

# Early Life Crises and the Resolution of Conflict: Meaning in a Franco-Newfoundland Fairy Tale

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THE TERM "FAIRY TALE" has generally been eschewed by folklorists for the good reason that in such tales, as they are popularly understood, fairies are few and far between. Indeed, as most Newfoundlanders know only too well, fairies are, for many people, only too real; they are in the realm of non-fiction, whereas fairy tales are understood to be fictional.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, in contemporary society, and in most industrialized societies of the western world since early in the nineteenth century, fairy tales are associated with children. They are perceived to be quaint tales which are told or read to infants and, since the middle of the twentieth century, disneyized, first on the silver screen and latterly on television sets, usually directed at infants and young children. The title of this essay is intended to suggest that "fairy tales" have had a depth of meaning which takes them well out of the domain of juvenile entertainment.

Indeed, most *scholars* of folk narrative prefer, for the idea of the "fairy tale," the German term *Märchen*. Unfortunately, this word has the disadvantage of being German and thus not immediately meaningful to the average anglophone; and while the word *Märchen* does not have what scholars see as the negative connotations of "fairy tale," contemporary society is not in the least bit inconvenienced by such scholarly concerns. This is so because there are very few people in western society who know fairy tales other than through their book or film versions. Yet the true fairy tale, or *Märchen*, has only recently in historical terms become the purview of infants and small children. In Newfoundland, the fairy tale was, until as late as the 1940s, a form of narrative intended for adult and young adult audiences. It is in fact still possible to collect versions of these originally long, complex, orally narrated "fairy tales" in some parts of the province, though now in often fragmentary form

and certainly lacking the important functions they formerly enjoyed in rural society.<sup>2</sup>

These generalities made, we can turn to the specifics of storytelling, and in particular to storytelling amongst French Newfoundlanders. I was able to explore the richness and sophistication of that tradition in depth between 1970 and 1985. I concluded that storytelling had enjoyed its own particular aesthetic, illustrating what I felt were its main characteristics through an analysis of the repertoires and style of three representative narrators, amongst the several dozens of individuals from whom I collected folktales in that period, principally in the Port-au-Port Peninsula communities of Cape St. George (Cap-Saint-Georges), Mainland (La Grand'Terre) and Black Duck Brook (L'Anse-à-Canards). I suggested that there were two kinds of storyteller, the "public" narrator who was known for his storytelling abilities and whose presence at someone's home in order to tell stories was cause for much excitement, because of the exuberant nature of the expected performance; and the "private" or "family" narrator, who was not known as a storyteller but who could, and did, tell the same tales to different audiences in very private circumstances, and whose performances were not marked by the same verve as the public storyteller, nor indeed by the rigour and artistry of the latter. Here, women as well as men introduced future audiences to the local repertoire, and gave hints as to the nature of the public performances.

This early study focussed then on narrative style and content, to a lesser extent on function, while stressing the key factor of context. What the study did not attempt to do was explore the meaning, or meanings of such tales. This essay will concentrate on the plausible meaning of fairy tales (or Märchen) as they were told in Franco-Newfoundland communities, where "plausible" implies that the interpretation of such tales is based on a thorough knowledge of, and familiarity with, Franco-Newfoundland society, as it is today but, more pertinently, as it was when the telling of Märchen still flourished as an *adult* activity.

Although one of the early aims of folk narrative scholars had been the discovery of the meaning of various kinds of folk narrative, most efforts were speculative, or based on theories which did not take much account, if any, of the human and social context of storytelling. In recent years, even distinguished narrative scholars who have turned their attention to the question of meaning have tended to seek universals rather than specifics.<sup>3</sup>

The outstanding exception to this pattern is the Danish scholar, the late Bengt Holbek, whose 1987 *Interpretation of Fairy Tales*<sup>4</sup> proposes a theory of meaning rooted in a thorough knowledge of Danish society in the period in which the Danish tales he analysed were collected. With some modest modification of details, I have adapted Holbek's theory to the local context; and while the interpretations I propose are mine alone, I am indebted to Holbek for his theoretical and interpretive perspective.

First of all, the tale chosen for interpretation is a full version of the international tale-type AT 313, *The Girl As Helper in the Hero's Flight*.<sup>5</sup> It was one of three versions narrated by "Uncle" Frank Woods (né Francis Dubois, 1893-1987) between 1974 and 1977, while he was staying with friends at Mainland. He claimed to have first heard it in 1920, or thereabouts, while living in the Bay of Islands. The title is his own. I have attempted to write his story down in as close an approximation of his words as possible.<sup>6</sup>

### THE SEVEN GOLD MOUNTAINS

Well one time there was a king. E ad one son — an when e growd up to be a man, e's — turned out to be a gambler. An e used to go around playin cards an e played n played n played but never no one could beat en. So dis time e left his home an e told is mother e was goin for a walk. An e went to — a place an there was a — e went in an ave — something have — a cup of coffee. An there was a man come in — an e said to im e — e said this prince e says euh, prince said to im e said "Can you play cards?" — "Oh yes" e says, "I can play cards." — "Well" e said, "let's ave a game." So they ad — quite a lot o money so they played an well — the prince's — lost every cent e ad. So now e said "I gotta give up." — "Oh no" e said — this feller said — "Let's play for — your father an mother's crown" e said. So they played that — princes lost that. "Well" e said "I can't" e said "play anymore." — "Yes, come on" e said, "let's play for your body an soul." So they played for is body n soul e, dis — ole feller won this. "Now" e said "I've got everything you've got" e said "I got your father an mother's crown, all your money an your body an soul. Now" e said "you gotta come to the Seven Gold Mountains — to find me, to get that back." So the prince e left, e went ome, e never told is mother e was goin but e packed off. E walked n walked n walked n wherever e see a big mountain e used to look up — see if I'm going. By n by e come, was goin, to under a big cliff an e seen kind of a — a door right, a door cut into — the wall — it's a big — stone. So e knocked now [*knocks twice on the table*] an there's an ole woman come out. She was an ole witch. "My son" she said, she says "It's a hundred years — I'm livin ere" she said "an you're the first man ever I seen." She says "Come in." So e went in now, e said "What can I do for you?" — "Well" e said "I could, can you tell me anything" e, e said, "about the Seven Gold Mountains?" She said "No — I can't — but" she says "I got a sister a hundred years older than I am — she lives — ten miles from this" she said — "now she might be able to tell you somethin." Well, s'not very, well she said "When you gets up, n you'll stay all night, when you gets up in the marnin I'll give you a boot — to put on. One boot — put it on one foot — an when you gets that step" she says "you'll be right to er door, ten miles." So anyow e went there. Put on the boot nex marning — off e goes. So e come to the door an e knock [*knocks twice on the table*] on the door, this ole witch come out. "My God" she said, "my son — where's you goin" she said, "it's two hundred years I'm livin ere an you're the first man ever I seen." — "Well I brought

you a letter from your sister” e said. So e —gave er the letter she — read it. “Well” she said “no. I can’t tell you anything,” she looked all in the books she ad, “I can’t tell you nothin” she said — “about the Seven Gold Mountains.” So — she said “But I’ll give you — a boot again in the mar —marning” she said “an you’ll — put the boot on” she said, “when you gets one step” she said “you’ll be out to my last sister’s” — she said. “She might be able to tell you something.” So e put the boot on nex marnin, in one step e was to er door, he knock [*knocks twice on table*], an she come, “Where you goin?” she said, “The firs man ever these three hundred years I’m livin ere.” — “Well” e said “I’ve come see could you give me — any advice about the Seven Gold Mountains.” Well e knowed cos e’d read the letter — from is sister — sisters. Well she, e said “My son no, for all the world no” she said, “old on” she said — she was boss over all — birds an everything used to fly y’see. So she went out in the marnin she called all the birds come, come, they all come sit — but the eagle didn come — big eagle. After a spell — the eagle come. She said “Where was you to?” — “Well” e said — “I was to a place this marnin, first time — since I’m flyin.” She said “Where’s that to?” E said “The Seven Gold Mountains. I was eatin when you called me to the, to this feller’s castle —to the door.” Well she, “Think you can fly that man there?” E said “I donno” e said, e said “If you give me enough to eat” e said. So anyow she give im some, cut meat, chunk o meat off, brought im is, on eagle’s back she said “Get on is back that’s where you’re flyin to.” When e fly she, e pitched er, pitched this feller so far from the castle — there was a big pond there. That’s where e pitched en to. An this woman, old witch told the man, she said “You pitch to that pond” she said “an there’s tree girls gonna come there.” An she said “They’re gonna — be three birds they’re gonna pitch then they’re gonna turn themself in three ladies — girls. That’s is tree daughters.” But she said “You watch out where the last one puts er clothes. That’s the youngest one — she got just so much power as er father.” So anyow — pitches to the pond by n by e seen em comin, come by n by, they pitched. Dey stepped off — an dey put deir clothes on one side de tree of em, when e seen the last one put er clothes, e got out long side e got the clothes, an e ide in the woods —long side of them. So when they come out, “Hello, my clothes is gone” — but she’s as — she was a witch enough she **knowed** where the clothes is to. So anyow she says “You fly around” she says, “an I’m gonna, an I’ll find, I’ll find my clothes there.” So she went, they fled around. She went in. “I know” she said “you got my clothes. Give me my clothes.” — “No” e said. “You gotta tell me something about the Seven Gold Mountains bout your father first.” Well she said “Yes, I’ll tell you” she, she said. She said “You’re gonna — the, the night” she says “this evening when you come to the castle” she said “n my father” she said “e’s a rough man. An e’s gonna give you — e’s call for you” she said “an e’s gonna give you something to eat — an e’s gonna tell you the bedtime.” An she said “You watch en — e’s gonna go upstairs an show you your bedroom but be sure” she said “to step on the same — step as e steps — you steps on one you’re gone, clear. An she’s gonna give you all

