

## FAIRY TALE MOTIFS IN ADVERTISING

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Fairy tales live on in [...] advertisements, and it is this altered tale communication through the various forms of mass media that folklorists need to study in much more detail in a comparative and international form.<sup>1</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

While it would be absolutely impossible to quantify the vast amount of publicity generated in a given society, country or continent within a finite period of time, we can observe the sporadic but persistent recurrence in advertisements of themes, motifs and techniques derived from the classical fairy tale tradition. In 1979 Linda Dégh observed, in the USA:

Märchen figures appear from time to time for a second on TV commercials: Cinderella waxes the floor with a new product; Snow White's wicked stepmother watches the effect of Palm Olive soap on her face through the magic mirror; Briar Rose enjoys a sweeter slumber in brand name percale bedding; and the Frog-Prince prefers staying a frog if the pool is treated with the advertised purifier.<sup>2</sup>

Almost twenty years later, copywriters continue to follow the same pattern, referring directly or indirectly to the better known or 'canonical' fairy tales, using texts and images that derive from the literary fairy tale tradition disseminated by Perrault and the Brothers Grimm, among others,<sup>3</sup> though in more recent times, much of the international popularity of fairy tales has been attributed to the influence of Walt Disney.<sup>4</sup> We should also take account of

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<sup>1</sup> Wolfgang Mieder, "Survival Forms of 'Little Red Riding Hood' in Modern Society", *International Folklore Review*, 2 (1982), p.39.

<sup>2</sup> Linda Dégh, 'Grimm's *Household Tales* and Its Place in the Household: The Social Relevance of a Controversial Classic', *Western Folklore*, 38 (April 1979), p.102 (Reprinted in *Fairy Tales as Ways of Knowing. Essays on Märchen in Psychology, Society and Literature*, edited by Michael Metzger & Katharina Mommsen, Bern, Peter Lang, 1981, pp.21-53).

<sup>3</sup> The notion of fairy tales as canonical is expressed by Jack Zipes in several publications, among them *Fairy Tale as Myth. Myth as Fairy Tale*, Lexington, The University Press of Kentucky, 1994, p.5: 'Somehow, they have become codified, authoritative, and canonical'. Regarding the authoritative nature of fairy tales, we should note the overlap with unabashedly didactic literature, such as Aesop's fables or the florilegia of medieval *exempla*.

<sup>4</sup> Many articles have been written on this topic, most of them taking a negative view. Scholars have not foreseen the global impact of recent Disney adaptations of fairy tales, not only shown in cinemas but available as 'home videos', on sale in every supermarket, and tied in to an ever-

the way that other art forms have contributed to the fairy tale intertext: films that have acquired cult status, such as Jean Cocteau's *La Belle et la Bête* (1946); ballet, opera and orchestral music such as Rossini's *Cinderella* (1831); Tchaikovsky's *Sleeping Beauty*, (1890); Humperdink's *Hansel and Gretel* (1893); Ravel's piano suite for four hands, *Ma mère l'oye*, including "Pavane de la belle au bois dormant", "Petit poucet", "Laideronnette, impératrice des pagodes", "Les entretiens de la belle et la bête", "Le Jardin féérique" (1908), and his subsequent ballet and orchestral work, *Ma mère l'oye* (1911); Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*, 1936, described by some musicologists as a symphonic fairy tale, and the same composer's *Cinderella* (1945). According to Peter Bürger: 'works of art are not received as single entities, but within institutional frameworks and conditions that largely determine the function of the works'<sup>5</sup>.

Advertisements, whether single photographs, posters or video clips, have much in common with 'serious' works of art and might in some cases be classed as an art form. Like works of art, they are not 'single entities', but come complete with their baggage of associations and connotations, fitting into cultural and economic frameworks — some might not make a distinction between the two. Just as the framing conditions of works of art presuppose a function, so do the framing conditions in which advertisements are created and made available to us.

Using the criteria of unity of theme and intention, we can talk, in the loosest possible sense, about a corpus, constituted by a score of print, television and billboard advertisements. These advertisements date back over four decades, and were published, broadcast or displayed in six countries and two continents, Portugal, Spain, England, France, Germany, Italy and the USA.<sup>6</sup> This randomness and dispersion does not invalidate any eventual conclusions about their effectiveness and appeal, or indeed about human nature and psychology in general. On the one hand, this trend reflects the international character of advertising, but equally it illustrates the refusal of fairy tales to remain static within the confines of one national frontier, geo-

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expanding range of related merchandise. In Portugal, Disney have taken the process one stage further, linking their product *Revistas Disney* with one of the most canonical works of Portuguese literature. In a full-page ad, we see a drawing of Mickey and Minnie Mouse. He is kissing her hand, she holds a bouquet. The title of this picture is "Amor de Perdição", and the text below the image reads: 'Com as histórias Disney, o seu filho devora livros, mesmo antes de ter idade para os grandes romances', i.e., 'with Disney's stories, your child devours books even before he is old enough to read great novels'. Note that *Amor de Perdição*, ("Fatal Love") is the title of the most famous Portuguese novel (supplied by Fernanda Catarino).

<sup>5</sup> Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, translated by Michael Shaw, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, p.12.

<sup>6</sup> The core advertisements have been seen at first hand. References to others have been noted in studies on advertising or fairy tales.

