish in order to seek a wholesome alternative. As such, this tale can be interpreted as the necessary stage in childhood development when the girl surmounts her Electral attachment to her father, in order to attach her love to a viable mate. Falassi's reading of "Donkey Skin" supports this interpretation: he links a real-life refusal of incest with the refusal of incest that occurs within the tale, leading to a real-life latency phase, and in the tale to an "intermediate phase" featuring "indeterminate ugliness" (1980, 46). This evaluation lends the tale an inner logic. It describes maturation using symbols that resonate on multiple levels.

Symbolically, the heroine's skin camouflage takes on polyvalent meanings

when interpreted with attention to the heroine's flight. Pilinovsky discusses the implications of the garment, citing the Law of Contagion in connection with the nature of the coat made of "skins, either from a creature magical in itself, or procured through magical means" (2001). Yet where Pilinovsky sees the heroine's disguise as a resource, Ashliman views it as a "grotesque cloak" that reflects the "intense feelings of shame" the heroine experiences (1997). Heroines in ATU 510B sometimes try to conceal all vestiges of their femininity, as in "Sackcloth" wherein the heroine dons "a tight-fitting sackcloth that will cover [her] whole body, except [her] nostrils, mouth, and eyes" (Muhawi and Kanaana 1989, 126). Here, the girl becomes a "strange-looking man" and "some kind of freak," thus losing both her femininity and her humanity (1989, 128, 129). Even when the heroine does not cross-dress, her humanity may be questionable. Tatar states that the "flight into the woods, with its concomitant degradation of the heroine into a creature of nature, remains the lasting mark of the father's attempted incestuous violation" (1992, 133). In contrast, Yocom views the furry disguise as a resource: "She strategically uses asexuality to camouflage her sexual body" (2012, 105). In some cases—like in the Grimms' "All Kinds of Fur" where the king finds her in a tree; in "Sackcloth" where she is discovered eating leftover household scraps; and in "Betta Pilusa" where the king sees her in her gray fur and wants to shoot her—heroines are first discovered in an animal situation. Often, the heroine is forced to live in animal-like conditions, or with animals, as in "All Kinds of Fur" where she sleeps "in

a little stall beneath the steps" (Ashliman 1998); in Falassi's "Donkey Skin" where she tends the king's geese; in Taggart's "Cinderella" where she wears a pelican suit and tends turkeys; in "Betta Pilusa" where she lives in a chicken coop; and in *Deerskin*, where she cares for the prince's hounds. Thus, not only the heroine's disguise, but also how she is treated, reflects her forced association with nature.<sup>21</sup>

In order to re-enter civilized society, the heroine must demonstrate her capacity to conform to patriarchal standards of feminine competence. Sandra Gilbert questions whether the heroine chooses to re-enter society, or whether she "cannot altogether abandon the imperatives her culture has impressed upon her" (1985, 377). In many versions of ATU 510B, the heroine prepares food for the lovesick prince, which serves not only to heal him but also to identify her as his chosen lover. For example, she cooks porridge for the king's son upon his orders in Falassi's "Donkey Skin;" she prepares bread containing recognition tokens in "Betta Pilusa;" a cake containing a ring in Perrault's "Donkey Skin;" a custard containing a ring in "Cinderella;" and soup containing a ring in "Pulleru," "Broomthrow, Brushthrow, Combthrow," "Allerleirauh," and "Fair Maria Wood;" and she serves the king's son his dinner in "Sackcloth," although she drops the tray more than once in order to avoid him in this version. When the heroine cooks or bakes for the prince, this is a functional display of her domestic abilities, as well as a demonstration of her replacement of his mother as the main nurturer in his life (which is an interesting transformation of her father's attempt to force her to replace

her mother, his wife). In some versions, the heroine engages in other clearly “feminine” activities, such as spinning. Thus, she is not only reincorporated into a cultural sphere where she is no longer identified as or with animals, but also valued for her human skills. This valuation may not be immediately apparent, however, due to the manner of the heroine’s uncloaking—sometimes voluntary, sometimes not.

