

## Red as Blood, White as Snow, Black as Crow: Chromatic Symbolism of Womanhood in Fairy Tales

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This article is intended as a modest follow-up on a classic study by Brent Berlin and Paul Kay. In *Basic Color Terms: Their Universality and Evolution*, these two linguists showed that despite the proven ability of humans to discriminate thousands of color percepts, “a total universal inventory of exactly eleven basic term categories exists from which the eleven or fewer basic color terms of any given languages are always drawn” (2). This means that, as they put it, such “eleven basic color categories are pan-human perceptual universals” (108).<sup>1</sup> To my mind, this conclusion is eerily reminiscent of Vladimir Propp’s discovery that thirty-one functions are all that the human imagination needs to produce the myriad extant variations in fairy tales. So the question arises of whether fairy tales use colors, as they use functions, in a patterned way. To answer, one must pursue Propp’s sort of exploration of fairy-tale universals beyond formalism, in the realm of sensory experience—or, rather, of its encoding in color categories.

Encouragingly, fairy tales make striking use of colors. Max Lüthi once remarked that whereas “[t]he real world shows us a richness of different hues and shadings . . . [b]y contrast, the folktale prefers clear, ultrapure colors” (27). And he gave a well-known example: “Snow White is as white as snow, as red as blood, and as black as ebony” (28). While in the following discussion I shall take advantage of the example of the three colors of Snow White, I must part ways with Lüthi’s ideas regarding the abstract style of fairy tales, for my

purpose is to call attention to the role of colors as concrete semiotic markers. Indeed, in taking up the colors of Snow White (and some of her sisters), I would like to explore chromatic codes as a means to uncover folk notions regarding womanhood.

### **Basic Chromatic Trio**

But how, precisely, does an exploration of chromatic codes regarding womanhood fit with Berlin and Kay's study on basic color terms? Let me backtrack a little. These authors have shown that natural languages encode basic color categories according to a single progressive sequence of color discriminations, so any given category supposes all previous ones. Specifically, they found that if a given language contains only two color terms, these refer to white and black. But if a language contains three terms, then it contains (in addition to the previous ones) a word for red. And so on and so forth concerning—in the following order—green or yellow, then blue, then brown, and finally purple, pink, orange, and gray.

But why would color terms follow such a strict order everywhere? Anthropologist Marshall Sahlins, while strengthening the case for a physiological basis of the universal scheme of color categories, also suggested that “colors are in practice semiotic codes” (171). This is why, Sahlins surmises, Berlin and Kay found strong cross-cultural regularities in the foci of basic color categories—for, if colors are to carry meanings, then “hues are socially relevant in their most distinctive perceptible form” (175). In principle, this argument applies to Lüthi's observation on the distinctiveness of fairy-tale colors.

In itself, the point that colors are convenient semiotic markers will not surprise anyone who is familiar with traffic lights or with the gender-specific assignments of blue and pink for babies. But, more ambitiously, I wish to focus on Snow White's tricolor pattern as one particular instance of a transcultural basic scheme. Berlin and Kay have shown the primacy of white, black, and red in most color terminologies (21); and, as one might expect, a fundamental chromatic trio tends to convey foundational notions.

Here is an interesting example. Victor W. Turner has shown in a classic study that the Ndembu of Zambia possess “primary terms” for only white, red, and black (60, 68). And he suggested these three colors stand for a totalizing tripartite mode of classification. Such “three principles of being” stand for, among others, heaven and chieftainship (white), blood spilling as in war (red), and sexual desire and regeneration (black).