kinds of books to read" she said. "But you take one that's all shabbie all tore up you take that one" she said. An she said "After, at nine o'clock sharp the bed is gonna go up in smoke — but you be out the bed. But if you takes the **good** book you'll fall asleep — an you're gone." Aright. "Then" she said "I'll tell you more." Okay. E went to bed. An e said the ole ki — the ole feller offer im the books he said "No" — e said "that's one," e said "gimme this one" e said. So e give im the book an — e start to read. An e looked — five minutes to nine e got out of the bed. Nine o'clock sharp — pook! The bed went in smoke. Then it came right back again. E got in the bed then. An when she come — she said "You done what I told you." He said "Yes." Well she said "The, the morning," she said, "you see that pond" she said — "I pitched you — where I pitched to" e said. "You gotta dry out that pond tomorrow." She says "It's gonna be your job. If not" she said "you'll — your head'll go on that hook." He says "Aright." Then she says "He's gonna offer you all kinds" she said, "whatever you does only eat what, what e eats." So the nex morning, de feller's breakfast with en. E said "Come on now" e said "get your job." An she said "Whatever you does, don't you take a bucket — or anything — be sure" she said "take a basket" — she said — "if not" she said "you're gone." So anyow — e eat, ave is breakfast an e heat what the ole feller eat an — so anyow goes — "Now" — but e sent en to the pond — "Now" e said "you got to ave that pond dry" e said — "for six o'clock this evening." E wouldn take nothing ony take a basket. So when e got — to the pond e took the basket out — like that — by n by e aul the basket in. "Well" e said "I'm finished" — so he hove his basket one side of im — by n by — so e — anyow e says e'll get back, e wouldn, e wouldn — cut it. So is ole boss said now, er father, e said "Oo's gonna take im is dinner today, is last dinner?" The youngest one said "I'm not." He says "You are the first one to say, i's you gotta go." An so e did. So anyow — took is dinner to im. "Now" she said "now, you got nothing done?" — "No-o-o" e said "I'm not gonna survive." — "Ave something to eat" — "No" e said "I don want nothin to eat" e says "I'm gonna die" e says, "I don wanna eat." Well she said "Sit down an eat." So e sat down, so she jumped out o the pond, "By the will o my power" she didn want — "dis pond be dry." Looked — not a sup of water. Very good. "Now" she said — "the night" she said — "when e, when you comes eh, e's gonna ask you if you do your job, you say 'yes' an if e says, an you be **saucy** to im." So anyow when that evening come well, "Ow d'you get on?" E said "I done the job." E said "You couldn do it." E said "You think, if you thinks I'm a liar go an look yourself." Went — the job was done, yes. Aright. Same thing that night. Alf pass **nine** now that night e ad — to bed. So anyow — e ad is supper — the ole man — walks upstairs. An e used to walk the same steps as the ole man [*uttered in a low, conspiratorial voice*]. So the ole man said to en now "Aaah, some nice books, ave something to read to yourself." — "No" e said, "take this one ere." So e took the book like she told. So — twenty-five — af — after nine — e got up — out the bed. Bed at alf pass nine — up in smoke. Gets back in, by n by the girl comes out again. "Well" she said "you done that," E said "Yes." —

“Well” she said — “when I, when I was flyin along that forest of wood” she said, “I, I, flying along” she said “that’s gonna be your job tomorrow morning. You’ve got to level that level, not a seen to be seen.” — “Well” she said, e said, “ow in the name o God” but she said “Don’t you take — there’s an old axe” she said — “be shore an take that old axe” she said. “If you takes one you likes” she said “I can’t do nothing for you.” Okay. So the next morning, ad is breakfast an e give en is job. “Now” e said “you’ve gotta pack that — all that wood — there — cut all of it — down” e said. “Come on now” e said, “all kinds of axes,” — “No” e said “I won’t take, I don’t want any good axe.” He said “I’m afraid — since I never cut wood I’m liable to cut myself.” E said “I’ll take this ole one.” Anyow, the same thing appened. When it come dinner time again — she said “I’m not takin en is dinner today — I went yesterday.” Er father said “You’re the one is gonna go again.” So when she got there — e never ad, couldn mark a stick with the axe e ad. So anyow she said — “Ave something to eat.” — “No.” — “Go ahead” she says “an eat.” So e sat an ad is lunch, she ad — she took the axe, the same like she swung is axe a couple a times — down it comes level — level. “Now” she said, “you got one more.” So anyow when e come ome — e said to im “It’s all done” e said, “I got it done.” But now e found that pretty darn queer. E thought to isself e’d beat en — so, “There’s something een to this” — so the nex mornin — e said “There’s a — tower” e said — y’know — “e’s so many hundred feet high” he said “there’s a goose’s egg — on top that tower an you got to bring me that egg this evening. If not, then you’re finished.” So anyow when the time come “Oo’s gonna take en is dinner today?” e said. The youngest one said “Not me.” — “No, not you, you’re not takin no dinner to en.” E said “The o, the next one.” Well she ad no power see? So anyow when she said that she took a little washboard, she ad a piece of clothes, there was a brook they ad there, she start — a washin. She broked it — she broke the washboard — with a little stone — an she hauled across, cut er finger. So her sister comes over near the brook she says “I’ve a cut in my finger” she said. “Will you finish this for me” she says “an wait me, I’m jus goin” she said “with is, I’m takin is dinner.” She said “Yes.” “Now” she says “we ony got a few minutes — we got left.” Now e ad the tower so jumpin Moses — probably a thousand feet around e couldn put is arms in it. “Now” she said, e looked, n there was a boiler goin full, full speed. Boilin water. “Now” she said “cut me up an eave in that.” — “Oh I can’t do — ” — “Go on” she said, “quick” — now she said “an leave it bile just for a second, pick it out, an everyone o the bones in my body” she said “’ll be the step of a ladder — an every —take them bones” she said, “you stick en.” So anyow. Okay. She went in — few minutes afterwards she was all, took all the bones e saw — an the last, when e reached the goose egg, the bone of er little toe — the last one e reached. An e got the hegg he start back but e forgot that — forgot the bone of er little toe. So anyow they come ome — brought the egg to im, “Well” e says, “well” e said, “you’re gonna marry my daughter.” Marry — get married. They got married. “Now” she said, “you’re married. I’m your wife — ” — but she — “e’ll