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political or linguistic, and it demonstrates their applicability to the wider context of human experience, as do other manifestations of folklore, such as the proverb and the ballad, which draw on fairy tale matter, as does the Iberian *romance Infantina*. We can map clear connections between proverbs and advertising slogans, proverbs and fairy tales, and fairy tales and advertisements.<sup>7</sup>

If we ask why advertisers use fairy tale motifs, the answer is obvious. Because they work. We know that fairy tales help manufacturers and retailers to sell goods and services. But the relationship of cause and effect cannot be reduced to the following simple equation: A uses a fairy tale motif to advertise the product, therefore B responds favourably to the stimulus of the advertisement and buys the product. Fairy tale advertisements function on a number of different levels, and may even be parodying fairy tale conventions. This is hardly surprising, when we consider how fairy tales lend themselves to multiple readings, or interpretative pluralism, as Maria Tatar puts it.<sup>8</sup> Betsy Hearne, in the preface to her study of *Beauty and the Beast*, talks about 'the multiple dimensions embodied in any great work of art',<sup>9</sup> and again I signal parallels between advertisements and works of literature, paintings, sculptures or musical compositions, both in the way they are crafted and created, and in the manners they are 'read' and received.

The most important characteristic of fairy tale advertisements, I believe, is the 'feel-good' factor. Fairy tales are amusing, attractive and accessible. We should not discount their power, even when experienced fleetingly, and at second hand, in a commercial advertisement. Notwithstanding the proliferation of new, radical re-interpretations of fairy tales, the general public

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<sup>7</sup> For specifically Portuguese examples, see P.A. Odber de Baubeta, 'Proverbs, the *Pater Noster* and Public Image. Advertising Rhetoric in Portugal Today', *Journal of the Association for Contemporary Iberian Studies*, VIII:8 (1995), pp.25-36. See also Barbara & Wolfgang Mieder, 'Tradition and Innovation: Proverbs in Advertising', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 11 (1978), p.93; Wolfgang Mieder, 'Proverbial Slogans are the Name of the Game', *Kentucky Folklore Record*, 24 (1978), pp.49-53. The interface between proverbs and fairy tales has been explored by Wolfgang Mieder, 'Wilhelm Grimm's Proverbial Additions in the Fairy Tales', *Proverbium* 3 (1986), pp.59-83; 'Ever Eager to Incorporate Folk Proverbs: Wilhelm Grimm's Proverbial Additions in the Fairy Tales', in *The Brothers Grimm and Folktale*, edited by James McGlatherty, with Larry W. Danielson, Ruth E. Lorbe, and Selma K. Richardson. Urbana & Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1988, pp.112-132 (see page 116 in particular); 'Fairy-Tale Allusions in Modern German Aphorisms', *The Reception of Grimm's Fairy Tales: Responses, Reactions, Revisions*, edited by Donald P. Haase, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993, pp.149-66; Donald P. Haase, 'Is Seeing Believing? Proverbs and the Film Adaptation of a Fairy Tale', *Proverbium*, 7 (1990), pp.89-104.

<sup>8</sup> Maria Tatar, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1987, p.51.

<sup>9</sup> Betsy Hearne, *Beauty and the Beast: Visions and Revisions of an Old Tale*. With an Essay by Larry DeVries, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1989, p. xiv.

continues to voraciously consume traditional fairy tales, in print, on audio-tape or film. Feminist critics bemoan the perpetuation of certain stereotypical types of female behaviour, pointing to the passivity, submissiveness and helplessness of fairy tale heroines. Psychoanalytical commentators use the ideas of Freud and Jung as their point of departure, and there is more than one doctoral thesis waiting to be written on advertisements as a locus for (Lacanian) desire. Marxist analysts comment in deeply pessimistic terms on mass-mediated culture, and those dedicated to Cultural and Media studies frequently express dismay about the 'disneyfication' of fairy tales and folklore in general. Steve Baker, however, challenges the limitations of this view:

Disney, it is said, has failed to appreciate this, the 'true meaning' of these tales, and has settled instead for a trivializing and sanitized cuteness which misses out on (or sometimes contradicts) their mythological richness and their psychological depth. It is clear that in on respect these psychoanalytical readings have not grasped what the viewing public does with popular imagery [...] The public uses whatever versions are currently available to it, and creates its own mythologies and its own sense from these.<sup>10</sup>

Writers, educators and others have set out to counter what they perceive as the negative effects of fairy tales, or the ways that fairy tales are (ab)used in contemporary society, by writing new, alternative tales or re-writing originals. But regardless of current trends in academia, the account managers, marketing experts and copywriters continue to reap the benefits of the feelings of warmth, happiness and well-being apparently engendered by an easily identifiable nucleus of favourite fairy tales, the 'remarkably modest but active and persistent repertoire' identified by Linda Dégh.<sup>11</sup> Zipes rightly insists that 'We are safe with the familiar. We shun the new, the real innovations'.<sup>12</sup> And these familiar narratives help to construct precisely the kind of psychological climate for which the advertiser is striving. In naive terms, they offer pleasure and reassurance. They remind us of childhood, or what childhood is, ideally, supposed to signify. A time when we still believe in magic solutions and outcomes, in fairy godmothers who can right wrongs, when virtue is rewarded and the wicked receive their just deserts.

For a more sophisticated explanation of adult responses to fairy tales, we might consider Lewis Seifert's theory of the 'infantilizing pretext', worth transcribing at length:

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<sup>10</sup> Steve Baker, *Picturing the Beast. Animals, Identity and Representation*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993, pp.177-178.

<sup>11</sup> Linda Dégh, *op.cit.*, p.103.