This example inevitably leads to another, for Turner's description of an all-encompassing, tripartite classification recalls Georges Dumézil's views on a triadic Indo-European worldview. Indeed, Dumézil's scheme includes a chromat-

ic trio of white, red, and black/dark blue/green (see Puhvel 159–60, 191; Zahan 131–32). And although languages of the Indo-European family typically present eleven-term basic color lexicons, the corresponding cultures still use the basic chromatic trio—as in depictions of Snow White’s complexion.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, examination of the basic chromatic trio should propitiate cross-cultural comparison. But Dumézil’s elucidation of Indo-European triadic chromaticism (unlike that of Turner regarding the Ndembu of Zambia) is, unfortunately, rather scant. And although Dumézil recognizes a trivalent goddess who synthesizes the three Indo-European functions and stands for “the very ideal of womanhood in society” (*Religion* 307), the French savant does not have much to say about three-color embodiment in such a goddess—or about ideal womanhood, either.<sup>3</sup>

However, there is another way to elicit chromatic symbolism of ideal womanhood. As Snow White’s complexion hints, European fairy tales express Dumézil’s intuition of a link between trivalent goddesses and ideal womanhood in terms of association between tricolor heroines and feminine perfection.

So, then, the following discussion examines the basic chromatic trio in European fairy tales from the perspective suggested by Snow White’s tricolor complexion. It is hoped that this will reveal something about the workings of symbolism in fairy tales while facilitating comparative research on chromatic codes. Overall, this article calls attention to the importance of tapping yet unheeded aspects of fairy tales to help advance research and problem solving in the wider realm of the humanities.

### **Tricolor Ideal Womanhood: Fairy-Tale Heroines**

Twelfth-century Chrétien de Troyes has famously let us know that the sight of three drops of blood on snow reminds Perceval of his sweetheart. In *Conte du Graal*, Perceval, on beholding three drops of blood on white snow, thinks of the “fresh color” of the face of his sweetheart. Specifically, “the red on white in her face was just like those three drops of blood . . . on the snow” (302–03).

Five centuries later, the complete chromatic trio surfaced in a fairy tale. Giambattista Basile’s tale 4.9, “The Crow,” presents a prince who finds a white marble slate on which a crow has just been killed, and who exclaims: “Oh, Heavens! Would that I could have a wife as red and white as this stone, and with hair and eyebrows as black as the feathers of this crow.” Instantly, he decides he must have “the original of the stone” (3: 488–89, 592). The same tricolor leitmotif appears in tale 5.9, “The Three Citrons,” concerning a prince who does not want to hear about taking a wife until—having cut a finger over ricotta cheese, after watching some jackdaws—he decides to search for a woman who is like ricotta stained with blood. Likewise, a tale collected by

François Luzel in Brittany presents a prince who, on beholding the contrast presented by a crow and its blood on snow, decides to marry the (as yet unknown) princess whose face is just as white, red, and black (131–37).

Such appears to be the proper background for understanding the Grimms' "Snow White" queen, who, on beholding three drops of her own blood on the snow, wishes to have a daughter "as white as snow, as red as blood, and as black as" ebony (Grimm 249). Presently, let us ask what the tricolor image tells us about the fairy-tale ideal maiden.

Consideration of all the above examples implies acknowledging that red-and-white is actually the basic contrast. Both the medieval image of three blood drops on snow and the Italian representation of blood on ricotta mention these two colors exclusively. Likewise, in "Snow White" it is the beauty of "red on white snow" that actually captures the queen's attention. But, of course, the queen sees the red-and-white contrast through a black frame. Similarly, Basile's hero sheds mesmerizing blood on ricotta on seeing black jackdaws. So the red-and-white contrast is the focus of the scene, and the black element is peripheral, to the point that it may vanish while the other two remain in sight.

Before proceeding with the elucidation of this chromatic articulation, it is important to know that the red-on-white contrast used to be important in daily life. Lucien Gerschel, in a classic contribution on colors and dyeing, showed that European sources throughout many centuries contrast the relative dullness of natural hemp or wool colors to the expensive production of bright white and its even more luxurious tinting with purple. This means that for a very long time, dyeing amounted to tinting white with red. Such equivalence still shows in the fact that the Spanish term *colorado* ("colored") means red. Similarly, the Portuguese term *colorau* designates a vermilion paste, and the derived term *corado* ("colored") designates blush—precisely that "touch of vermilion set on white," to be seen in the face of his sweetheart, to which Perceval compares the three drops of blood he sees on snow (Troyes 302).