Heroines of ATU 510B are forced from their homes and compelled to rely on the dubious charity of a future husband. The circumstances under which their trials end vary. Goldberg hypothesizes that, over time the heroines in ATU 510B have developed more self-reliance and independence (1997, 41). However, these conditions continue to fluctuate. The heroine in “Sackcloth” displays the initiative to attend a wedding dance, but this version does not contain the recognition token motif, and instead the heroine must be ordered to serve the king’s son food. However, even in versions where the heroine attends parties and ventures as far as teasing the prince with hints of her identity, the extent of her initiative is difficult to determine. Ashliman makes a convincing case for the traumatized behavior of the heroine, demonstrating that she is not yet capable of recognizing and securing a suitable partner for herself (1997). He sees the heroine’s teasing of the prince as “psychotic behavior,” which is “perfectly believable for one who has just been sexually threatened by the man who should have been her closest and most powerful protector, her own father” (1997). This “psychotic behavior” corresponds to Herman and Hirschman’s

list of symptoms found in female incest survivors: “guilt, shame, feelings of inferiority and low self-esteem, anxiety, imitative ritualized sexual behavior, hostile or aggressive behavior, and school problems” (1981, 30). The heroine’s inferior social status while she is a servant, and her compulsorily repeated trips to the dances, could well fit this description.

When her future husband finally figures out his beloved’s identity, often it is he who must bring her out into the open. Holbek notes that persecuted heroines in tales must “suffer in patience” to be “*discovered* by their princes, in some cases quite literally dis-covered...*Pulleru* is stripped of her rags” (1998, 584, italics in original). The same thing occurs in the Grimms’ 1812 version of “All Kinds of Fur,” when the disguised heroine is summoned by the king: “she tried to make an excuse and then run away, but as she ran by, the king noticed a white finger on her hand, and he held her fast. He found the ring that had slipped into her finger, and then he ripped off her fur coat” (Ashliman 1998). The heroine resists having her identity revealed, and the act occurs in an almost violent struggle, which she loses. In Falassi’s “Donkey Skin,” the king’s son threatens the heroine if she does not comply with his wishes, and removes her donkey skin so “whether she wanted to or not,” she agrees and takes it off (1980, 44). Similarly, in “Betta Pilusa,” the king she serves threatens to cut off her head unless she reveals her identity to him—yet she then actively throws off the cat skin she wears (Zipes 2004, 58). These stratagems are not empowering for the heroine; she is stripped of the comforting

anonymity of her disguise, and forced to confront her fears of human contact that her overzealous father instilled in her. The inherent variability of oral tradition, however, also supplies the occasional empowering alternative: in Taggart's "Cinderella," the heroine asks for a few minutes to comb her hair and get dressed, and is granted these small kindnesses. In "Sackcloth," Muhawi and Kanaana explain the heroine's dancing in public as "a declaration of her new awareness, her readiness to accept a mate" now that she is more secure in her identity (1989, 145). However, the heroine is finally revealed to the king's son only once the prince pulls out a knife in order to disrobe her (1989, 130). This example—empowerment coexisting with coercion—demonstrates the difficulty of extricating these themes from each other in the tale as a whole.

The tale's outcome offers a final view of converging interpretations of ATU 510B. The heroine's dark past does not get much in the way of resolution; like the dirty animal skin she discards after being discovered, the incest is rarely mentioned again at the denouement. Only in two versions—"Broomthrow, Brushthrow, Combthrow" and Falassi's "Donkey Skin"—is it said that the heroine is able to reveal her father's incestuous advances. In the former, when the prince recognizes her, "she now [has] to tell him her life story," which does not sound entirely voluntary (Ashliman 1998). In the latter, the heroine serves her father salt-less food at her wedding, and when he complains, she publicly announces: "It has no taste, just as the man who wants to marry his daughter has no taste" (1980, 45). These declarations, and related

confrontations with the father, are few, as can be seen in Cox's plot summaries of 510B tales (1893, 53-79). The fact that so few daughters confront their fathers with their crimes is an indication of the power structures within these societies, as well as the effects of victimization. As Herman and Hirschman point out: "Most incest victims both long and fear to reveal their secret" (1981, 129). Just as likely is the possibility that such Electra wishes on the daughter's part have been repressed, then overcome, hence there is no need (and certainly no desire) to bring them up again.