<sup>12</sup> Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tale as Myth. Myth as Fairy Tale*, p.5. On a more prosaic note, parents, grandparents and other adult book-buyers are presumably more inclined to buy their younger relatives stories which they themselves recognise and have enjoyed.

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Adults read child-like texts ironically; however, the pleasure they afford assimilates adults to children. Adults distance themselves but do not and cannot escape from the infantilizing narration of fairy tales and the pleasure it procures. Since this pleasure is inseparable from (if not synonymous with) the marvelous, it follows that adult readers are simultaneously disdainful of it and drawn to it. Or, as it would be more accurate to say, adults reject a *merveilleux* that is marginal, because infantile, the better to remain seduced by it. Interpreted ironically, the infantilizing pretext is a justification for writing and reading fairy tales. But this very justification is itself ironic since, for adult writers and readers, the infantile marvelous has the potential for wish-fulfillment. If irony is the sign of adult identity in these texts, is it perhaps because it is also the sign of the contingency of adulthood on childhood, and the adult's inescapable desire to "regress" to that state?<sup>13</sup>

Catherine Belsey also comments on the desire to regress, through fiction, 'a kind of adventure playground where grown-ups imagine that they can recover the lost wholeness of childhood, secure from civilization and its discontents'.<sup>14</sup> What is true for literary fictions holds equally true for advertising fictions, which use precisely the same language and rhetorical devices.

Seifert uses the terms 'seduction' and 'wish-fulfillment', both of which are of enormous relevance to contemporary advertising. Advertisers deliberately set out to charm and bewitch their readers, as much as any fairy tale. But wish-fulfillment, the satisfaction of desires in dreams or daydreams, is a different matter. Publicity plays on our desires, desires which the advertisers have usually encouraged in the first place, whether for concrete, material objects, such as a car or a washing machine, or less tangible objectives, such as a particular life style, the peace of mind that is bought through a good health insurance policy or pension plan, the desire to fit in, be like everyone else. Once the desire has been created, or brought to the surface, advertisers cannot afford to rely on our residual hope that dreams will come true. They have to convince us that our desires can be satisfied in reality, not merely in dreams or daydreams. Hence such phrases as 'a dream come true'. Advertisers identify their target segments of the market, in order to persuade people to part with their money, the very process described by Dorothy L. Sayers in one of her Lord Peter Wimsey detective novels:

He had never realized the enormous commercial importance of the comparatively poor. Nor on the wealthy, who buy only what they want when they want it, was the vast superstructure of industry founded and built up, but on those who, aching for a luxury beyond their reach and for a leisure for ever denied them, could be bullied or wheedled

<sup>13</sup> Lewis C. Seifert, *Fairy Tales, Sexuality, and Gender in France 1690-1715*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp.50-51.

<sup>14</sup> Catherine Belsey, *Desire. Love Stories in Western Culture*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1994, p.19, referring to Freud.

into spending their few hardly won shillings on whatever might give them, if only for a moment, a leisured and luxurious illusion (*Murder Must Advertise*, 1934).

This need to bridge the gap between desire and satisfaction goes some way towards explaining the hortatory tone of some advertisements, a tone which in some cases may derive from the literary fairy tale. Literary fairy tales were often written with a social and didactic function. They were written to entertain, but also to socialise their listeners and readers into acceptable patterns of behaviour. The same may be said of certain advertisements. Not just public sector advertising, where the text, or voice-over urges us to protect the environment, practise safe sex, or drive carefully. Commercial advertising, too, exhorts the public to adopt certain kinds of conduct, drive a specific model of car, wear a specific brand of jeans, drink one brand of beer in preference to another. Fairy tales often show a hero or heroine at a crossroads — figurative as well as literal, where he or she is required to make a choice, between happiness and wretchedness, success and failure, good and evil. Some television advertisements use a filmic metaphor; a character comes to a crossroads and has to opt for one course of action, or purchase, instead of another. Advertising is all about choice, between product A and product B, or the other members of the class of goods to which product A belongs. Product A is focused very strongly, product B is present by implication, rarely shown, or mentioned by name, not only for legal reasons, but so as not to fix the name of a rival product in the consumer's consciousness. The advertiser presses us to make the 'right' choice, so that we can live happily ever after.

Because of the very real constraints of temporal and spatial compression, an advertisement must use every means available to transmit its message quickly, effectively, to the fullest possible extent. Rapidity is usually taken care of by a well-chosen image. Effectiveness depends on the language used, whether it can be understood by the audience. And completeness will depend on the number of associated meanings, connotations, that can be crammed into the ad. Advertisements based on fairy tales strike an immediate chord with readers or viewers, because their constituent elements are instantly recognisable:

The common knowledge of the tales is so profound, so deeply ingrained, that, even without the story being told in full, a reference or casual hint is enough to communicate the meaning of the essential message of a tale.<sup>15</sup>

This common knowledge may be due to childhood reading or listening, but psychoanalysts suggest that the process of recognition functions at a deeper level:

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<sup>15</sup> Linda Dégh, *op.cit.*, p.102.