### **Red . . .**

Let us proceed. Such drops are surely important; but what could they stand for? Another Portuguese name for red-on-white blush, *rosetas* ("small roses"), points us the way of Briar-Rose—that floral maiden in the Grimms' no. 50 who pricks her finger at fifteen years old, then falls into a long sleep, which (as Charles Perrault's variant specifies) does not diminish "one bit of her complexion: her cheeks were carnation and her lips were coral" (Lang 56).

So now we face a slightly different question: what do such carnation cheeks and coral lips stand for? Basile's usual bluntness delivers a clear answer. Says he, Eros tinged the white face of the maiden with red, and Venus tainted with menstrual blood her lips—which Basile likens to roses, destined to pierce with their

briars a thousand enamored hearts (3: 596). This establishes a clear association between red on a white face, roses, and menses. From here, it remains to inquire on the relationship between roses and three drops of blood reminiscent, as we know, of vermilion-on-white in the face of Perceval's sweetheart.

Recall that we have met three blood drops in "Snow White," where the queen sheds her own blood just before wishing for a tricolor daughter.<sup>4</sup> Again, we find them in no. 89, "The Goose Girl," in the Grimms' collection. Here a mother sets three drops of her own blood on a white handkerchief, which she gives to her daughter as the latter sets off to marry. Both cases, then, affirm a blood link between a mother and her daughter. Predictably (in view of the association between roses and menses), such a link may be told with flowers as well. For example, a Portuguese oral version of "Snow White" presents a mother named Rose and her daughter, called Flower of the Rose, of whom the former is envious to the point of trying to kill her (Barbosa 107). Note that both are roses, but only the younger maiden is the bloom, which casts the older woman on the side of briars. So, we may ask, what do briars indicate about a woman by the time her daughter is old enough to be the rose bloom? What the bloom represents is clear, for one version of "Sleeping Beauty" by Basile shows a maiden become pregnant after eating a leaf from a blooming rose. But let us look on the side of briars (2.8, "The Young Slave").

At this point we need to take a broader view of the flower metaphor encompassing both blooms and briars. For this purpose, let us extend our view for a moment. Shakespeare, in *Twelfth Night*, links "roses of spring" and "maidhood," and states, "[W]omen are as roses, whose fair flow'r being once display'd doth fall that very hour." And in *All's Well That Ends Well* he describes a maiden not as yet "husbanded" as "a fresh uncropped flower," defloration of whom would take her "roses" and barely leave her "thorns" to prick herself (Shakespeare 364, 372, 375, 388, 392). The same ancient symbolism of passage from roses to thorns underlies Ovid's description of the Roman festival of *Floralia* (April 28 through May 3) in *Fasti* 5.331–54. After associating the acts of wine drinking and of "pluck[ing] the rose," the poet sets to explain why "a crowd of drabs" frequent these games. Says he, the goddess Flora "warns us to use life's flower, while it still blooms; for the thorn, she reminds us, is flouted when the roses have fallen away" (Frazer 1: 271).

What can we learn from these examples? While Ovid appears to generically take the rose for the prime of womanhood and the thorn for life past its bloom, Shakespeare is more precise. On the one hand, he links plucked roses to lost maidenhood; on the other, he hints that the pricking leftover stands for other bloodsheds in a woman's life. Let us look in this perspective at "Little Briar-Rose." If to prick oneself at fifteen years old stands for the first spilling of blood, then the subsequent period of thorny unavailability should amount to

the forbidding aspect of a blood condition. Indeed, all taken together, the contributions of Ovid, Shakespeare, and the Grimms suggest that red flowers stand for the fruitful aspect of womb blood as well as for youth, that most fruitful time in life, whereas thorns symbolize the leftovers of both: the monthly flux and life past its prime.

