

James M. McGlathery

Fairy Tale Romance. The Grimms, Basile, and Perrault

Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991. Pp. 226. \$29.95

Reviewed by Joseph Schmidt

Erotic passion as translated from folk culture into the literary folk tale is undoubtedly an interesting subject. James M. McGlathery (editor of *The Brothers Grimm and Folktale*, 1988), employing a very solid and traditional approach, delineates and analyzes the topic in three major sources of the European fairy-tale tradition. The introduction provides a concise and comprehensive review of major studies and trends in the field of fairy-tale research, the six following chapters pair off relevant social roles (from 1. "Brothers and Sisters," 2. "Beauties and Beasts" to 6. "Bridegrooms and Bachelors"). The conclusion summarizes the overriding issue of the extent to which the authors, as editors of significant fairy-tale collections and cultural mediators of folk culture, dealt with erotic passion intentionally.

1. III, "The Brother as Matchmaker," is a typical sub-chapter for professor McGlathery's type of analysis. The two central facts of stories with this motif—that the brother is often relegated to a kind of animal existence until the heroine marries, and that he is actively involved as a matchmaker (often lingering on with the husband to form a happy threesome!)—serve for Grimms' and Basile's demand that "siblings ought to be loyal and devoted" (49) to each other and not be rivals; however, the fairy-tale editors often do not eliminate imagery that suggests "unconsciously incestuous attachment" (44), passion, or even guilt. At his best, McGlathery provides true insights into psychological undercurrents as reflected by the epoch in which a particular editor suited erotic allusions to images that fitted popular taste. E.g. subchapter II "Jealous Passion" (chapter 3, "Fathers and Daughters") discusses the Sleeping Beauty type tale and the *Allerleirauh* (Thousandfurs) story, outlining how a narrator could assign a whole range of indirect judgments on paternal behavior: from stern warning (Perrault) to open, zesty Renaissance ridicule (Basile).

But two major reservations for this reviewer. The first is the general style of analysis: a well-documented, but nevertheless noncommittal, conversational style that remains peculiarly vague when anchoring speculation on historical facts. Modal verbs in the subjunctive abound to the very end of the book. The introductory summarizing phrase of the last paragraph of the conclusion reflects this caution: "These patterns [the various polarities as outlined in the chapter headings] suggest that tellers of these tales were not oblivious to the problematic nature of erotic desire." The second reservation concerns the omission of modern literary criticism where the kind of binary polarity of human relations that form the basic structure of all chapters are central. One does not have to embrace it, but to ignore it altogether seems inappropriate. A case in point is A.J. Greimas *Sémantique structurale*, 1966 (when discussed in connection with Propp's famous analysis as, e.g., in Maria Tatar *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales*. 1987, 68f.); another would be Jacques Lacan's famous (Freudian) "relational system" that places this type of human personality

into binary structures/axes (e.g., A. Sheridan's translation of *Ecrits*, 1977) of the kind professor McGlathery uses as a basis for his analytical procedure.

Nawal el-Saadawi

Searching

Translated from the Arabic by Shirley Eber

London: Zed Books, 1991. Pp. 114. £3.95 (\$7.95).

Reviewed by Ramzi M. Salti

Not unlike many of Nawal el-Saadawi's other feminist works which generally deal with the situation of women in Egypt, *Searching* (originally published in Arabic as *Al-Ghâ'ib*, not dated) is a novel that operates on a dual level. On one level, the reader is led on an eventful journey through Cairo in the company of the main character, Fouada, who is looking for her lover, Farid. On a less apparent level, however, the reader is also being taken on a psychological journey through Fouada's mind as she discovers that her quest, which originally centered on her absent lover, gradually takes on the form of a search for some significance for her own life. As the story unfolds, the reader is constantly reminded that Farida's seemingly new awareness "was not exactly a discovery, neither was it sudden, but rather a slow, insidious, obscure feeling, which had started some time ago" (12).

At first glance, the plot seems simple. Fouada, a trained research chemist in Cairo, is worried when her lover Farid does not show up for their weekly meeting at their favorite restaurant. She thus begins her search for him by calling his home and going over, only to find that Farid has disappeared. As the days pass, however, Farid's continual absence leads Fouada to focus on the things that she had been looking for in her own life but never seemed to find, such as her ambitions, values, and place in society. She finds herself constantly in contact with mostly male characters who, in one way or another, attempt to manipulate her and take advantage of her. While looking for a place to set up her chemistry lab, for example, she finds that she has to deal with Saati, a landlord who agrees to rent her an apartment for little money, yet expects payment in other ways. In this novel, he is just one of the many characters who refuse to take her qualifications as a chemist seriously because she is a woman. As in the case of other main characters in el-Saadawi's other novels, such as Bahiah in *Two Women in One* (1985; see *WLT* 60:2, p.356) and Ferdaus in *Woman at Point Zero* (1975; see *WLT* 59:3, p.483), Fouada is also a woman who feels that she must compromise and prostitute herself in some way if she is to survive.

Farid's disappearance also leads Fouada to reevaluate her own priorities in life, something which seemed impossible to her when Farid was still in her life. She wonders, for instance, "how he had become her every moment" and "how had a man become her whole life?" (74). These questions become even more poignant when contrasted with her mother's recurrent words warning that her "future lies in studying" and that "there's no use in men" (13). The real-