### Conclusion

I share Michèle Simonsen's skepticism about whether it is possible to *interpret* fairy tales, in the sense of decoding some secret meaning, or rather to simply *understand* them in a given context (1985). Because fairy tales contain both literal and fantastic elements, we must employ more than one interpretive frame in order to access both surface and symbolic meanings. ATU 510B, in particular, is a problematic case due to the portrait of incest and power structures it depicts, a picture all too easy to ignore by switching one's focus to the "hidden" meaning of the tale. There is only so much "hidden" in this tale, however. As Elizabeth Marshall explains: "The daughter rather than the father bears the cultural punishment that highlights the danger inherent in forbidden sexual contacts" (2004, 409). In other words, it is significant that tale contains the message that the *daughter* is the one punished for the sexual transgression. Marshall points out that the tale's message is more than the sum of its parts; there are messages

not only about incest and family relations, but also about how society codes, condones, and communicates about these topics. Read in this light, the tale “suggests that the danger inherent in father-daughter incest is not the act itself, but in potentially knowing and telling about it” (2004, 410).

Contemplating the layers of meaning in this tale is a bit like peeling back the layers of the heroine’s skin to uncover who she is and what she means. The heroine’s father decides to marry her, often because of a characteristic close to her biological skin: a golden star or cross on her forehead, golden hair, the way a dress or ring or shoe molds itself to her body. The heroine’s skin, therefore, is part of her sexual and social identity, inevitably desired by her father, which causes her to hide herself under layers that obscure this new, maturing identity. In Yocom’s analysis, “the beautiful gowns of the heroine are just as much a disguise as her ashy rags or her rough-fur pelt” (2012, 93). The multiple skins she wears reinforce the idea that “gender is an ‘act’” (Butler 1999 [1990], 187), that she dons femininity and animality as the situation demands.<sup>22</sup> Whether she enters a period of latent sexuality or traumatized anxiety, the heroine’s triple skins—her own skin, the dresses, and the disguise—become a chain of symbols through which tale-tellers, collectors, editors, and writers can express their views on feminine development in patriarchal societies. Just as the heroine’s beautiful apparel conceals her possibly bruised and scarred skin, so the interpretations of ATU 510B that exonerate the father, veil a potentially ugly reality.

The physical and sexual abuse (often incestuous) of children continues today, as do retellings of ATU 510B, though these are not usually aimed at children in Western society. The fact that retellings of 510B are not as popular as those of 510A leads some scholars to the misconception that incest is simply no longer a relevant topic: “During the evolution of the story, the motif of the ‘unnatural father’ gradually vanishes, and the relation with the cruel stepmother and stepsisters is foregrounded” (Mei 1995, 5). Tatar, on the other hand, recognizes that while incest may have vanished from the manifest layer of many retellings of tales in the 510 cycle, the latent contents remain both comprehensible and necessary:

In depicting erotic persecution of a daughter by her father . . . mothers and stepdaughters tend to vanish from the central arena of action. Yet the father’s desire for his daughter in the second tale type furnishes a powerful motive for a stepmother’s jealous rages and unnatural deeds in the first tale type. The two plots thereby conveniently dovetail to produce an intrigue that corresponds almost perfectly to the Oedipal fantasies of female children. In this way fairy tales are able to stage the Oedipal drama even as they disguise it by eliminating one of its two essential components (1987, 150).

Yet Tatar’s methodology is also valuable in that it does not immediately reject psychological concepts, but rather integrates them into an analysis that is keenly aware of power structures.

As this survey of material establishes, it is both impossible and unwise to wholly accept or reject either the psychological or literal methods of interpretation. The most comprehensive and rewarding

approach is to compromise and to attempt to integrate these perspectives, using them to illuminate one another and, most importantly, the tale in question. As I believe I have shown, interpretations of tales can and should converge. This method ensures that no single approach is allowed to dominate the tale's interpretation, and that fairy tales act less as mirrors for the interpreter's biases than as texts that can be understood within various contexts. Meaning, like all cultural performance, is always embedded, and should be studied in ways that allow for the most nuanced expressions of human experiences, whether they be actual, symbolic, or something in between.