On the side of fairy tales this implies two things. First, Briar-Rose—or, rather, the thorny rose she impersonates—expresses the ambivalence of feminine blood. The bloom metaphor of womb blood affirms this medium is fruitful, whereas the use of pricking thorns to designate a blood condition implies marital unavailability. Second, the envy of a woman called Rose for her Flower-of-the-Rose daughter entails that the latter casts the former on the sterile side of spines, not blooms.

Now we are ready to grasp the constant meaning of three blood drops. Recall that Briar-Rose pricks one finger at fifteen years old, then becomes impenetrably surrounded by thorns until the right time comes for the elected husband to pass through her barrier—now displaying “large and beautiful flowers”—so as to deflower her, as Basile (5.5, “Sun, Moon, and Talia”) specifies and independent oral variants confirm (see Braga 90–92; Curtin 57–61). Of course, both the pricked finger and the subsequent defloration entail bleeding. And it is as Snow White’s mother pricks her finger that she conceives (both literally and figuratively) of a girl.

Thus, pricked fingers as well as thorns represent feminine bleeding in connection with potential fertility. Which suggests that three blood drops match the three bleedings punctuating a woman’s destiny at puberty, defloration, and birth giving (cf. Verdier 252). “Red as blood,” then, sets the dynamic frame of a shared destiny in which related women interact, both for good and for evil. Overall, women are like roses; but whereas a good mother passes on her blood drops and takes briars as they come, the bad one clings to rosebuds out of season.

. . . *white* . . .

After a lengthy discussion of the semantics of redness, the examination of whiteness risks sounding minimal. Not that this color is not important—in tales as elsewhere, white stands for luminosity and untainted sheen, thus for luminous heaven as much as for purity. Hence, the dove that keeps watch over Snow White fits with her glass coffin in regard of the idea of heavenly light. In the same vein, in tale no. 21 in the Grimms’ collection, white doves represent Cinderella’s dead mother watching over her daughter from heaven.

But, precisely, our theme denies such untainted otherworldliness. White is pertinent regarding our heroine *insofar as* it is tinged with red. The whole point of Snow White’s sleep in the glass coffin is that she still has “pretty red cheeks,” and even in her bier she remains “as white as snow, as red as blood, and her

hair was as black as ebony” (Grimm 256). In sum, the purity of whiteness is there to be tinted.

We may understand this in at least two ways, which are by no means contradictory. First, the ideal woman born by supernatural intervention, or else actually searched for in some unearthly kingdom beyond water, is otherworldly (which white represents). But her destiny is incarnation and motherhood (which red epitomizes). Second, this is a theme of passage from the purity of infancy (white) to the mature realm of procreation (red). In both perspectives, the red-on-white stain embodies a threshold.

Angela Carter has keenly expressed the life-cycle dimension of this chromatic threshold regarding another fairy-tale theme. First she depicts a girl, “thirteen going on fourteen, the hinge of your life, when you are . . . nor child nor woman . . . untouched, invincible, immaculate. Like snow” (*Curious* 64–65) Then she asserts that the destiny of this girl, who can’t bleed as yet, is to take on a “scarlet shawl, the colour of poppies, the colour of sacrifices, the colour of her menses” (*Bloody* 117) This girl is none other than Red Riding Hood, whose trials and tribulations Carter depicts in terms of a red-on-white hinge. Therefore, as in real-world ancient techniques of dyeing studied by Gerschel, so in the symbolic realm of fairy tales (of which Carter was a most penetrating commentator) white is the precondition for red—its chromatic background.

### *. . . and black*

Finally we come to black, which (as you may recall) appears ancillary to the basic white-and-red contrast. Apparently, there is little to say about this color besides the fact that black appears primarily in the shape of an otherworldly bird (crow, raven) that has been killed. In itself this fact is important, for it relates black to death and the otherworld.