ave you tonight” she said. “You can do what you like, e’s gonna ave you tonight.” She said “E’s smart.” “Now” e said “the first thing” e said “you got to pick out first — now you got to pick out your wife by — the feeling of their ands.” He was blindfolden, see? “No” — e said “not that — my feet.” So e put out is feet an e told the ole woman, no, an the other girls, e said “Now” e said “you got to pick out tween — there’s three of us there an you’ve got to pick out — the one is your wife.” So e started — an when e come to er little toe —no bone see? “This one” e said. Yes, that’s right. So anyow e married er. That evening she took — she went to bed an she ad baked three pies that day — an every pie — wo, would speak one word, see? Okay. They went to bed im an is wife — an the ole, she was the real, ole witch of all, the old devil of all she was. So anyow they went to bed — bout nine o’clock. Shh there! They eard a noise. She said “Ole man, you know one thing” she said, “What?” — “That feller’s gone — gone with our daughter.” Now euh, mm, went too — ahead. They ad, there was a horse in the barn but she told im the last was, not to never take — y’know the nice, take the ole one just about falling down. She said “We might be safe.” So — s anyow when e got to bed she put the three pies still she’d keep on the bed im an is wife an e took the ole horse — an a bunch a hay, a comb — ... a bunch a hay, a comb —mm, was — dere was ... an a **saddle**. So anyow, they started now. The three pies still in the bedroom see. “Ole man” she said “that feller’s gone with our daughter.” — “Well” e said “not at all.” So e said “My daughter is you asleep yet?” The pie spoke. “No father, not yet.” — “E is too” e said. E said “I told you!” e said — “she was, they was ome.” By n by she start to tell the ole, “Oh” she said, “I’m right nervous, right nervous,” got to be crazy, she said “They’re **gone**.” The ole man, tell im to ask once more. He said “My daughter — is you asleep yet?” Pies — “No. Not asleep yet father.” But now — dey was goin **on** all that time. Anyow — they stopped — for a spell, to give em... On the last the ole woman said “I’m gonna get up an see myself.” — “Well I’m gonna sing out once more” e said. “My daughter is youse ...” She said “No.” So the ole woman start to get up. Well the ole man started to go an sleep, gone, gone into the bed. Ole woman started — so e, they never gets up. “Ho, hold on” she said, “they’ve escaped.” So e jumped in my God — e got after them. An they kept right, by n by she looked an — she looked she said — to er usband — “E, e’s comin. You see that smoke?” she said, “That’s im.” So when e got pretty near, right close to em, she ho, hove the brush. She said “I wish it — that I was a church — an my usband — at prayers into en.” A big — e run right into the big church. Got down. Went in. The priest was on the altar y’know, and the priest is — e said “You seen any sign of a man an a woman pass ere?” An the priest e stands sayin Latin like the mass see, answer in Latin. Im e got vex. E went back ome. Tole the ole woman e said “I — went there — was to a feller that they ad — talkin, I couldn understand what e was saying.” — “Well” she said “anyow, dat, well when you see that church?” she said — “That was your daughter” she says — and the feller was — preaching that was your son-in-law. “My God e ad — e turned back. “Now” e said “this time” e

said — “I’m gonna nail it.” E took that to er again. An when e got right close so she hove de bunch o hay. She said “I was, I wish — I was a forest of wood so my man, my husband cuttin wood in it.” Come dere, e, e said it — stopped — e said “Seen any sign of a woman an a man pass this way?” — “No” e said. “Never did see no one.” Well, e — s — give it up. E went — went back ome. When e got back home — his wife, is wife said “Now ole man, you see any sign?” — “No” e said, “But” she said “you was **talking** to im!” She said “That, that feller was cuttin that was your son-in-law an the — woods was your daughter.” Well e got right crazy. “But” e said “I’ll ave im this time.” So anyow e jumped on is horse, back again. An er she drove along, drove around, when e got about — oh, no distance at all, probably fifty or sixty feet she ove the saddle, “I wish I was a duck, a pond, I wish I was a pond an my usband a duck” she said. E run right, went through the water, e couldn stop. He was give up, given up — went back ome. Now that was **all** — the three pies y’know, it was all over then. She ad the three pee — pies was gone, it was all over. E went back ome — “I know where **I’m** goin.” An by the night e told “Drive whatever they could cos see if we can get to the Oly Land — e can’t touch us.” So — they go on, “She’s gettin right close, i’s mother — it’s my mother — gettin close.” An when she grabbed at the horse, the horse jumped on the Oly Land. Couldn do no more. She turned back. An the ole man said ... “Now” she said, “we’re clear. But” she said, “don’t you never leave — anyone co — kiss you — when you’s home. Cos if you do” she says “you’ll forget **all about me**. You won’t know ever you, I seen you, ever you went to the Seven Gold Mountains or not anything.” Okay. So e went ome — his mother an father used to come to kiss en. “No no!” E wouldn allow no one to kiss en. But is granmother used to live quite a **long** way, she was a real old woman, they went after er. Cos she was comin he was so glad. An e was asleep. An she — is granmother went in the bedroom to, to im, kissed en. An e forgot **everything**. He woke up an asked em where e was to, e didn’t know nothing, e didn know **nothing**. But is **wife** knowed about all that. So anyow she, she, e used to walk about, walk, go about an talk but never nothing in is mind — never e was married or never e seen the girl. So this evening im an — two fellers started walking — walked — up the street a ways and they went — there was that room, co — was ees own — cottage they ad bought. So they went in. So by n by, she was a handsome looking girl. So this one o the fellers said — was three of em — e said euh, “I’d like, I’d like to spend the night with this one ere” e said. She said “What did you say?” Mmm e said what I told. “Well” she said “it’s your own fault if you don’t.” So — s — now er usband, the same thing, well e stopped. Anyow she’s — went to — just when they went to go to bed “Oh look” she said “I got a hen n a rooster” she said “talks up there” she said—an she said “I’m, I spose I left the door open, will you go” she said “an shut the door for me?” E said “Yes.” [*Five or six words mumbled, unclear*] An she says “An when he got it” she said “I hope that door will keep you goin all night.” E shut the door an the door used to go open — by n by — e do — dere, he saw, “Oh no” she said “we gets up at daylight, we



don't go to bed." Aright. Well, next feller t'was — the — another feller's turn. But she give en a job to do was not quite so ard but e worked e worked an worked an worked an worked, no. E use to put his shovel, pull up, an, andle'd — fall on the ground with the gum. Stayed all night. So anyow — bedtime. Bare e comes y'know. "No no, we gets up at daylight." That's er usband. E was the **last** one see. So anyow she got there — an — they got talkin about one thing an [*three or four words mumbled, unclear*] "well" e said, she said, "Can you tell me" — You know what she said to im? "I've got a hen n a rooster's —talks." — "No." Well e said — "There's a big party" e said "to my father's" e said, "will you come down" e said "an —in — to the party?" — "Well" she says "I can't go unless I takes my hen n rooster." She said "They'll talk for me if anyone appen to ave a speech." So she took er hen n rooster, when it comes to everyone's turn, when it comes to, when it comes to er turn, she says "Now come, put the hen n rooster there." Well the rooster said "Ow's you — ow's you gettin on lately?" — "Well" the hen said — to en — the other feller see — "not too bad." An then the hen they, they'd chat over an she asked im about all of is troubles — an everything — she said "Ow'd you come, ow'd you come to get ere?" — "Well" e said — "I was en — chant to the devil" e said — "at the Seven Gold Mountains" — an she said "An who got you free an done everything for you?" She said to the **rooster** see. E said "**You** did" an when, she said that, everything come back in is mind — an e was married that night — to another girl — an everything come back in what she'd done. So e — e called this to the king's fa — father — the one e was ma, married to is daughter, "Now" e said, "I'm gonna ask you something, if you was coming up you ad a lock on your door the night" e said "an you was comin up" e said "an you lost the key — a golden key — " — e said "Yes." — E said "An you couldn find the one, you got one made" e said, "which is the fittest one, first one you ad —that one or this one?" — "Sure my golden one." — "Well it's the same as my first wife" e said. So she explained everything the hen n rooster told the whole story what they went through understand? An they married an they're livin —livin if they're not dead.<sup>7</sup>

Before taking up the question of meaning in this tale, it should be noted that "Uncle" Frank Woods was 82 when he narrated it. From my earlier discussions with him, it was safe to surmise that he had probably always been of the private or family tradition of storytellers, rather than of the public tradition; at any event, analysis of his performance style over the years I knew him, and careful scrutiny of his texts suggests this. In *The Seven Black Mountains*, there are numerous lapses in detail, where the storyteller makes little jumps ahead of his story, even though he may later compensate. The most striking example is in the tale's concluding sections, where the hero, having lost all memory of his adventures, attempts with two friends to seduce his forgotten wife. The narrator does not tell us until the end of the tale that the hero was about to be married to another woman, and the visit to the real wife was in order to invite her to this second wedding. In other versions of

the tale told by Uncle Frank, this point comes out clearly. As knowledge of this situation has a key bearing on the tale's interpretation, it underlines the importance of collecting more than one version of a given tale from a given storyteller. As a tradition erodes, retellings allow the narrator to recall the story in greater and greater detail. Where such points of interpretation require reference to other versions of the tale, such reference will be made.