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The symbolic codes woven into fairy tales are relatively easy to decipher, for they are often based on familiar allusions or on readily decodable verbal substitutions. As Freud observed, folklore in general takes advantage of symbols that have universal validity.[...] The symbols of folkloric art are highly accessible to the public imagination, in large part because they are shaped, if not created, by a collective body.<sup>16</sup>

This being so, a mere allusion to the collective symbolic universe is 'meio caminho andado' ('half the job done'), in the words of a memorable Portuguese advertising slogan. Few deny the existence of a collective unconscious, a notion which accounts for the favourable reception of certain literary texts which contain fairy tale elements. J. C. Cooper considers the fairy tale romantic and emotional in its appeal.<sup>17</sup> Karen Rowe detects similar qualities in a novel which for some critics contains much of the fairy tale:

[*Jane Eyre*] begins with an echo of *Cinderella* and then transforms into a variant of *Beauty and the Beast*, one modified however by Gothic shadows and psychological depths permitted to nineteenth-century novelists. From its opening *Jane Eyre* plays on a collective, folkloric unconscious, engaging readers to transfer youthful romantic expectations from their own psyches into the fiction and to judge its success by the fidelity to fantasy paradigms.<sup>18</sup>

Advertisements with (or without) a fairy tale allusion function in an identical way, inviting the consumer to project his or her (but usually her), romantic expectations on to the product. Hence the efficacy of ads that recall the rags-to-riches trajectory of certain fairy tales, notably *Cinderella*. Many readers will enjoy *Jane Eyre* because the ending meets expectations that have been pre-conditioned by fairy tales.

One crucial aspect of fairy tale adverts is that they do not exclude possible customers. On the contrary, they welcome them with open arms. Fairy tales, like proverbs, refrains, ballads, nursery rhymes, are part of our cultural heritage, and even passive participation offer a sense of fellowship, belonging, which may be very short-lived but which stands in marked contrast to the alienation so often experienced in contemporary societies. Any advert that links into a fairy tale, immediately claims a wide audience whose receptiveness and goodwill towards the product may be virtually taken for granted:

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<sup>16</sup> Maria Tatar, *op.cit.*, pp.80-81.

<sup>17</sup> J. C. Cooper, *Fairy Tales. Allegories of the Inner Life. Archetypal Patterns and Symbols in Classic Fairy Stories*, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, The Aquarian Press, 1983, p.19.

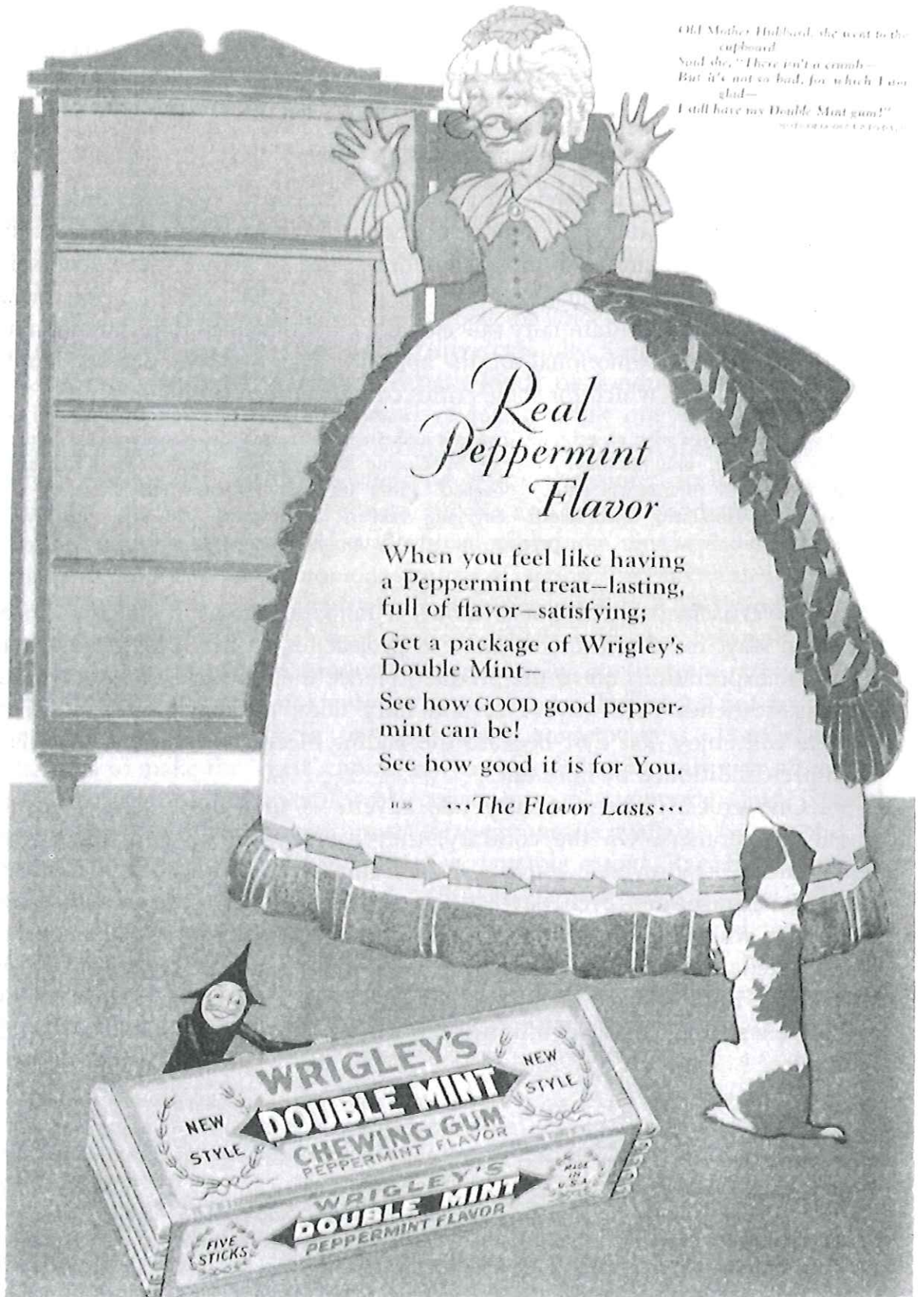
<sup>18</sup> "'Fairy-born and human-bred': Jane Eyre's Education in Romance" in *The Voyage*, edited by Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland. Hanover, University Press of New England, 1983, p.89 (Cited by Jack Zipes, *Don't Bet on the Prince. Contemporary Feminist Fairy Tales in North America and England*, London, Routledge, 1986, p.34).