But there is more to it. Consider Basile’s tale 5.9, “The Three Citrons,” which engages blackness in interesting ways. At first sight it would appear there is no trace of death here, for the prince becomes mesmerized by the *bicolor* contrast of blood on ricotta cheese after seeing *live* jackdaws. However, when he decides to search for the bicolor woman, the dark element is made clear as he declares he must set on his search or else end up wandering with the shades.

Now let us focus on the maiden he seeks. She is fair as cream and red as a strawberry, with apparently no trace of blackness. But on suffering enchantment she is replaced by a black slave, who in turn presents some remarkable features. First, on looking at herself on a mirroring surface, the black slave sees the bicolor face of the maiden; second, the dark slave is called Lucia (“light”); and third, she introduces herself to the prince as the fair bride turned black, on the grounds that being bewitched, she turns black every other year. There is structural truth to this explanation, for the black usurper’s appearance in the plot pre-

cisely matches the enchantment of the red-on-white bride. In other words, the black usurper appears to personify the heroine's enchantment. She is, in sum, the black aspect of the white-and-red heroine that appeared to be missing.

So, then, let us say blackness connotes enchantment as well as death. In fairy tales the two notions are intertwined. Enchantment is something like reversible death, and death itself appears in tones of enchantment.

### **Death and Rebirth**

Constantly, such enchantment-like death is prerequisite for rebirth. Let us heed N. J. Girardot's remarks on the death symbolism of time spent by Snow White in the dark forest. In his view, the fate of the tricolor heroine enacts "the idea of a union of the red (menstrual blood) and white (semen) through the agency of the black (the ritual 'death' involved in the initiation and marriage union)." At the very least, the association between symbolic death and blackness is certainly correct. The death of Snow White happens in the dwelling place of chthonian creatures, and Girardot again has a point as he argues that these dwarfs in the dark forest are not only "malevolent and destructive beings" but also "creative agents of growth and rebirth" (289–90). This articulation is nicely expressed in a German version mentioned by the Grimms. Here, the malevolent queen takes Snow White to the dwarfs' cave in hopes that they will kill her; but what they end up doing, instead, is elevating the inert maiden out of their cave and putting her in a silver coffin up on a tree (Hunt 407). The Grimms' text actually expands this lesson. The dwarfs' business is to draw ore from the mountains, so they routinely bring to light gleaming "copper and gold." In the same vein, they will not bury the maiden in the "dark earth" (*schwarze Erde*) but choose, instead, to elevate her to light by putting her in a glass coffin on top of a mountain (Grimm 252).

In sum, chthonian dwarfs in the dark forest are in the business of drawing luminous entities out of darkness. Thus, both the black slave called Lucia and dwarfs drawing solarlike ore out of darkness stand for the notion that darkness prefigures new light, for enchantment is, at bottom, a reversible death.

Such primacy of death and darkness over life and light is, beyond fairy tales, a standard feature of cyclic models regarding conspicuous natural phenomena. Consider the dark moon, out of which the "new" moon (as Romance languages call it) reappears periodically; or the black earth taking in the dead, as well as seeds, so as to generate new life.

And, of course, equivalence between such phenomena and women's cycles is a staple of symbolic thought. There is hardly any need to elaborate on the widespread correspondence between women's cycles and the moon's returns. And regarding equivalence between wombs and fields, recall that the term



“husbandman” refers to him who casts seed in both the earth and the uterus. This analogy is old, of course, for it underlies Sophocles’s depiction of Oedipus’s fault in terms of “plowing” the place where he had been “sown,” thus replacing his father in the “furrows” of Jocasta, whom the poet likens to “mother earth” having cropped twice at once (Sophocles 234, 236).

Poetic proclivities aside, my point is that ancient equivalence between women’s cycles and paradigms of life springing out of death entails that women themselves operate rebirth from death.