The theoretical framework in which my interpretation is placed is that developed by Bengt Holbek. For the sake of brevity, I outline only the central features of his theory, those which are crucial to our understanding of the tale's meaning. In general terms, Holbek stresses that fairy tales embodied a reflection of peasant realities and ideals, often of a kind too sensitive to be discussed in open conversation, but which could be neatly and artistically expressed in an accepted and conventional medium. He defines "fairy tales" as "... tales which end with a wedding or with the triumph of a couple married earlier under ignominious circumstances, after a series of events characterized by the occurrence of tale elements ... defined as *symbolic*."<sup>8</sup>

By *symbolic*, Holbek means the so-called "marvellous" elements of tales, the magical motifs often used as defining features of fairy tales, an abundance of which appear in *The Seven Gold Mountains*. His thesis is based on the premise that "symbolic elements refer to features of the real world as experienced by the storytellers and their audiences."<sup>9</sup> Indeed, he characterizes his whole thesis as an attempt to answer the question: "... how does one get from "there" (the real life in the storytelling community) to "here" (the recorded tales)?"<sup>10</sup> He explains thus: "The symbolic elements of fairy tales convey emotional impressions of beings, phenomena and events in the real world, organized in the form of fictional narrative sequences which allow the narrator to speak of the problems, hopes and ideals of the community."<sup>11</sup>

Holbek determines that the means by which emotional impressions are metamorphosed into symbolic expressions is a process governed by a number of rules, seven in all.<sup>12</sup> They include the *Split*, in which conflicting aspects of a character are distributed upon different figures in the tale; *Particularization*, in which aspects of persons, phenomena and events appear as independent symbolic elements; *Projection*, in which feelings and reactions in the protagonist's mind are presented as phenomena occurring in the surrounding world; *Externalization*, in which inner qualities are expressed by attributes or through action; *Hyperbole*, in which intensity of feeling is expressed by exaggeration of the phenomena eliciting the feeling; *Quantification*, in which quality is often expressed as quantity; and *Contraction*, in which developments extended in space or time are contracted so as to appear as instantaneous changes, often by three stages.<sup>13</sup> These rules are abundantly illustrated in the tale text above.

Moving closer to the real world, also of central importance to Holbek's argument is the pattern of semantic oppositions which characterize fairy tales.<sup>14</sup>

Holbek finds three primary oppositions in fairy tales: firstly, the conflict between the generations; secondly, the meeting of the sexes, and thirdly, the social opposition between the “haves” and the “have-nots.” These oppositions can be represented, depending on their various combinations in different fairy tales, in varying three-dimensional paradigmatic models, corresponding to what Holbek calls masculine or feminine tale structures. He presents the oppositions as *High-Low*, *Male-Female*, and *Young-Adult*. The models depict semantically defined tale roles and are not therefore based on functions, as are those of Propp.<sup>15</sup>

Holbek identifies eight tale roles encompassed in his three primary oppositions. They include *LYM* (Low Young Male), *LYF* (Low Young Female), *LAM* (Low Adult Male), *LAJ* (Low Adult Female), *HAM* (High Adult Male), *HAF* (High Adult Female), *HYF* (High Young Female) and *HYM* (High Young Male). The distinction made by Holbek between *masculine* and *feminine* tales (which he feels is reflected in the repertoire of male and female storytellers) is based on the status of the two main characters in a tale: *LYM* and *HYF* in a masculine tale, *LYF* and *HYM* in a feminine tale. My own interpretation of the tale will focus chiefly on the *LYM* and *HYF* tale roles, though not without some contextually generated modifications of terminology. The important point to remember is that all characters in a fairy tale occupy one of these slots, with the *LYF* or the *LYM* attempting to change their status to *HYF* or *HYM* or, more specifically in the present tale, to *HAF* and *HAM* (and other tale roles either helping them achieve, or attempting to hinder or prevent the attainment of their goal). If one can then as it were translate these tale roles into real world individuals and situations, the relevance of this terminology becomes clear.

As was noted earlier, the three thematic oppositions characteristic of fairy tales — conflict between the generations, the meeting of the sexes, and the social opposition between the “haves” and the “have-nots” — represent and define, according to Holbek, three categories of crises which may occur in such tales. These crises he describes as follows: 1. “Those of the young in their parental home: incestuous attraction; the rebellion of the young against the tyranny and abuse of their parents; the desire of the young to obtain independence; or, conversely, their being sent away from home prematurely;” 2. “Those associated with the meeting of the sexes: learning to appreciate and love a person of the opposite sex; winning the other person’s love; his/her liberation from attachment to the parent of the opposite sex;” and 3. “Those associated with establishing a secure basis for the married life of the new couple, which implies the recognition of the low-born partner by the high-born partner’s family and the older generation’s acceptance of the necessity of relinquishing its hold on the “kingdom” to the younger generation.”<sup>16</sup> It should be stressed that not all three types of crisis necessarily occur in a given tale, and if they do, one may be the major focus of the tale, the other two having minor parts to play. As an example, one may point to the widely known *Cinderella* story, in which the principal conflict is between daughter and mother, each character occupying at least two tale roles: Cinderella representing the “good”

aspect of the daughter, her ugly sister or sisters representing the “bad” aspect of the daughter; similarly, the step-mother and (fairy) god-mother represent respectively the bad and good aspects of the mother figure.<sup>17</sup>

Holbek sets these three crises in the narrative context, in his case, the world of the nineteenth century Danish peasant: “All of these crises” he notes, “are real or possible events in the storytelling community. At the same time, all of them are sensitive, even painful, subjects, which cannot easily be brought into the open. The potential conflicts with actual relatives and in-laws are only too obvious. The tales solve the problem of dealing with these matters by treating them as if they were events in a purely fictitious world and by disguising all the participants, whereas the nature of the conflicts is hardly disguised at all.”<sup>18</sup> He continues: “It should be noted that the sequential order of these crises corresponds to what Danish storytellers knew from their own culture: a young man could not court a girl until he was well on his way to independence and he could not marry until he had won her acceptance and her parents’ consent. This order is clearly reflected in the fairy tale pattern described above.”<sup>19</sup> It is worthwhile recalling here that Holbek proposes that fairy tales incarnate the hopes and the ideals of the storytelling community; they constitute idealized models for the storytelling audience, and like all such models, reflect how things ought to be, rather than how they necessarily are in the real world.

Thus far I have stressed Holbek’s own emphasis on the rules he uncovers in fairy tales, on the merits of structural analysis, and on the reflection in fairy tales of significant social realities, i.e. the issue of context. There is one further perspective that requires mention. In his discussion of the rules governing the metamorphosis of emotional impressions into symbolic expressions, Holbek notes the similarity of some of these with the “mechanisms” for the formation of myths and dreams described by Freud and Rank.<sup>20</sup> His adaptation of Kōngās Maranda’s semantic oppositions stresses relationships between individuals, and these relationships are specified in his description of the crises discernible in fairy tales. There is specific reference to incestuous attraction, and liberation from attachment to the parent of the opposite sex.

Holbek is applying Freudian principles to his interpretation of fairy tales, in addition to his other analytic tools. This is an approach eschewed by many folklorists (few of whom have been adequately trained in psychology and psychoanalysis); I myself have harboured serious doubts about the validity of much Freudian-inspired interpretation of folkloristic phenomena, Alan Dundes’ perceptive and persuasive arguments notwithstanding,<sup>21</sup> chiefly because so much interpretation has been made without adequate discussion of context. Holbek is however restrained in his application of Freudian psychoanalytic theory, and relates it carefully to context, as far as that is possible. In this regard I follow his lead, on the premise that, in context, the symbolic interpretations seem plausible.