Old Mother Hubbard, she went to the cupboard  
Said she, "There isn't a crumb—  
But it's not so bad, for which I am  
glad—  
I still have my Double Mint gum!"  
© Wm. Wrigley & Co., 1927

## Real Peppermint Flavor

When you feel like having  
a Peppermint treat—lasting,  
full of flavor—satisfying;  
Get a package of Wrigley's  
Double Mint—  
See how GOOD good pepper-  
mint can be!  
See how good it is for You.

1139 ...The Flavor Lasts...



Vintage Mother Goose Rhyme, 1927  
This photograph is reprinted courtesy of the Wm. Wrigley Jr. Company

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The classical fairy tale makes it appear that we are all part of a universal community with shared values and norms, that we are all striving for the same happiness, that there are certain dreams and wishes which are irrefutable, that a particular type of behaviour will produce guaranteed results, like living happily ever after with lots of gold in a marvelous castle, *our* castle and fortress that will forever protect us from inimical and unpredictable forces of the outside world.<sup>19</sup>

Fairy tales and adverts have much in common. Much of all comes down to language. There is a clear interface between the two discourses. But there are also clear differences between them. Fairy tales nowadays, unlike their precursors, are directed towards an infantile audience. Most advertisements are not. We might make the naive assumption that fairy tale advertisements publicise children's products, and are therefore aimed at children. The reality is rather different. Children, unless we count teenagers, do not usually have significant spending power. The most they can hope to do is 'persuade', sometimes in a domestic war of attrition, parents or grandparents to buy them toys, electronic games or sportswear which they may have seen advertised on television during peak children's viewing time or in the period shortly before Christmas.

While some products and services advertised for sale may eventually have positive benefits for the younger members of a family, I have only come across two items advertised via fairy tales that are destined for direct consumption by children, the Three Teddy Bears (Midlands Cooperative Society Ltd., England) and Monoprix's children's clothes (France), respectively. The cuddly toys are in part of a general promotion to encourage adults to shop at one supermarket in preference to other high-street stores, and the children's clothes, also on sale in a supermarket chain, will be chosen and purchased by parents, not the end-consumer. In fact, most of the items given the fairy tale treatment could not be further removed from children, for example, the Stannah Stairlift for the elderly or infirm, the Banco Espírito Santo credit card, Benson & Hedges *All Gold* cigarettes. There are no discernible restrictions on the products and services advertised with fairy tale allusions, other than those which might be imposed by national advertising authorities or "watchdogs". In fact, we might tentatively formulate a rule: the more 'adult' the product, the more likely it is to be advertised in this way. Wolfgang Mieder reminds us that:

these were originally not children's stories but rather traditional narratives for adults, couching basic human problems and aspirations in symbolic and poetic language. [...]

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<sup>19</sup> Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tale as Myth. Myth as Fairy Tale*, p.5.

They are symbolic comments on basic aspects of social life and modes of human behaviour'.<sup>20</sup>

This is perfectly true, and may account for the much of the appeal of advertisements that incorporate or parody fairy tale motifs and allusions. But there is one further element to consider: the shock effect which derives from the incongruity between fairy tale images and language, and products destined for specifically adult use or consumption. This incongruity first catches our attention, disarms us through humour, and nudges us towards buying the product.

J. C. Cooper makes several useful points about the fairy tale, particularly germane to our consideration of the content and conventions of certain advertisements: 'The fairy tale largely concerns a person, often nameless, who represents some quality with which the individual can identify'.<sup>21</sup>

Indeed, although there are a number of fairy tale princes and princesses, as in *Sleeping Beauty*, a substantial number of fairy tales involve the children of the poor and needy (*Hansel and Gretel*, *Tom Thumb*); millers' sons (*Puss in Boots*); widows' sons (*Jack and the Beanstalk*); woodcutters and other characters who belong to the rural or urban proletariat. In *Beauty and the Beast*, the protagonist's father, a wealthy merchant, has fallen on hard times; in a modern recasting of the tale he might as easily be a victim of the recession, or a Stock Exchange crash. Nowadays, many televised adverts are devised as mini-dramas, with a protagonist. Although some of these cash in on the fame and prestige of an actor or a 'media personality', others adverts present a supposedly ordinary person, a housewife or man in the street with whom the public is intended to identify, a *vox populi* whom we are to believe when he or she extols the virtues of a specific product. This was the approach taken by Volkswagen, in an advertisement for the Polo shown on British television in 1993.

Just like their fairy tale counterparts, characters depicted in an advertisement may be engaged in some kind of quest, in search of a product that will be the key to happiness, wealth, success: in the world of advertising, the three are interchangeable.

Transformation is a key element in many fairy tales. Mice become coachmen, pumpkins turn into coaches, frogs are transformed into handsome princes. One television advertisement even contains a double transformation, when the frog turns into a muscle-bound Australian sheepshearer, and the

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<sup>20</sup> Wolfgang Mieder, *Grim Variations*, *Tradition and Innovation in Folk Literature*. Hanover London: University Press of New England, 1987, p.2.

