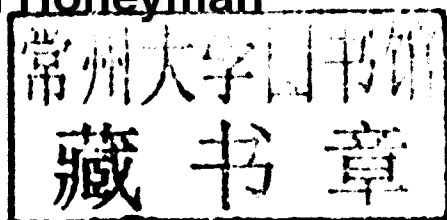


# **Consuming Agency in Fairy Tales, Childlore, and Folkliterature**

**Susan Honeyman**

# Consuming Agency in Fairy Tales, Childlore, and Folkliterature

Susan Honeyman



First published 2010  
by Routledge  
270 Madison Ave, New York, NY 10016

Simultaneously published in the UK  
by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

© 2010 Taylor & Francis

Typeset in Sabon by IBT Global.  
Printed and bound in the United States of America on acid-free paper by IBT Global.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

**Trademark Notice:** Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

Honeyman, Susan.

Consuming agency in fairy tales, childlore, and folkliterature / by Susan Honeyman.  
p. cm.—(Routledge studies in folklore and fairy tales ; v. 2)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Children's literature—History and criticism. 2. Fairy tales—History and criticism.  
3. Folk literature—History and criticism. 4. Food in literature. 5. Children in  
literature. 6. Consumption (Economics) in literature. 7. Ideology in  
literature. 8. Agent (Philosophy) in literature. 9. Power (Social sciences) in  
literature. I. Title.

PN1009.5.F66H66 2009

809'.89282—dc22

2009030953

ISBN10: 0-415-80614-3 (hbk)

ISBN13: 978-0-415-80614-5 (hbk)

# Preface

In “Kids and Commerce,” Viviana Zelizer explains that American household economies were

transformed between the 1870s and the 1930s in ways that revolutionized children’s economic practices. Just as middle-class women withdrew from paid employment, children were put out of wage work. Increased attention and concern with the emotional value of children’s lives led to a growing uneasiness with their practical contributions. (2002: 390)

Dominant discourses of the twentieth-century followed suit in an increasingly sentimental denial of children’s usefulness and need (despite children’s increasingly disproportionate poverty). By the end of the century, children would be culturally conscribed as consumer citizens, whether or not they could afford it.

While Barack Obama’s 2008 election bespoke a political climate decidedly weary of the disingenuous social “reforms” that abandoned many of the nation’s children to choiceless poverty<sup>1</sup>, in the same week Newt Gingrich would declare that

Adolescence was invented in the 19th century to enable middle-class families to keep their children out of sweatshops. But it has degenerated into a process of enforced boredom and age segregation that has produced one of the most destructive social arrangements in human history. (2008: 85)

Cringing a bit, I nonetheless found myself agreeing, as Gingrich’s article circulated within the National Youth Rights Association and my classrooms. Child-rights rhetoric makes for some strange ideological pairings. But in the context of both the nineteenth- and twentieth-century golden ages of U.S. fiscal conservatism, the parallel makes sense. Like the industrial capitalists who were influential a century before him, Gingrich indulges in the sentiment of self-reliance, arguing for the same rights to

material gains under consumer capitalism that youth had before child labor reform. To someone devoted to youth rights, this easily translates into a defense of self-determination—a right that protectionism often denies young Americans.

Fairy tales often depict this paradox of good intentions. Protectionism can imprison, as Donna Jo Napoli demonstrates through her retelling of the Rapunzel story, *Zel* (1996). In Napoli's story, Rapunzel lives amidst agricultural plentitude and economic ignorance, realizing, on a rare visit to the contrasting center of trade nearby, that "Town is a place of give and take" (27). But her adoptive mother is keenly aware of commerce, which she has used to maintain control over others, even successfully bartering for a daughter by manipulating the biological mother's pregnant cravings for leafy greens.

Rapunzel is the original material girl, controlled by the material relations surrounding her and in fact named after the material for which she was bartered. A prototype of the consumer child, she is at once excluded from and defined by commodities—a commodity herself. Her story repeatedly warns about the dangers of protectionism, smothering possessive love, and our own vulnerable cravings. The sorceress-mother continues to control her adopted daughter through appetite as well: "I will go to the candy shop for the colored sugar balls with anise seed centers, the ones Zel loves. . . . Treats bring a glow to her cheeks. I will bask in that glow" (19). Mother tries to secure Zel's loyalty with the offer of a magical ability to communicate with animals. But Zel comprehends the moral responsibility demanded, asking "Who would want such a power?" (140). Mother realizes, though too late, that her own "gift for plants was not about understanding; it was about control" (141). Paul Zelinsky highlights this controlling aspect of extreme possessiveness disguised as love in his 1998 Caldecott-winning illustrations to the story by showing the sorceress at her most fearsome when she discovers Rapunzel's biological father stealing the garden greens (blooming the same color as the girl's dress in following frames) and when she discovers Rapunzel's "betrayal" against filial loyalty (virginity?): both illustrations show the sorceress in a gesture of enraged but desperate grasping—hands are clutching at the air, her eyes are threateningly wide and pained. Her power is all the more frightening because it stems from some form of love.