### Notes

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2 It is interesting that Uther notes: "This form of the incest motif (the king wants to marry his daughter after the death of his wife) is

often documented independently since the 12th century" (2004, 295). Other scholars, such as Christine Goldberg, downplay the incest motif in favor of other defining characteristics.

3 Goldberg's historical analysis of multiple versions of ATU 510B leads her to some interesting conclusions about women's agency, claiming that the motifs of hiding boxes and spying scenes in earlier versions of ATU 510B gave way to plot mechanisms in which "the heroine achieves a considerable degree of self-determination" (1997, 41).

4 The fact that incest is mentioned in more than one tale type does not invalidate its presence as a key motif in the definition of ATU 510B. One reason that the father-daughter incest does not blur the lines between ATU 510B and ATU 706 is that the maiden without hands leaves home under different circumstances—not only after suffering mutilation, but without the magical garb, disguise, and/or transportation that the incestuous father, tricked into serving as a donor figure, usually provides. Similarly, in ATU 923, the donor sequence is missing, and the heroine must win the prince under a different set of circumstances from the dances and visits typical of ATU 510B. Thus, motifs must be examined within the contexts they appear.

5 Moves are discussed in Holbek 1998.

Ashliman's plot formula for ATU 510B is:

1. A dying woman extracts from her husband the promise that he will remarry only if he can find a woman that fits a certain description.
2. After a period of mourning, the widower discovers that only his daughter meets the requirements for

remarriage set by his deceased wife, and he asks her to marry him.

3. The daughter, in order to buy time, and in hope of dissuading her father, asks for a number of gifts, but he finds these with little difficulty.

4. Seeing no other solution to her dilemma, the girl dresses herself in an unusual garb and runs away.

5. She finds both refuge and abuse in another man's household, where she serves as a maid.

6. She temporarily escapes from the kitchen where she works and makes a series of appearances at a dress ball.

7. A prince falls in love with the heroine in her beautiful attire. He discovers that the beautiful woman is none other than his maid, and he marries her. (1998).

6 It is important to note that distinguishing between author and collector is a tricky issue. As many Grimms' scholars have documented, the Grimms made substantial changes to their tales while claiming that they were representing stories straight from the mouths of the "folk" (discussed in Dundes 1999, 1-5). Rather than draw a firm line between author and collector, I prefer to follow Francisco Vaz da Silva's lead in asking, "[W]hy then would different criteria apply to oral folk-tellers and to the Grimms, if not for the notion that the former are the sole bearers of 'pure oral tradition'—and that therefore the latter cannot but produce 'fakelore'" (2002, 116)? Like Vaz da Silva, I see many authorial inventions as "thematic transformations within an age-old tradition" (2002, 119), and thus I tend to view oral and literary versions of a tale type as existing on a spectrum.

7 The argument for abstract/archetypal characterization in fairy tales fits Max Lüthi's description of fairy tale characters as depthless. Lüthi claims: "The whole realm of sentiment is absent from folktale characters...Individual narrators, of course, may interject a word about the hero's sorrow or joy. But we clearly sense that this is incidental embellishment and does not pertain essentially to the folktale as a form" (1982, 13). Supporting Lüthi's argument, the characters in the Grimms' version of ATU 510B are barely described at all. Yet at the other end of the spectrum, tale characters can and do exhibit real human emotions. The heroine in "Betta Pilusa" weeps when she goes to a priest to confess her father's crimes, and her father becomes "very sullen" when his immediate desire for his daughter is thwarted.

8 In dividing the approaches I address into psychological and literal, I am not neglecting structuralism, but rather using it apart from these, because it is not an interpretive method so much as a descriptive one—less about meaning than form.