<sup>21</sup> J. C. Cooper, *op.cit.*, p.19.

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young girl responsible for his transformation becomes a glass of beer. The power of transformation is extremely relevant for products being advertised, which, so it is claimed, or insinuated, will change our lives. This can be seen in unsophisticated advertising of the 'before and after' variety, when someone is miraculously transformed by a particular brand of soap, shampoo, or some other toiletry. Stannah Stairlifts has one ad that uses a play on words, "I bought a Stannah and it changed my wife".<sup>22</sup> Just in case the reader misses the allusion, there is a coloured drawing of a fairy godmother hovering in mid air in a pseudo-medieval kitchen, obviously meant to remind us of the filmic *Cinderella*. A Peugeot television advertisement shows a man who has been transformed into a wolf, the *loup-garou* of French folklore, waiting to prey on the *Trois petits enfants*.

Finally, Cooper talks about the need for a happy ending:<sup>23</sup>

An adult who deals with any aspect of fairy tales today, be it in a joke, a cartoon, a literary text, an advertisement, or whatever, must obviously also recall the actual fairy tale and its happy end.<sup>24</sup>

This is obviously a vital ingredient in advertising, unless we consider campaigns designed to deter the public from antisocial behaviour, such as drinking and driving. Commercial adverts do not usually show victims, preferring to avoid negative associations. One technique which owes much to fairy tales, relies on the depiction of characters faced with a problem. But thanks to the intervention of an individual, product or service fulfilling the role of 'fairy godmother', crisis is averted, possible victims are rescued and the status quo is restored.

### THE LANGUAGE OF FAIRY TALES

It is possible to talk about fairy tale discourse, because there is a recognisable language that characterises fairy tale narratives, although it also overlaps with other discourses, whether in English, Portuguese, or in any other language.

While stories may at various times and places be referred to as fairy tales, folklore, folk tales, myths, or legends, the labeling of these stories does not disguise their commonality; we all know a fairy tale when we hear one. One of the problems with labeling is that most of the tales have come to us in translation; that is, their original 'langue' is not English. I take the position of Lévi-Strauss (1955), and, no doubt, of Propp (1968) before him, that

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<sup>22</sup> *The Lady*, 21 to 27 November 1995.

<sup>23</sup> J. C. Cooper, *op.cit.*, p.19.

<sup>24</sup> Wolfgang Mieder, 'Grim Variations', *Tradition and Innovation in Folk Literature*, p.8.

a fairy tale remains a fairy tale and is recognized as such no matter what its original context.<sup>25</sup>

Rashidi, in the article cited above, sets out to address the problem of 'how broad variations in meaning are reflected in the structure and language of a text',<sup>26</sup> and to this end, devises a classificatory system which will allow her to differentiate tales in terms of their function. Analysis of a corpus of one hundred tales permits her to identify a number of linguistic patterns corresponding to the functions of situation, problem, solution and evaluation. However, trying to trace fairy tale elements in advertisements poses a different set of problems, better answered, I believe, by analysis at the level of sentences, phrases, and even individual words. Such an analysis would be best carried out with adequate time and technological support, using scanning equipment and a computer programme capable of determining and quantifying frequency of occurrence, types of co-occurrence, and collocational possibilities. For the moment, and limiting ourselves to the Portuguese context, a superficial reading of two or three collections of folktales strongly suggests that we can identify a relatively restricted number of vocabulary items, either single words or phrases, that appear time and time again both in literary fairy tales, translations from Grimm and Perrault, and traditional Portuguese folk tales, collected by cultural anthropologists. These words can be grouped according to function: locating in time; locating in space; action and movement; human and animal actors; distinguishing characteristics; change of circumstances; psychological climate; objects; magic; rewards; endings.

*Time*

era uma vez; havia; houve em certo tempo; aconteceu que; daí a pouco; dali a pouco; dali a um momento; dali em diante; noite e dia; ao cair da tarde; fechou-se a noite; assim que anoiteceu; meia-noite em ponto; passados dias; passado o tempo; passaram tempos; pernoitar; ao fim de certo tempo; costumava; as perguntas do costume; ter por costume; como de costume

*space*

havia em certa terra; o bosque; a floresta; uma floresta muito fechada; o monte; a ilha; o rio; a fonte; a tapada; o palácio; estar pelo palácio dentro; o castelo; a torre; o mercado; a praça; o jardim; pelo caminho; a aldeia

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<sup>25</sup> Linda Stump Rashidi, 'Functional Co-Occurrence Restrictions in the Fairy Tale', in *Systemic Functional Approaches to Discourse*, Selected Papers from the 12th International Systemic Workshop, edited by James D. Benson & William S. Greaves, (volume XXVI in the Series *Advances in Discourse Processes*), Norwood, New Jersey, Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1988, pp. 113-135.

<sup>26</sup> Linda Stump Rashidi, *op.cit.*, p.115.