A final word on context is necessary. Many changes, both great and small, have taken place in Newfoundland in the second half of the twentieth century, all of which have had their effect on the lives and culture of French Newfoundlanders. Uncle Frank Woods lived the most productive part of his life before the majority of these changes began to alter in any significant fashion the older, traditional lifestyle in which change had been slow and relatively unobtrusive. The interpretation I offer then, relates more specifically to the first half of the twentieth century, a good deal less to the second half. The interpretation is based in part on what Uncle Frank told me about that period of his life, and in part on what I have learned from many of his peers about the life and times of French Newfoundlanders in that period. The telling of Märchen, or fairy tales, is much less common now than it was before the coming of television in the 1960s, having been in decline as early as the 1940s. Old forms of social entertainment have given way to new ones, or have at the very least been much modified; so it is for older values, customs, behaviours, and the ways in which they were transmitted to younger generations.

Uncle Frank's narration of *The Girl As Helper in the Hero's Flight* is as full a version of the tale as one can hope to find; the version given above is the third of three he told, each fuller than the one preceding. His versions complement the dozen or so collected from other French Newfoundlanders; the tale was without question the best loved and most widely told of fairy tales in the days when such tales were told with any frequency.<sup>22</sup>

## THE INTERPRETATION

In the light of general contextual data, it will first appear that the tale role definitions proposed by Holbek do not mesh readily with the characters in Uncle Frank Woods' version. To begin with the hero and heroine: while the latter may be characterized as a *HYF*, the former does not slip so readily into the *LYM* slot. We are told, after his confrontation with the *HAM*, that he loses not only his wealth, but also his parents' crowns. This suggests that in terms of *status*, the hero is at least on a par with the heroine, who is of course the devil's daughter. Given the absence historically of any kind of class or wealth distinction amongst French Newfoundlanders, *status* may therefore be inappropriate as a means of differentiation.

What does distinguish the hero both from the heroine and her father is his lack of *power*. He is unable to overcome an *HAM* when they are in conflict (he loses at cards); the heroine demonstrates immediately upon her appearance in the tale that she *does* have power; she knows what to tell the hero to allow him to successfully pass the first and subsequent nights at the devil's castle (he must eat what the devil eats, walk on the same steps of the stairs, choose an old book to read rather than a new one, be out of bed by 9 o'clock lest he "go up in smoke"); and it is by her power that the three tasks are completed. The hero is in fact unable to do *anything* without

the heroine's advice or help. He is better characterized as an *UYM* (Unempowered Young Male), the heroine as an *EYF* (Empowered Young Female), and the devil as an *EAM* (Empowered Adult Male).

The unfolding of the tale now traces the move from a state of being unempowered, to a state of being empowered. On the other hand, it can be argued that the process of becoming empowered is expressed in the tale by the gradual *maturation* of the hero, or that the process of empowerment and maturation go hand in hand. In tracing this process, we can draw upon another conceptual perspective which was denied Holbek, and that is the question of the narrator's *performance*. Holbek was not able to observe the actual telling of the tales which formed the basis of his analysis.<sup>23</sup>

I have characterized the narrative tradition of French Newfoundlanders as having a public dimension, in which narrators gave dramatic, exuberant performances, and a private or family dimension, in which narrators were much more restrained in their performance.<sup>24</sup> Now Uncle Frank was, as I have already intimated, a narrator of the private or family tradition; amongst other points, this means that he did not use mimicry or gesture to underline his representation of characters portrayed in his tales; rather, he relied almost entirely on the description of behaviour to make the same kind of emphasis. His style stands in sharp contrast to that of Emile Benoit, who was in the tradition of the public narrator. I draw upon my familiarity with both styles (which were contemporaneous) to underline the performative dimension of interpretation.

To return to the question of the hero's maturation. When we first encounter him, he is portrayed usually as an immature, strutting, self-confident braggart. He is a successful young man whose success has come, however, not from honest toil but from gambling, which in the context of Uncle Frank's life, was not a socially sanctioned way of earning an honest living. The hero is presented much as we might visualize a self-centred teenager today. In Uncle Frank's day, it is well to remember that boys began fishing with their fathers at around the age of nine, and girls were usually immersed in household chores as early as six or seven; I have vivid descriptions from now old women of having to kneel on a stool in order to reach the counter on which they would be kneading the dough necessary for the day's bread. This is to say that by the time boys and girls reached puberty, they were already doing a man's or a woman's work, even though they might not be emotionally mature; but it was at that age that young people began attending the public *veillées* or storytelling evenings.

The hero's encounter with a mature male in the game of cards is disastrous for him: he is reduced to his true state of an immature male.<sup>25</sup> The best he can do is set off in search of his goal, in some versions with only a loaf of bread provided by his mother. The first step in his maturation is taken when he encounters the three old sisters, whom Uncle Frank refers to twice as a "witch." Now in some versions, the hero's meeting with the old sisters is marked by his outward sign of fear at their

ugliness. He overcomes his trepidation, is courteous and polite, and is rewarded for his pains with food, drink, shelter and help. Uncle Frank does not go to any great lengths to develop the potential of these encounters; he is perhaps more concerned with the central element of the tale, the meeting with the devil's daughter. Other versions suggest that there is greater significance to the encounter with the three old sisters than Uncle Frank suggests, and that in fact, the encounter represents a first stage in the hero's maturation.

It should be recalled here that following Holbek's thesis, the gifts made to the hero must be understood as external representations of his internal potential; secondly, that the gifts are made by females; and thirdly, that food figures prominently in the transaction. Indeed, food plays a role in a number of crucial moments in the hero's maturation. In Uncle Frank's version, the transaction is much abridged, and it is only with reference to later events and other versions that one can, in hindsight, appreciate the significance of the three old sisters.

The nature of the gifts is significant. In this version, seven-league boots are provided, one at a time; an example of externalization, they represent the hero's potential to move forward. The talking eagle who transports the hero to his destination is best understood with reference to other versions in which to ensure the old eagle's successful flight, the hero has to cut strips of his flesh off his leg to feed the bird; such auto-mutilation indicates the necessity of a sense of self-sacrifice (even though the hero has been provided by the oldest sister with a magical elixir which heals the cuts at once). In some versions, the seven-league boots constitute a single gift, the first gift being a "magical" bag which provides food and drink as the hero's need requires; this again symbolizes his potential for self-provision. It is quite possible that Uncle Frank had at one time included all these motifs in his versions of the tale, but when I interviewed him his memory was no longer what it had been.

Briefly, the hero's maturation is evidenced by his overcoming his fear of the old women. The three old sisters, apart from being a triple representation of the same tale role, can be seen as the "good" aspect of the *EAF* (the "bad" aspect being the devil's wife). But more pertinently, in the Franco-Newfoundland context, the *EAF* was an important aspect of the role of the female in general. Old women were generally thought of, by adults, as wise, knowledgeable; they were often the repositories of medical knowledge (in Franco-Newfoundland society, for example, mid-wives were referred to, for the benefit of children, as "la vieille sorciaise," the old witch, and the fear this was meant to inspire was to ensure the absence of children from the home during childbirth). We note that in other versions, it is the "old witch" who provides the hero with the means of healing his sliced flesh. Thus, engaging in friendly and polite conversation with "old witches" marks a passage from childhood to a more mature level of youthfulness.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, the role of food needs some scrutiny. In terms of Lévi-Straussian semantic oppositions, in real life, men provided food in its raw state (by fishing,

hunting, farming); but women transformed it into its edible state. The opposition raw-cooked may be understood in two ways: the need for cooperation between the sexes, and the civilizing influence of women upon men. The hero is, in the first section of the tale, essentially in a state of savagery until his encounter with the old women (in one Franco-Newfoundland version, he wanders alone in the forest surviving as a hunter-gatherer, until he meets the old sisters). Food in its civilized form is thus the domain of the female, who prepares it, cooks it, serves it. Its presence elsewhere in the tale comes at crucial points in the hero's development: when he leaves home, his mother gives him a loaf of bread; when the daughter brings him his lunch during the tasks; and when she bakes talking cakes prior to their escape. I shall comment further, at the appropriate moment, on the significance of food at these junctures, only noting here that in many versions, the hero's mother has no role to play in the first part of the tale, other than to provide some food for the hero's journey.

The second stage of the hero's maturation begins with his encounter with the heroine. This middle stage of the tale — which falls between events leading to his encounter with the heroine, and the moment of their escape — is by far the most developed of the three stages of the tale, both in the actual telling of the tale by the narrator and in its interpretive potential. It must be seen, then, as the most important part of the tale.