### **Tricolor Ideal Womanhood: Madonna**

In terms of chromatic symbolism, this would mean women bring forth white from black by means of their sex-specific fertility, epitomized by red. Such general conclusion is borne out, even beyond fairy-tale heroines, by the paradigmatic image of ideal womanhood in Christendom.

Consider that artists have garbed the Virgin Mary in red and blue for centuries. This chromatic pattern is not too hard to fathom if we consider the foregoing discussion on rose symbolism, and if we heed François Rabelais’s point that “blue signifies heaven and heavenly things” (62). In this light, blue-and-red figurations of Mary suggest she brings together celestial essence and womb blood. This is true in two senses. First, although Mary was heavenly begotten, she is still a woman able to conceive. Second, in Mary’s earthly womb the godhead incarnated in human flesh. (Significantly, in Portuguese *encarnado* means both “incarnate” and “red.”) In sum, Mary’s blue-and-red figurations intimate the incarnation of celestial essence in womb blood, which is arguably the core value of Mary in Christian dogma (see Vaz da Silva).

Rabelais also ascribes white to celestial light, which suggests that blue and white share a heavenly connotation (60–61). This helps explain the shift of Mary’s garb to white after the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, in 1854, emphasized the celestial purity of the Mother of Jesus.

Even garbed in white, though, the pure Virgin relates conspicuously to roses, rosaries, and flowers in enclosed gardens. The reason for this is clear once you recall that the popular expression “defloration” supposes that virgins possess flowers. In this frame of mind, the white mantle of virginal purity implies the virtuous accumulation of red flowers, which justifies constant association of Mary to roses (see Albert-Llorca 54, 193–205). Therefore, while the famous Portuguese Virgin of *Fátima* appears white-dressed, she presents conspicuous blush cheeks popularly named *rosetas* (from “roses”).

So the Virgin Mary, like the ideal fairy-tale heroine, is a maiden in flowers whose face shows red on white. The fact that the destiny of the fairy-tale maiden is defloration while that of the Madonna hinges on the intactness of her flow-

ers delineates two variations within a single conceptual framework of tricolor feminine perfection. Which suggests that the Virgin, too, ought to present a discreet black streak.

This would explain that black Madonna denominations have persisted to this day throughout Europe, even though a black Virgin Mary is strange from a canonical perspective. To understand what is at stake in such representations, consider the testimony of someone with firsthand experience. Carlo Levi, who lived among south Italian peasants, lucidly describes the black Madonna of Viggiano in terms that are rather remote from the official image of Mary. She appears, he says, as a “fierce, pitiless, mysterious, ancient earth goddess” endowed with a “black, scowling face” and “large, inhuman eyes.” From daily acquaintance, he comes to see her as “a subterranean deity, black with the shadows of the bowels of the earth, a peasant Persephone or lower-world goddess of the harvest” (117, 119–21). From a comparative perspective, this point is certainly well taken, for David Shulman independently points out that Indian dark goddesses to this day may claim “to represent the earth in its character of the universal womb from which life issues, and to which life returns, in violence” (139; cf. Gimbutas xviii–xix, 110, 159, 255–56, 319). In sum, occasional representations of the usually white-and-red Virgin in disquieting black are in accord with the streak of death-connoting darkness we found at the core of fairy-tale representations of ideal womanhood.

Granted, a tricolor image of femininity composed of ostensible white-and-red, underlain by discreet black, may seem strange. But recall Freud’s insight on “the three forms taken by the figure of the mother in the course of a man’s life—the mother herself, the beloved one who is chosen after her pattern, and lastly the Mother Earth who receives him once more” (247).

Correspondence between Freud’s death-related earth aspect and the black streak we have examined is obvious. So is the fit between the sexual aspect and red; indeed, Sahlins has noted the Western tendency to understand red “as harlotry as opposed to the prudery of blue or the purity of white” (178). Which brings us to the harmony between maternity and white. Indeed, the cleanliness of white fits the purity of ideal motherhood, ultimately impersonated by the Madonna. Moreover, whiteness is a fitting symbol for milk and, thus, the nurturing aspect of motherliness.