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<i>action and movement</i>	meter-se a caminho; seguir por esse caminho adentro; pôr-se a caminho; ir correr o mundo; ir por esse mundo além; ir andando; ir dali para fora; ir ter a um lugar, ir dar a; perder-se no monte; em chegando à sua terra; passar por; percorrer; aconteceu assim; e assim fez; assim aconteceu; fiar; ir buscar; ir trazer; calçar; deitar um pregão; pernoitar; degolar; pôr-se a salvamento; fugir; andar à caça; socorrer; acudir, contar a sua história; adormecer; despertar
<i>human and animal actors</i>	a madrastra; a enteada; o afilhado; os noivos; a viúva; a donzela; a velha; o lenhador; a fiandeira; o criado; o carvoeiro; o pastor; o mercador; o pescador; o ferreiro; o moleiro; a princesa herdeira; o rei; a rainha; a Gata Borralheira; Mamãe Gansa; O Pequeno Polegar; Mestre Gato; O Gato de Botas; o ogro; o lobo; o Lobo Mau; o cão lobado; a raposa; o sapo; o lebre; o gato; o corvo
<i>distinguishing characteristics</i>	corcovado; um nariz muito pencudo; fiel; esperto
<i>change of circumstances.</i>	Viver do seu trabalho aturado; vir a cair em pobreza
<i>psychological climate</i>	ficar contente; não ter outro remédio senão; não fazia senão pedir para; numa hora de desespero; descansar das calmas; teimar em; mentir; jurar; esperar; ficou pasmado de ver tal coisa
<i>objects</i>	varinha mágica; a chave; a arca; a carruagem; a roca; uma pedra de linho; o anel; o firmal; a espada; a jóia; cravejado de brilhantes ou diamantes; o tesouro; a pedra preciosa
<i>magic</i>	a fada; a fada minha madrinha; fadar; ficar encantado; o príncipe encantado; desencantar; quebrar o encantamento; botas de sete léguas; o gigante; o anão; o monstro; o dragão; o segredo; transformar-se em; tornar-se em; adivinhar; a adivinha; a feiticeira; enfeitiçado; o Mágico; fingir; maravilhas; a bruxa
<i>rewards</i>	dar em casamento; dar a mão da princesa a quem achar; pedir em casamento; consentir no casamento; castigar
<i>endings</i>	casou com a princesa e foram felizes; assim foi; assim aconteceu; assim fez <sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Approximate translation: *time*: once upon a time; there once was; there was a time when; it once happened; a while later; a moment later; from then onwards; night and day; at the end of the day; the evening set; as soon as it got dark; at midnight sharp, days later; when the time passed, time(s) passed; spend the night; at the end of a certain time; (he, she) used to; the usual questions; as usual. *Space*: there was in a certain land; the woods; the forest; a very thick forest; the mountain; the island; the river; the spring; the hunting grounds; the palace; to be inside the palace; the castle; the tower; the market; the (village) square; the garden; on the way; the village.

These are not hard and fast classifications, and doubtless require tailoring to match more rigorous other categories, such as tale types. But for the purposes of this discussion, they prove the point that there is an identifiable nucleus of vocabulary items that distinguish the fairy tale from other kinds of discourse. Just by reading through this brief and by no means exhaustive listing it is almost possible to write our own fairy tale. The items are exceedingly familiar, perhaps because of our reading, listening and viewing habits, and perhaps, as Jung suggests, because the symbolic language of fairy tales reflects 'the unchanging, ever stable structure of the human psyche'.<sup>28</sup> Whatever the explanation, many of the key terms, or clusters of words, have entered everyday language, so that for many people 'stepmother' automatically collocates with 'wicked', or 'lobo' with 'mau'; a forest is 'muito fechada', and we would never talk about eight-league boots. As Lewis Seifert observes, 'In English, the very word "fairy" almost effortlessly attaches itself to "godmother"'.<sup>29</sup> The verbal elements are already in place, rooted in our conscious, or unconscious minds. How they are combined brings us to the next characteristic of the fairy tale discourse, which concerns structure and style.

When we analyse fairy tales, we note a preference for declarative sentences; formulaic sayings, set phrases; repetitions of patterns, words, phrases, and motifs; rhythm; and rhyme. All of these, it goes without saying,

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*Action and movement:* to set (oneself) on the way; to follow through that path, to run the world; to walk and walk; to get out of there; to reach a place; to reach; to get lost in the mountain; when (he, she) returned to (his, her) land; to pass through; to go through; and so it happened; and so (he, she) did; to spin; to fetch; to bring, to shoe; to put an edit; to spend the night; to behead; to reach safety; to run away; to go hunting; to rescue; to tell one's tale, to go to sleep; to wake up. *Human and animal actors:* the stepmother; the stepdaughter; the godson, the bridal pair; the maiden; the old woman; the woodcutter; the spinster; the servant; the charcoal man; the shepherd; the merchant; the fisherman; the smith; the miller; the heir(ess) to the throne; the king; the queen; Cinderella; Mother Goose; Tom Thumb; Master Cat; Puss in Boots; the ogre; the Big Bad Wolf; the wolf dog; the fox; the toad; the hare; the cat; the raven. *Distinguishing characteristics:* hunchback; hooked nose; faithful; clever. *Change of circumstances:* to live of one's hard work; to fall into poverty. *Psychological climate:* to be happy; have no choice except; to do nothing except asking for; in a moment of despair, to relax; to insist; to lie; to swear; to wait; to be astounded to see such a thing. *Object:* magic wand, key; chest; coach, spindle; a stone of linen; ring; signet; sword; jewel; set with brilliants and diamonds; treasure; precious stone. *Magic:* fairy; fairy godmother; to be enchanted; prince charming (or enchanted prince); to break the charm; seven league boots; giant; dwarf; monster; dragon; secret; to transform into; to turn into; to guess; riddle; witch; bewitched; magician; to pretend; wonders; hag. *Rewards:* to give in marriage; to give the hand of the princess to whoever finds; to ask for the hand of; to allow the marriage; to punish. *Endings:* he married the princess and they were happy; and so it was; and so it happened; and so he did.