The encounter, in terms of Holbek's crises, is that of meeting a member of the opposite sex, coming to terms with him or her, and establishing a mature relationship; though the stress in the actual tale may be on the *UYM*, we must not ignore what is going on with the *EYF*. The three sisters (i.e. the devil's daughters) are again a triple representation of the same tale role, the *EYF*. The youngest and most beautiful (and most powerful) quickly dispatches her sisters once she is aware of the hero's presence. He has drawn attention to himself, however, in a characteristically juvenile, immature way: by stealing her clothes.

Against this inept attempt to institute a relationship, one can set the reasonable attitude of the heroine; she bargains with him. That we are however dealing with the female in her sexual aspect should not go unrecognized; water is an acknowledged symbol of the female principle, and when the heroine discards her bird costume her nakedness is revealed to the hero. Significantly, the advice she gives the hero about how he should conduct himself with her father, is also the first step in *her* evolution in the father-daughter relationship. Her advice allows the hero to foil the devil's attempts to do away with him on the very day of his arrival. He recognizes only too well that the hero is a rival for his daughter's affection.

The three tasks the hero is successively required to do are, symbolically, the most significant elements of the tale, and to be properly understood, must be interpreted with reference to the principals: the *EAM*, the *EYF*, and the *UYM*: father, daughter and suitor. Each task represents sexual aspects of the triple relationship,



and each contributes both to the evolution and change in the relationships, and to the maturation of both hero and heroine.

The tasks appear to be impossible, and our assumption is that the devil does not expect the hero to perform them; but he also does not apparently suspect any possible involvement in them on the part of his daughter, whom the audience knows to have fallen in love with the hero at the time of their meeting. The first task requires the hero to drain the pond in which the daughter was swimming when they met — with a basket, cautions the heroine, not a bucket. In some versions the hero is also expected to make the dried pond bloom with flowers by the deadline for completion of the task. The heroine, having manipulated her father into coercing her to take the hero his lunch, insists that the hero, who has given up all hope of success, eat his meal. She, “by the will o my power,” drains the pond at once.

Water and female sexuality alert us to the true nature of the task. The basket is a yonic symbol. The hero does not know how to use the basket. The heroine does it for him, because she understands the nature of her power. She is teaching the hero about female sexuality. From the father’s perspective, bucket or basket, he does not believe the hero is capable of “draining the pond” (nor, in other versions, of making the dried pond bloom). This is the first step in the hero’s sexual maturation.

The second step can be understood as yet another challenge by the father to the hero; he is told to take an old (i.e. blunt) axe with which to chop down a forest of trees. In other versions, he takes, or is given, a paper or cardboard axe, the point being that the axe is a phallic symbol, and the axe taken by the hero is inefficacious. It is, or he is, unable to cut down the father’s trees which are themselves phallic symbols. In other words, the hero is unable to perform the symbolic castration of the father, he is not man enough. The father is of this opinion too. However, when the heroine takes axe in hand, by her power the forest of trees is instantaneously felled. Having learnt something of female sexuality at the first task, the hero now learns something about male sexuality; indeed, the task can be seen as the heroine’s sexual initiation of the hero. In versions of the tale where the hero has to make flowers bloom, there is an obvious allusion to the relationship of female sexuality to fertility. She is obviously more mature than he is, because of her knowledge. The task also suggests that the heroine is aware of the nature of the conflict between her father and suitor, and is ready to substitute her filial affections with the mature affection directed towards a male other than her father.

Now in the narration of the first two tasks, the hero is conspicuously passive. He quickly gives up not only in his efforts to drain the pond or fell the trees, but also his hope: “I’m gonna die” he says in despair. All he can do is eat his lunch, and watch the heroine perform his tasks for him. In some performances of the tale, the narrator stresses, by tone of voice and gesture, the hero’s pathetic inadequacy.

The third task requires the hero to scale a glass tower and retrieve an egg from its pinnacle. He tries to scale it and fails. In Emile Benoit’s versions, the hero tries so hard that he wears away the fabric of his trousers and has bloodied thighs for his

pains. The task is completed, however, not by the heroine but by the hero. She persuades him to cast her into the yonic vat of boiling water, retrieve her bones, and use them as a ladder to the top of the phallic glass tower, where he successfully retrieves the devil's egg. We may interpret the episode as the hero's initiation into sexual intercourse; the heroine tells him what to do, and he does it.

It also demonstrates that he has attained an apparent level of maturity sufficient to prompt the devil to give him the hand of one of his daughters. By scaling the phallic tower and retrieving the egg, the hero has given evidence of an adequate degree of virility. The implication may be, when the episode is translated into the real world, that the father is aware that some kind of sexual behaviour is taking place between the hero and one of his daughters.

For the heroine's part, the episode represents the replacement of her father with the hero, the final move out of the Electral phase of her development. It will also have stressed to the hero the bipartite nature of cooperation; the third task is the first in which he actually does anything, though still not on his own initiative. The episode as a whole thus clearly corresponds to the second of the three crises identified by Holbek. We must add that in the "real world," pre-marital sex, and subsequent pregnancy, was far from unknown amongst French Newfoundlanders (and by no means restricted to them, of course). Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that pregnancy was a justification for marriage (rather than the other way about); to marry a woman who could not have children was potentially an economic disaster. Fathers needed sons to work with at the fishery, preserving for the family unit alone any economic benefits, rather than having to share such benefits with other family units.

Holbek's definition of "fairy tale" includes the phrase "... a couple married earlier under ignominious circumstances," and, as if to stress the *EAM*'s continuing power over his daughter and her suitor, he obliges the hero to choose a daughter *blindfold*. Further, he must choose her on his hands and knees. It is only the hero's fortuitous oversight in not restoring all the heroine's bones to the vat, resulting in the disfigurement of her missing little toe, that enables him to make the right choice, when he touches the daughters' feet. To conclude the ignominy, although hero and heroine are married by the devil, they are obliged to remain *in loco parentis*.

This introduces the third of Holbek's crises, specifically the conflict generated by the new couple's attempt to assert its independence from parental authority. Uncle Frank's version of the tale does not make this conflict explicit; he does not say the *EAM* forbids the couple to leave. In his real life experience, it might not have been necessary to do so; young couples often had to stay in the parental home until such time as the son or son-in-law was able to provide adequately for his new wife. But clearly, two families sharing the same home will often lead to conflict, if only over matters of privacy. Once the couple has agreed to escape, a hyperbolic representation of the couple's needs, the escape is undertaken in a way which

demonstrates the parental belief that daughter and husband are still children, and still dependent.

The heroine stresses her maturity through her power to produce “talking cakes.” Once again, food intrudes at a crucial point in the tale, and again it is the female who produces it. She is smart enough to fool her father, though her mother, who only now appears in the tale, is not taken in. Nonetheless, she has to provoke her husband into calling out, to be assured that their daughter is still there. In other versions, the same scene almost becomes violent, as the husband takes offence at his wife’s insistence that something is wrong. For his part, the hero simply does what he is told by the heroine, but at least does it properly; he steals the right horse, the devil’s best, the only one able to transport the two of them to safety in the “Holy Land.”

The final stage in the casting off by the young couple of parental authority is achieved through the sequence of transformations brought about by the heroine’s power. On each of the three occasions in which the devil draws near, the daughter casts down an object, a domestic item such as a comb or brush, a handful of straw, or, as in this instance, a saddle (an unusual object, not included by Uncle Frank in other versions of the tale he told). The transformations are of course symbolic. The first has the heroine transform herself into a church, her husband into a priest reciting Latin prayers. We may interpret the scene, as the devil, or father, pulls up his horse in front of the church, as the hero asserting that this is his church (wife) and that he is capable of looking after it (her). The devil recognizes neither daughter nor son-in-law, which is tantamount to saying he has still not recognized them as an independent couple.

The second transformation is more blatantly sexual: the hero is cutting a tree with his axe: his tree, with his axe. Still the father cannot recognize that he has been replaced by his son-in-law as the principal male in his daughter’s life, that her sexuality is now fully and properly focussed on her husband.

The third and final transformation has the husband, in the form of a drake, *swimming* in a pond (his wife). This suggests that the couple is engaged in sexual intercourse, and it is significant that the devil, in his haste, charges right into the pond, before finally giving up his pursuit and disappearing from the tale. It is perhaps the clearest sign of the father’s continued assumption of authority: he blunders into the couple’s bedroom without knocking, sees them in a legitimate sexual act, and finally has to accept their legitimate union. He wakes up to the reality he has for so long attempted to ignore.