9 One notable exception is Alan Dundes's use of allomotifs to access an underlying folk symbolic code, which can be done without resorting to any particular theoretical model. However, Dundes's application of allomotif analysis to ATU 570, "The Rabbit Herd" (1987) is unmistakably psychoanalytic in tone, as is Holbek's application to ATU 433, "King Wivern" (discussed in Vaz da Silva 2002, 22-24). Further, as Claude Lévi-Strauss notes in a discussion of symbolism, Freud "tries to decipher myths by means of

a single and exclusive code, while a myth will always put several codes into play" (1988, 186). Freud's code of choice was, of course, psychosexual, and while Lévi-Strauss also prioritizes sexual codes in *The Jealous Potter*, he makes a compelling case for interpreting myth according to multiple codes, and allowing for symbolism and metaphor to work multi-directionally rather than uni-directionally (1988, 193-195). I focus on psychological approaches in this essay because they have been the most prevalent application of symbolic reading in fairy tale research.

10 Alan Dundes concurs with this point: "The literal-historical approach has its good points, but it cannot possibly plumb the depths of the fantastic" (1989, 144).

11 Alternate psychological approaches—to ATU 510B and to fairy tales in general—remain rare. Amelia Rutledge analyzes McKinley's novelization of ATU 510B, *Deerskin*, using Lacan's theories of identity to map the protagonist's transition to subjectivity. Rutledge describes the protagonist's relationships with others, primarily her mother and her future husband, in terms of Lacan's mirror stage, wherein a child progresses towards self/other distinctions in the social (symbolic) world. Rutledge's use of a psychological approach does not prevent her from referring to different versions of ATU 510B that intertextually inform *Deerskin*, nor from treating the incest within the text as real. Thus, Rutledge's analysis finds a balance between the tales she works with and the theories she employs.

12 An example of Woodman's style of interpretation is: "In rejecting an incestuous marriage, Allerleirauh leaves behind the collective crutches that supported her as the golden-haired daughter of her golden-haired mother" and "chose to give nature a chance by living in the forest" (1992, 205).

13 I especially agree with Yocom's interpretation of the tale's theme of survival: "Some see in 'Allerleirauh,' as I do, an undercurrent that carries the experiences of incest survivors who move back and forth among different perceptions of themselves and their bodies as they journey toward renewed life" (2012, 93).

14 Also notable is the recent queer approach to fairy tales, as seen in *Transgressive Tales: Queering the Grimms*, edited by Kay Turner and Pauline Greenhill. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2012.

15 In my view, trying to explain the incest motif by means of a historical approach, such as claiming that ritual incest used to occur and remains in the "folk" memory, is not only unverifiable, but also tells us nothing of why the tale remains relevant enough to continue in oral and literary circulation. Holbek criticizes historically-oriented interpretations as grossly underestimating the role of the individual narrator, but not to be entirely dismissed because, "There are traces of ancient beliefs and rituals in many fairy tale motifs" (1998, 258).

16 However, Holbek also claims that incestuous desires "are *manifestly* present in tales like AT 510B and other tales of the feminine pattern" which would lend credence to a literal interpretation of the tale type (1998, 320, italics in original).



17 Examples of placing too much emphasis on only one aspect of interpretation exist in both psychological and literal studies. Tatar critiques Dundes's reading of ATU 706 for ignoring the heroine's crippling vulnerability and making her the story's villain. This instance of victim-blaming leads Tatar to claim that Dundes's interpretation "is a perfect illustration of the hazards of giving too much weight to 'hidden meanings' while neglecting the significance of a tale's manifest content" (1992, 125). Yet Dundes is not ignoring the manifest content of the tale—namely, incest—but rather shifting the emphasis from a sexual crime to a psychological desire. Conversely, Holbek utilizes similar reasoning—"one should pay attention to what the characters *do* rather than to what they *say*"—to explain how in ATU 510B, "we see no reason why the father's desire should not be taken at face value" (1998, 554, italics in original). This is one inconsistency of Holbek's approach, as he reads incest into "King Wivern" (ATU 433B) when it is not there manifestly in the text, and ignores latent desires in ATU 510B.

18 Indeed, applying Judith Butler's model of gender performativity to ATU 510B yields an intriguing starting point for a future study. The polyvalence of the heroine's identity and the importance of surfaces (skin disguises; sooty skin) point to a complexly embodied and contested gender identity.