Taken in separation, the white and red elements of womanhood have given rise to the rather pathological cultural antinomy southern Europeans express in terms of the *mamma* and the *puttana*. Conversely, their articulation synthesizes the nurturing and fertile aspects of maternity, as shown in the fairy-tale heroine and in Madonna imagery. And then, beyond this worldly aspect of femininity, occasional glimpses arise of the realm of death and new life hinging on a streak of black.

## A Comparative Sketch

Throughout this discussion I have argued that the use of “pure colors” (Lüthi 24) in fairy tales has little to do with empty abstraction; rather, it is part of a general encoding of cultural values in sensory-based categories.

Indeed, the chromatic symbolism found in fairy tales is not peculiar to this genre—nor, indeed, to Western cultures. In the aforementioned paper on color classification in Africa, Turner has made a few points worth considering. He notices that red is regularly paired with white in action contexts, whereas “black is seldom directly expressed.” Both white and red are “associated with activity”; by contrast, black represents “that which is hidden” and tends to appear as “the null member” in the triad. In clearer terms, both white and red stand for life—for they represent life-giving elements, such as milk and semen on the one hand, and blood and its attendant power on the other—whereas black symbolizes darkness and death. But whenever black is displayed openly, it refers to “ritual death” and the inherent notion of “regeneration.” Indeed, Turner clarifies that “‘to die’ often means . . . to reach the terminus of a cycle of growth”; death is like “a blackout, a period of powerlessness and passivity between two living states.” Therefore, black stands for “potentiality, as opposed to actuality” (71–74, 79, 80–81).

These points strikingly fit the foregoing discussion, which suggests that the basic chromatic trio presents constant semantic values across genres and cultures. But, of course, such constant values allow for culture-specific variations and elaborations. Thus, the same tricolor symbolism underlies African ritual on the one hand, and representations of ideal womanhood in European fairy tales and folklore on the other. One way to understand this parallelism (while shunning the easy way of falling back on the myth-ritual hypothesis) would be to admit that the life-eliciting power of womanhood, as expressed in European tricolor symbolism, is what men at all times and places have tried to appropriate by means of ritual action.

Whatever the value of this speculation, in this article I have presented a strictly inductive way of examining the workings of symbolism in fairy tales, and suggested how such procedure facilitates comparative research. However, the field is vast, and research has yet to begin systematically. Chromaticism in fairy tales is a promising field of research; even so, patterned use of colors constitutes but one of several intertextual dimensions waiting to be unraveled before a basic command of the semantics of fairy tales is at hand.

### Notes

1. Berlin and Kay (6) deem “basic” color terms that are monolexemic, designate values not included in any other color term, do not designate a narrow class of

- objects, and are psychologically salient for informants.
2. In fact, Luc de Heusch claims that chromatic systems in Bantu Africa show deep-set similarities to the tripartite Indo-European scheme.
  3. Granted, there is a triadic color clue elsewhere. Dumézil examines a feminine Indo-European personification of royalty endowed with trivalent traits and variously associated to white, red, and dark. Thus, Indian Mādhavī is associated to white (*Types* 327n3), her Irish counterpart Medb is linked to red (337), and Irish representations of a loathly bride turning into a shining maiden associate the loathly shape to blackness (335–36). Still, these piecemeal associations fail to meet the Dumézilian principle that any group of three functions must be given as an organic whole in order to be recognized as such.
  4. G. Ronald Murphy (123) suggests that the Grimms have changed the queen's drops of blood from "several" to "three" in order to allude to the German version of the episode in which Perceval beholds such drops. In the German text the three red drops on white are the very image of Parzival's beloved wife—of her beautiful body, cheeks, and chin, and colors (see von Eschenbach 208). But, of course, we can also look closer to home—that is, in the inner logic of modern fairy tales.

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