In each of the three transformations, while it is the heroine who brings them about, it is the hero who now occupies the active role in the confrontations. His wife, while still empowered, now stands behind him, metaphorically speaking. In real life, this is how men and women behaved in Newfoundland. The women, the adult women, made decisions concerning family and community life in informal discussion. In the public arena, it was however the men who spoke up, who

presented to the outside world the appearance of male dominance; the womenfolk stood to the side, to ensure that their point of view was properly presented to whichever figures of authority they were dealing with. Even in the home, the casual visitor might be led to believe men dominated the scene; they spoke loudly, were served first, mother and daughters catering not only to the needs of husband and father, but also to male siblings. The men in fact made decisions relative to their work, but in other matters, the female voice was the most influential. What the transformations demonstrate is husband and wife working or behaving cooperatively, the only way in which a family could function efficiently.

The process of maturation does not however conclude with the transformations. The hero still has a final hurdle to jump before he can be considered fully mature and take his rightful place as an *EYM*. The hurdle is overcome through another demonstration of female power. Living together near the hero's home, but incognito, the couple remain symbolically apart from the community as a whole. Today one might be tempted to think in terms of a honeymoon period, but in Uncle Frank's day, there were no honeymoons; couples could not afford them, nor afford the time away from home and work such a honeymoon would imply.

Let us examine the tale again. The hero wishes to visit his family; the heroine agrees, but warns him not to let anyone kiss him, on pain of forgetting all that has happened. He is kissed while sleeping and not only forgets everything but, once more under the authority of *his* parents, lapses into a state of parental dependency: he reverts to the role of *UYM*. His parents arrange a marriage for him with a princess (which itself implies that his original status was high, and underlines the point that status is not the issue, but empowerment is), and his task is to invite guests to his wedding.

We may assume that his two companions are simply extensions of himself (as is usually the case with triplification of characters), and that the three unsuccessful attempts at seduction of the heroine have the same message. Understanding the symbolic elements of the failed seduction permit understanding of the message. Each of the three would-be seducers gains access to the heroine's bedroom, only to be sent to close a door or window, which keeps opening despite their efforts to close it, until sunrise, by which time the heroine is getting up for the day. Each suitor is humiliated by trying to close the door or window while naked. Each may subsequently claim success in order not to lose face, but it is idle braggadocio.

We may interpret the magically opening doors as symbols of the heroine's sexuality; the suitors are unable to "close the door," to initiate and complete the sexual act. The heroine has demonstrated her maturity in knowing how to handle unwanted suitors in the absence of her husband (as far as he is concerned at this point in the tale, she is "just another pretty face"). This may seem a peculiar element to introduce into the tale at this juncture, but it should be remembered that in Uncle Frank's day, many men were absent from home for months at a time, working in the woods. It might well have been a constant fear in the back of men's minds that

their young wives become involved in extra-conjugal affairs during their absence. The episode serves to remind menfolk of the need to trust their wives during their absences, as well as to instill in the minds of young women that their fidelity was an essential ingredient to a successful marriage.

The second wedding nonetheless takes place (though it is not consummated). The heroine, by means of a talking hen and rooster, restores the hero's memory; and he, for the first time in the entire tale, acts solely on his own initiative, when he tells his would-be father-in-law the parable of the gold and iron keys, and is sufficiently persuasive to convince him of the legitimacy of his original marriage. The hero is now on a footing with an *EAM*, and has achieved this role through cooperation with his wife. They are reunited and assimilated into the community as empowered adults, presumably to live happily ever after.

The validity of Holbek's thesis is most apparent in its focus on the crises illustrated in the tale. We are able to follow, in a necessarily compressed and contracted framework, the process by which an *UYM* becomes an *EAM*. He undergoes two major crises himself: meeting, and then developing an adult mature relationship with an *EYF*; and confronting, eventually to achieve parity with, *EAMS*. But the tale does not simply chart the progress to maturity of young males, it does not simply provide, in the form of a kind of secular myth, the path a young man may expect to follow on his way to adult life.

It also, though with a different stress, provides a blueprint for what a young woman may expect in early adult life. The heroine is already empowered, which we can understand to be her awareness of her sexuality and her eventual role in society. She knows what to do when she meets the hero (*her* hero); her role in the tale is the realization of her knowledge. Thus it is she who initiates her chosen man into sexual experience, and she who breaks the pre-adult relationship with her father. In the process, she teaches the hero the need for cooperation, and is instrumental in guiding and governing the hero's general maturation. Her father plays the part of the possessive parent reluctant to recognize his daughter's achieving of adulthood. Incidentally, the audience will have been further alerted, unconsciously no doubt, to male and female roles, through the symbolic presence of food at significant moments in the tale, stressing the dominant, civilizing role of women in the community.

Less evidently valid for Franco-Newfoundland society is Holbek's representation of tale roles in versions of *The Girl As Helper in the Hero's Flight*. According to Holbek, AT 313 is a masculine tale; but in the version under study, hero and heroine are, at least in terms of birth, of equal status, both are children of *EAMS* (even though the hero's father does not have a role to play in the tale, we are told early on that he is a king). In the Franco-Newfoundland context, this complementarity of male and female roles is reflected in the tale by the initially empowered and dominant status of the heroine; but she too undergoes significant development. Given the generally unflattering portrayal of men, one might be led to expect that

the majority of the fifteen or more versions of the tale recorded from French Newfoundlanders would be told by women; yet only two versions were told by female narrators.

Given the egalitarian and cooperative nature of Franco-Newfoundland society in Uncle Frank's day (at least in ideal terms), the tale may well have been told more frequently by men precisely *because* the older narrators recognized the dominant role of women. While the tale ostensibly recounts the path of the male, in reality its focus is as much, if not more, on the path of the female, and as such is perhaps more properly, in its Franco-Newfoundland manifestations, a *feminine*, rather than a *masculine* tale. This is not of course a criticism of Holbek, but rather an illustration of how context is crucial to the understanding of meaning. Holbek provides an analytic method whose application requires a necessary modification to suit the context, though not a modification of the underlying premises.

As was noted earlier, it is the middle section of the tale which is most developed by narrators in Newfoundland's French tradition, and the middle section is most intensely focussed on the role of the female. It is here that the heroine most fully occupies an active role, both in the way she manipulates and outwits her father and in the way she guides the hero through sexual awakening, marriage, and, by the end of the section, a confident assertion of maturity. The Aarne-Thompson title to the tale rolls nicely off the tongue, but it might have been more appropriately titled *The Maid As Mentor in the Young Man's Maturation*.<sup>27</sup>

If the proposed interpretation of this tale seems plausible in context, it should nonetheless be stressed that the kinds of undoubtedly subconscious lessons to be learnt from the tale's telling by young French Newfoundlanders were not the only such lessons contained in the Franco-Newfoundland Märchen repertoire. Other tales stress different crises, and conflict may be resolved in different ways. The point is that *all* such tales were not told simply to entertain. The crises and conflicts present would be over the heads of very young listeners, who would simply enjoy the story's drama. In the mouths of gifted storytellers, the lessons would however be dramatically reinforced, with an aesthetic dimension added to the barebones telling of an Uncle Frank. This is why it is so important to record and transcribe orally told tales accurately, without modification; only thus can one appreciate the nuances of character that emerge through careful analysis of performance features. Such information reinforces Holbek's interpretive thesis, as Holbek himself knew only too well.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>The best illustration of this assertion is Barbara Rieti's *Strange Terrain. The Fairy World in Newfoundland* (St. John's: Institute of Social and Economic Research, Social and Economic Studies No. 45, 1991). For comparative and international perspectives, see also

Peter Narváez, ed., *The Good People. New Fairylore Essays* (New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1991).

<sup>2</sup>See in particular Herbert Halpert and J.D.A. Widdowson, *Folktales of Newfoundland. The Resilience of the Oral Tradition*, 2 vols., World Folktales Library 3 (New York & London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1996), described by specialist W.F.H. Nicolaisen in a recent review (*Newfoundland Studies*, 13, 1 [sp.1997], 93-7) as "the best edition of a regional (or national for that matter) corpus of folk-narrative that I have come across in almost fifty years of involvement in this field of study," and whose General Editor, Carl Lindahl, in his "Series Editor's Preface," quoted me as calling it "the most important folktale collection since the Grimms," a view which he endorsed. See also my own *Les Deux Traditions: le conte populaire chez les Franco-Terreneuviens* (Montréal: Bellarmin, 1983), and my English translation of this work, *The Two Traditions: The Art of Storytelling Amongst French Newfoundlanders* (St. John's: Breakwater Books, 1993). What these volumes demonstrate is not only the richness of Newfoundland's narrative tradition, but also the fact that since the tales were collected for the most part between 1960 (Halpert and Widdowson) and 1980 (myself), the narrative Märchen tradition must have remained a vital, functioning tradition in Newfoundland long after it had shrivelled and died in most other parts of North America, with the exception principally of French-speaking areas of the continent.