19 Dundes has demonstrated the "explicit . . . symbolism of finger-rings" to refer to sexual intercourse, which would be a fitting explanation of the father's attempt to force his daughter to wear a ring in her mother's place (1989, 14). It might also be a metaphor for the father's rape of the daughter.

20 Moreover, as Marina Warner points out, in certain renditions of the tale, the tellers and audiences would have been aware of additional meanings in the heroine's disguise: "As an outcast, spurning the sexual demand made upon her, her disguises—donkey, cat, or bear—reproduce the traditional iconography of the very passion she is fleeing," and these particular animal forms also anticipate sexual pollution (1994, 355).

21 For the association between women and nature in the West, in contrast to how men tend to be aligned with culture, see Ortner 1974.

22 This morphological variability connects to Butler's notion of agency: "Indeed, the source of personal and political agency comes not from within the individual, but in and through the complex cultural exchanges among bodies in which identity itself is ever-shifting, indeed, where identity itself is constructed, disintegrated, and recirculated only within the context of a dynamic field of cultural relations" (1999 [1990], 161-162). From this perspective, the heroine in 510B approaches a Butlerian notion of agency by being so flexible in terms of her shifting skins and identities.

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## Response

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I teach a course on fairy tales at USC, and we dip into Bettelheim and von Franz alongside reading a few of these “Donkeyskin”-type-tales, so this article was especially interesting to me. First: I found it very helpful that Jorgensen broke down the methods of analysis so clearly. Symbolic, literal. I also appreciated that she seemed to favor both, while taking into account possible issues with each. Although the psychoanalytic approach *can* be dogmatic and reductive, I also think fairy tales are uniquely suited toward this kind of analysis.

As a fiction writer, I am particularly attracted to fairy tales as a counter to the more character-driven fiction that is the American norm; there, we usually have some internal engagement with the characters’ thoughts and emotions to help a reader piece together motivation. “What a character wants” or why they act is often the driving question in book group discussions and writing workshops. This allows for a certain kind of psychological interpretation, but one usually based on direct passages that give access to internal information. But with fairy tales, the internal is generally shut-off, unavailable. No one is thinking or feeling overtly; motivation is usually fairly opaque. The actions, however, are plain and stark, and a reader is left with story as the main source of analytic material.

There are many issues that come up with a story like ATU 510B, and with the patriarchal problem Jorgensen acknowledges-- the problem of ascribing

the girl’s longing for her father as the reason for the story’s plot. But! It also strikes me that a tale is one of the only types of storytelling where this kind of psychological wondering can be even considered. Because we do not know what she is thinking, we have a lot of room to guess, and to make flat and symbolic and archetypal what might otherwise be offensive, if used upon a three-dimensional character. If/when taken literally, all the complications of actual real incest and abuse flood in, as Tatar and Zipes and others here address, importantly. These concerns are valid and crucial, and cannot be skipped. But they often are the frontline of inquiry, which is why I find the symbolic interpretations almost illicit in their assertions. Which area of interpretation is an underdog here, when it comes to fairy tales? I’m not sure.

What Jorgensen does very effectively is move us through a range of interpretations—from the more plodding and reductive Freudian interpretations to the more historical and realistic interpretations and finally to psychological ones that feel more nuanced, such as those from Woodman and Falassi.

Jorgensen also admits to the limitations of analyzing these tales in her conclusion.

I agree; I was thinking of Donald Barthelme’s concept of good art in his great essay *Not Knowing*. He’s talking about his experience of Rauschenberg’s sculpture of a goat and tire that both intrigues and confounds him.

What’s magical about the object is that it both invites and resists

interpretation... its artistic worth is measurable by the degree to which it remains, after interpretation, vital--no interpretation or cardiopulmonary push-pull can exhaust or empty it (20).

I do believe fairy tales model this as well as anything: whatever lens we use to view the tale and its meaning does not stick permanently to the tale. The tale, told and retold and retold, seems to be one of the most pleasurable items to analyze, and deserves deep and complex study, but will always, always, ultimately resist the analysis and return to its fairly blank state, to its story-self, open again to interpretation.