<sup>28</sup> Maria Tatar, *op.cit.*, p.81.

<sup>29</sup> Lewis C. Seifert, *op.cit.*, p.191.

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are key elements of advertising discourse. Fairy tales, even the most polished literary variety, resort to the conventions of oral tradition. Advertising texts, a more recent phenomenon, try consciously, often self-consciously, to mimic this same voice. Karla Kuskin coins an especially onomatopoeic phrase to describe the soothing, comforting effect of the words used in certain stories for children, which 'take on the sound and weight of a lulling encantation'.<sup>30</sup> Kuskin, too, sees points of contact between the language of children's literature and the language of advertising, although she approaches the question from the opposite direction. I have suggested that advertisers make use of fairy tales because of all the positive, agreeable associations that these call up for the audience. Kuskin, on the other hand, starts off from the premise that children will enjoy and respond to certain types of writing, among which we could include the fairy tale, because it meshes with their other linguistic and cultural experiences:

An emphasis on rhythms, word sounds, rhyme, and mood is a natural way to address the generation particularly tuned to just these elements in stories, verse, tongue twisters, song lyrics, commercial jingles, and assorted nonsense.<sup>31</sup>

According to this logic, children nowadays will respond to fairy tales because they are attuned to advertisements, while adults respond to adverts because the jingles or slogans will carry echoes, faint but still audible, of nursery rhymes and fairy tales. I suspect that Kuskin underestimates the force and impact of fairy tales, especially today, when they reach us through several different channels. But she is right to note a relationship between the two discourses, one which might even be termed symbiotic.

Kuskin makes one further point which might usefully be explored in an investigation of the interface between children's language and the language of advertising:

When a child connects a word to a thing he begins the process of naming. That is the point at which one acquires language. At first, according to Jean Piaget, children may not differentiate between the name and the thing, they may even practise a kind of word magic in which the name controls the thing.<sup>32</sup>

The relationship between names and objects is primordial for the advertiser, who certainly does not want us to distinguish between the name, or brand, and the thing, or object to be consumed. One of the biggest triumphs of twentieth-century marketing has to be the way, in English, that the brand

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<sup>30</sup> Karla Kuskin, 'The Language of Children's Literature', in *The State of the Language*, edited by Leonard Michaels & Christopher Ricks, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 1980, p.219.

<sup>31</sup> Karla Kuskin, *op.cit.*, p.220.

<sup>32</sup> Karla Kuskin, *op.cit.*, p.225.

name Hoover has for many people displaced the common compound noun 'vacuum cleaner', changed its grammatical category, and become a verb: 'I must Hoover the living room'. *Fairy* washing soaps and liquids are another case in point, and in present day Portugal, the magic wand or 'varinha mágica' has been transformed into an electric hand-blender.

#### ANALYSIS OF THE CORPUS

So far, we have considered the reception of fairy tales and advertisements, made some general observations about their respective linguistic components, and sought parallels or correspondences between the two discourses. In the next stage of this discussion, I propose to make close readings of ten advertisements: two Portuguese, three English, three French, one Spanish and one Italian, as well as passing references to others. These particular adverts have been selected because they allude directly or indirectly to canonical fairy tales, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, *The Three Little Pigs*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, or because they exemplify the use of a particular technique. One ad derives from Aesopian fable as well as the fairy tale tradition, and is notable for its use of pictorial metaphor.

Only the relevant portions of the text have been transcribed; I have omitted those parts that refer to details such as price or conditions of purchase. The lay-out has been chosen to facilitate reading rather than faithfully reflect the physical disposition of the original advertisement. Pictures or video films are described in some detail. The general procedure has been to deconstruct advertisements in order to establish how they function or 'mean'. That is to say, I attempt to determine how the fairy tale references are embedded in image or text; whether they are explicit or implicit, easily detectable or disguised; whether the original fairy tale is used in a straightforward manner, or whether it is parodied and subverted for humorous effects.

Particular attention will be paid to the use of metonymy and metaphor in advertising, namely pictorial metaphor. Charles Forceville offers a useful insight into the ways advertising metaphors work, basing his theories of pictorial metaphor on Max Black's interaction theory of metaphor,<sup>33</sup> and emphasising among other aspects, dependence on cultural context. Metaphorical statements contain two distinct elements, the literal element or

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<sup>33</sup> Max Black, 'Metaphor', in *Models and Metaphors*, Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1962.

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primary subject. The other is the non-literal, metaphorical focus, the secondary subject. These two subjects interact in the following manner:

The metaphorical utterance works by 'projecting upon' the primary subject a set of 'associated implications', comprised in the implicative complex, that are predictable of the secondary subject.<sup>34</sup>

For Forceville, this 'implicative complex' may be defined as 'the theoretical totality of properties, features, notions, beliefs, metonymic extensions that in one way or another adhere to the secondary subject'.<sup>35</sup> This totality comprises not only dictionary meanings and factual properties, but also beliefs, superstitions, attitudes and emotions. This notion of the implicative complex is highly pertinent for any study of advertising, but it is especially useful for a consideration of fairy tale advertisements. We shall therefore be attentive to the transfer of beliefs, superstitions and feelings from the secondary subject, the fairy tale, to the primary subject, the object being advertised.

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<sup>34</sup> Charles Forceville, *Pictorial Metaphor in Advertising*, London, Routledge, 1995, p.8.

<sup>35</sup> Charles Forceville, *op.cit.*, p.8.