<sup>3</sup>The distinguished Swiss scholar Max Lüthi addresses the question of "The Fairy Tale as Representation of a Maturation Process," ch. 8 in his *Once Upon A Time. On the Nature of Fairy Tales* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1976, first published in German in 1970), and his *The European Folktale: Form and Nature*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986, first published in German in 1947) devotes a whole chapter ("Function and Significance of the Folktale," ch. 6) to issues of meaning. But Lüthi, as he indicates in his preface to the English translation, is searching for the lasting truths of the folktale, even though folktales "...speak to all kinds of people and to widely separated generations; they speak in terms that sometimes differ and yet in many ways remain the same" (xv). Like Lüthi, the German scholar Lutz Röhrich is also concerned with interpretation, but as Dan Ben-Amos says in his "Foreword" to Röhrich's *Folktales and Reality* (Bloomington & London: Indiana University Press, 1991, first published in German in 1956), "... Röhrich proposes a bold universal theory of folklore genres" (ix). Linda Dégh's *Folktales and Society: Storytelling in a Hungarian Community* (Bloomington & London: Indiana University Press, 1969, first published in German in 1962); one of the most influential works in folk narrative of the second half of the twentieth century, does not address meaning directly; her concerns were with the social role and cultural values of narration, the interaction of personality and community. Henry Glassie, in his remarkable *Passing the Time in Ballymenone* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), only occasionally focusses specifically on matters of meaning, and then only in general terms.

<sup>4</sup>Subtitled *Danish Folklore in a European Perspective* (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica; FF Communications No. 239). This 660 page *magnum opus* draws on Evald Tang Kristensen's large collection of Jutland folktales made chiefly in the period 1870-1900, and for which a substantial amount of contextual data was available. Holbek stresses how fairy tales, as he prefers to call them, seem to have been the preserve of the rural peasantry in European tradition. He insists that any interpretation of fairy tales must relate to the narrator and his or her culture. It was this insistence which appealed to me, given my own

training at Memorial, where now Emeritus Professor Herbert Halpert stressed the importance of context and function in the study of folklore.

<sup>5</sup>As classified in the international tale-type index compiled by Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson, *The Types of the Folktale*, Second revision (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1964), FF Communications No. 184.

<sup>6</sup>There is much on-going debate over the best protocol for the transcribing of oral materials, especially when dealing with “non-standard” language. There is a school of thought which argues for a phonetic rendering of texts (inaccessible to most readers) juxtaposed with a “regularized” version of the text, i.e. corrected to conform to standard English (or French, or whatever language it may be) and edited to remove “unsightly repetitions” and the like, retaining some dialectal features for “local colour.” I do not subscribe to this approach, preferring what has been termed a “folkloric” rendering, though in fact based on a sound familiarity with the science of phonetics, which attempts to capture the full flavour of the speech in question. Some scholars dislike this method on the grounds that it is less than perfect when compared to a phonetic transcription, and often demeans the speaker, into whose mouth is put ungrammatical forms. Unfortunately, this is how many people actually speak, and if one is to try and capture the character of an individual narrator’s speech, then in order not to produce a normalized, corrected rendering, which robs the narrator of any personality and distinctiveness, one has to attempt some kind of close approximation. For a lengthier discussion of the question, see *The Two Traditions*, “A Note on Text Transcription,” 137-43.

<sup>7</sup>From CEFT collection 75-239/F1835, F1836.

<sup>8</sup>Bengt Holbek, *Interpretation of Fairy Tales*, 452.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 435.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup>Holbek’s rules underlie Olrik’s epic laws, Lüthi’s *Stiltendenzen*, and are in some cases virtually identical with the “mechanisms” for the formation of myths and dreams described by Freud and Rank. See Holbek, *Interpretation of Fairy Tales*, 435-44.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup>Adapted by Holbek from a model proposed in Elli Köngäs Maranda and Pierre Maranda, *Structural Models in Folklore and Transformational Essays* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1971). Approaches to Semiotics 10. See Holbek, 347-8 and, for his application of the Marandas’ model, 419-34.

<sup>15</sup>See Holbek, 347, and particularly 416-34, in which he discusses the system of tale roles present in fairy tales, eight of which he identifies. He argues that “... all of the eight tale roles defined by the paradigmatic model may be found in fairy tales and that all principal characters may be unambiguously defined as the occupants of these roles. Each of the characters may be doubled, trebled or split into a ‘good’ and a ‘bad’ or a ‘strong’ and a ‘weak’ aspect, each aspect then appearing in the stage as an independent figure. A character may fill one role to begin with and later assume another — actually, the unit we call a ‘move’ may be described as the attempt of a character to leave one role to assume another — and a character may be dispossessed of any role in the tale; that character then dies or is of no further importance” (416).

<sup>16</sup>Holbek, 418.



<sup>17</sup>I have analyzed a Franco-Newfoundland version of the tale in an as yet unpublished article entitled "Meaning in Narrative: A Franco-Newfoundland Version of AT 480 (*The Spinning Women by the Spring*) and AT 510 (*Cinderella and Cap O'Rushes*)." As is commonly the case with the *Cinderella* story, in oral tradition it is very often welded together with another tale.

<sup>18</sup>Holbek, 418.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup>See Holbek, 390-400, "On sociohistorical and sociopsychological approaches," and 424-7 for specific reference to Freudian symbolism in tales.

<sup>21</sup>See Alan Dundes, ed., *The Study of Folklore* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1965), in particular the section "Psychoanalysis and Folklore," (88-128) in which Dundes presents five essays on the subject which illuminate both the strengths and weaknesses of psychoanalytic applications in folklore; and more recently, his *Interpreting Folklore* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1980), in which he offers a selection of his own essays on the subject with wit and persuasiveness.

<sup>22</sup>Which should tell us something about its significance; indeed, this tale is known, from historic-geographic studies, to be one of the oldest, most widespread, and most complex of all internationally distributed Märchen.

<sup>23</sup>Holbek told me himself, not long before his untimely death, how he envied me the opportunity I had enjoyed to study a living Märchen tradition, recognizing that had he been able to do so, it might well have influenced his thinking. I owe it to him, therefore, to introduce this perspective into my analysis. Holbek was certainly entranced when, in 1984, at the VIIIth Congress of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research at Bergen, he was able to watch a performance of this tale by the late Emile Benoit.

<sup>24</sup>See *The Two Traditions*, especially chs. 2, 4 and 6.

<sup>25</sup>In several versions of this tale, including this one, the *EAM* is presented as the devil. In some versions, the devil is even summoned in the traditional way, e.g. "I'd play with the devil himself, just to have a game of cards," and soon after, a "stranger" appears. It is one among other ways in which a veneer of christianity has been roughly brushed over this ancient narrative, although in Newfoundland, this method of summoning the devil is usually associated with legends. The point is that the "devil" here should not be understood as a christian devil, but rather as the embodiment of any *EAM* with whom an *UYM* or *UYF* is in conflict. In Newfoundland, the concept of the *devil* neatly summarizes this situation, and can be understood as an example of *hyperbole*, one of Holbek's seven rules governing the metamorphosis of emotional impressions into symbolic expressions.

<sup>26</sup>For an excellent illustration of the role of women in Newfoundland society in the period 1900-1950, see Hilda Chaulk Murray, *More Than 50%* (St. John's: Breakwater Books, 1979); Canada's Atlantic Folklore-Folklife Series, Vol. 3.

<sup>27</sup>I am grateful to J.D.A. Widdowson for his thoughtful comments on an earlier version of this essay, entitled "An Interpretation of Some Contemporary Newfoundland Versions of AT 313 from a Post-Holbekian Perspective," which was originally presented at the 1995 annual meeting of the American Folklore Society in Lafayette, Louisiana. He was particularly helpful in nudging me towards my use of the terms empowered/unempowered as an alternative to the status terms high/low.