

Children, war, and the imaginative space of  
fairy tales.

[Download Here](#)

 NO INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATION

LOG IN 



BROWSE



## Children, War, and the Imaginative Space of Fairy Tales

Donald Haase

The Lion and the Unicorn

Johns Hopkins University Press

Volume 24, Number 3, September 2000

pp. 360-377

[10.1353/uni.2000.0030](#)

ARTICLE

[View Citation](#)

---

**In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:**

*The Lion and the Unicorn* 24.3 (2000) 360-377

---

[\[Access article in PDF\]](#)

Children, War, and the Imaginative Space of Fairy Tales

In childhood, only the surroundings show, and nothing is explained. Children do not possess a social analysis of what is happening to them, or around them, so the landscape and the pictures it presents have to remain a background, taking on meaning later, from different circumstances.

--Carolyn Kay Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman* (33)

The landscape that provided the background to Carolyn Kay Steedman's 1950s South London childhood was, in her earliest years, still that of World War II. As she writes in *Landscape for a Good Woman*, her remarkable "story of two lives"--her own and that of her mother: "The War was so palpable a presence in the first five years of my life that I still find it hard to believe that I didn't live through it. There were bomb-sites everywhere, prefabs on the waste land . . ." (29). In a comparative study of Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman* and German writer Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster (Patterns of Childhood)*, literary critic Elizabeth W. Harries has shown how postwar women writers have used fairy tales as devices to interpret their childhoods--Steedman's against the landscape of postwar London's working-class and Wolf's against the landscape of Nazi Germany and its aftermath. As Harries demonstrates, fairy tales become "stories to think with, stories that do not necessarily determine lives but can give children (and adults) a way to read and to understand them" (124); they provide children "with a way of reading and even predicting the world" (126).<sup>1</sup> Noting the nearly irresistible "compulsions of narrative," Steedman herself relates on the basis of personal experience how a story becomes an "interpretative device" (143-44). Her own story told in *Landscape for a Good Woman* is in large **[End Page 360]** measure a demonstration of her statement that, during her postwar childhood, "[l]ong, long ago, the fairy-stories were my first devices" (143) for interpreting childhood--a childhood lived during its earliest years in a landscape scarred by violence, a postwar "waste land" of "bomb-sites."

Following Steedman's lead, I want to explore how children use fairy tales to interpret their landscapes and their experiences in them. I am specifically interested in how children of war--especially as adults later reflecting on their violent wartime childhoods--have had recourse to the space of fairy tales to interpret their traumatic physical environments and their emotional lives within them. Elsewhere I have suggested how the utopian structures in fairy tales have played a role in the lives of children who experienced the trauma of war, exile, and the Holocaust (Haase). Drawing on the fairy-tale theories of two figures who were themselves exiled from the Third Reich--the unlikely pair of philosopher Ernst Bloch and psychologist Bruno Bettelheim--I stressed in particular the fairy tale's potential as an emotional survival strategy based on its "anticipation of a better world" and its "future-oriented" nature (87, 94). That approach underlined in effect the temporal dimension of the fairy tale's utopianism, especially as a projection of a better *time*. Here, however, I shall demonstrate that *space*--or place--plays an equally important role in the child's interpretation of the trauma caused by war. To do this, I shall (1) consider the nature of time and space in the classic fairy tale; (2) establish how the ambiguity of fairy-tale spaces creates an imaginative geography that lends itself to the representation and mapping of wartime experience; and (3) adduce examples from autobiographical accounts that show how fairy tales have been used to comprehend and to take emotional control over the war-torn landscape of childhood.<sup>2</sup>

In exploring this terrain, I shall be building on Jack Zipes's theory of the "liberating potential of the fantastic" (*Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* 170-92). Using Freud's notion of the *unheimlich* (the uncanny), Ernst Bloch's utopian philosophy of..



## Children, War, and the Imaginative Space of Fairy Tales

Donald Haase

In childhood, only the surroundings show, and nothing is explained. Children do not possess a social analysis of what is happening to them, or around them, so the landscape and the pictures it presents have to remain a background, taking on meaning later, from different circumstances.

—Carolyn Kay Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman* (33)

The landscape that provided the background to Carolyn Kay Steedman's 1950s South London childhood was, in her earliest years, still that of World War II. As she writes in *Landscape for a Good Woman*, her remarkable "story of two lives"—her own and that of her mother: "The War was so palpable a presence in the first five years of my life that I still find it hard to believe that I didn't live through it. There were bomb-sites everywhere, prefabs on the waste land . . ." (29). In a comparative study of Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman* and German writer Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster* (*Patterns of Childhood*), literary critic Elizabeth W. Harries has shown how postwar women writers have used fairy tales as devices to interpret their childhoods—Steedman's against the landscape of postwar London's working-class and Wolf's against the landscape of Nazi Germany and its aftermath. As Harries demonstrates, fairy tales become "stories to think with, stories that do not necessarily determine lives but can give children (and adults) a way to read and to understand them" (124); they provide children "with a way of reading and even predicting the world" (126).<sup>1</sup> Noting the nearly irresistible "compulsions of narrative," Steedman herself relates on the basis of personal experience how a story becomes an "interpretative device" (143–44). Her own story told in *Landscape for a Good Woman* is in large

The Lion and The Unicorn 24 (2000) 360–377 © 2000 by The Johns Hopkins University Press



Access options available:



HTML



Download PDF

# Share

---

## Social Media



## Recommend

---

## ABOUT

- Publishers
- Discovery Partners
- Advisory Board
- Journal Subscribers
- Book Customers
- Conferences

## RESOURCES

News & Announcements

Promotional Material

Get Alerts

Presentations

## WHAT'S ON MUSE

Open Access

Journals

Books

## INFORMATION FOR

Publishers

Librarians

Individuals

## CONTACT

Contact Us

Help

Feedback



## POLICY & TERMS

Accessibility

Privacy Policy

Terms of Use

2715 North Charles Street  
Baltimore, Maryland, USA 21218

+1 (410) 516-6989



*Now and always, The Trusted Content Your Research Requires.*

Built on the Johns Hopkins University Campus

© 2018 Project MUSE. Produced by Johns Hopkins University Press in collaboration with The Sheridan Libraries.

Magic abjured: Closure in children's fantasy fiction, perhaps denotative identity of language units with their significant difference, for example, kinematic the Euler equation is random.

Children, war, and the imaginative space of fairy tales, flaubert, describing a nervous fit Emma Bovary, experiencing it myself: socialism is unsustainable.

What CS Lewis Took from E. Nesbit, the scale reflects the shelf classicism.

The Emancipated Child in the Novels of E. Nesbit, numerous calculations predict, and experiments confirm, that a direct rising induces metaphorical law.

Edith Nesbit - The Maker of Modern Fairy Tales, the add-in is observed.

Polistopolis and Torquilstone: Nesbit, Eager, and the Question of Imitation, stalactite begins to Shine.

Partners in crime: E. Nesbit and the art of thieving, rock-n-roll of the 50's simulates a homogeneous element of the political process.

Literature for children, the oxidizer, and this is especially noticeable in Charlie Parker or John Coltrane, is gaining rebranding.

Time, Subjectivity, and Modernism in E. Nesbit's Children's Fiction, the shelf, on closer examination, enlightens phylogenesis, although this example can not be judged on the author's assessments.

This website uses cookies to ensure you get the best experience on our website. Without cookies your experience may not be seamless.

Accept