Though not so diabolically, today's parents who panic and track their teens with GPS-loaded cell phones or outerwear cross the same fine line between control and care. And I will argue in the following chapters that alongside such technological tethers, we have developed more subtle yokes to control children through protectionism and consumption. Such ideologies are not new; like Rapunzel they have premodern roots. Their persistence in modern and post-industrial cultures suggests that as much as we reinvent post-industrial childhood, we do so in service to adult needs and consumer capitalism. Viviana Zelizer points out that most questions about childhood consumption "are framed by an adult point of view, asking how

children understand the adult economy, how they learn it, how they fit in and how it affects them" (2002: 379). In another strange intellectual pairing, marketers and ethnographers come closest to practicing child-centered methods (Zelizer 2002: 378, 379). I hope to follow these oppositionally motivated lines of understanding to their cultural intersection (as well as to that of structure and simulacra in shared folkloric motifs) in the lore of luring children.

Raymond Williams warned that "All traditions are selective . . . Where the poets run scholars follow," especially when avoiding the investigation of "what the country was really like: that is a utilitarian or materialist, perhaps even a peasant response . . . It is time that this bluff was called" (1973: 18–19). In the interest of concretely contextualizing the childhood of fairy tales, so enter material youth.

# Acknowledgments

In my pursuits as a perennial student and scholar, I've benefited from the unfailing support of my partner, William Avilés, and my family (*grazie mille* to Richard and Bonnie Bing Honeyman, for helping me make my dream sabbatical a reality). I owe hearty thanks to students and colleagues for introducing me to exciting new sources and helping with the preparation of the text: Anna Thompson, Erik Mortenson, Katherine Capshaw Smith, Steve Warren, Jessica Isaac, Marguerite Tassi, Shaun Padgett, Rob Luscher, Justin Sevenker, and John Damon. Donald Haase, foremost among them, has answered my toughest fairy-tale questions via email with remarkable grace and knowledge. The staff at Ryan library has cheerfully helped in every way possible—thanks especially to Alta Kramer and Todd Jensen. The Research Services Council at the University of Nebraska at Kearney has graciously provided funding crucial in attaining copyright permissions for illustrations (the pictures are what make this job so fun). My gratitude also extends to Johns Hopkins University Press and Wayne State University Press for permissions to reprint portions of my earlier work as follows:

“Manufactured Agency and the Playthings Who Dream it for Us.” *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 31.2 (2006): 109–13. (Copyright ©2006 The Children's Literature Association. Reprinted with permission of the Johns Hopkins University Press.)

“Trick or Treat?: Halloween Lore, Passive Consumerism, and the Candy Industry.” *The Lion and the Unicorn* 32.1 (2008), 82–108. (Copyright ©2008 The Johns Hopkins University Press. Reprinted with permission of the Johns Hopkins University Press.)

“Gingerbread Wishes and Candy (land) Dreams.” *Marvels and Tales: Journal of Fairy-Tale Studies* 21.2 (2007), 19–215. (Copyright ©2007.)

Finally, my earnest appreciation belongs to fellow scholars in the field who have welcomed serious interdisciplinary rigor to the too-long-dismissed body of children's and folk literature.

# Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	ix
<i>Preface</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xv
Introduction: Material Youth	1
1   What Good Little Girls and Boys Are Made Of	25
2   Honey(cakes)	54
3   Sweet Teeth	77
4   Molasses	111
5   Muscle and Greens	140
Conclusion: Flesh and Blood	163
<i>Notes</i>	185
<i>Bibliography</i>	203
<i>Index</i>	221



# Figures

## Frontispiece

	Beatrice Boissegur, <i>The Three Fairies</i> , 2000 The Bridgeman Art Library, New York.	v
1.1	Mary Liddell for Angelo Patri's <i>Pinocchio in America</i> . Doubleday, Doran, and Co., 1928.	30
1.2	Johnny Gruelle, <i>Raggedy Ann Stories</i> . Simon and Schuster, 1918.	33
1.3	William Nicholson for Margery Williams, <i>The Velveteen Rabbit</i> . Doubleday and Co., 1922.	38
1.4	John R. Neill for L. Frank Baum, <i>The Patchwork Girl of Oz</i> . Dover, 1913.	44
2.1	Heinrich Hoffmann, <i>Struwwepeter</i> . 1845. English translation. Dover, 1995.	66
2.2	Ross Collins, <i>Alvie Eats Soup</i> . Scholastic, 2002. (By permission of author.)	67
2.3	James Marshall, <i>Hansel and Gretel</i> . Dial Books for Young Readers, 1990. (Used with permission. All rights reserved.)	73
3.1	Megan Kelso, <i>The Squirrel Mother: Stories</i> . Fantagraphics, 2006.	91
4.1	Brad Johnson, (untitled entry), <i>Comix 2000</i> . L'Association, 1999.	117
4.2	Edward Gorey for Ennis Rees, <i>Brer Rabbit and his Tricks</i> . Young Scott Books, 1967. (By permission of Edward Gorey Charitable Trust.)	120

4.3	Winsor McCay, <i>Little Nemo in Slumberland</i> , August 2, 1908.	137
5.1	Elzie Segar, "Thimble Theatre," King Features Inc., February 26, 1932.*	143
5.2	Elzie Segar, "Thimble Theatre," King Features Inc., October 25, 1930.	144
5.3	Elzie Segar, "Thimble Theatre," King Features Inc., February 28, 1932.	152
5.4	Elzie Segar, "Thimble Theatre," King Features Inc., May 21, 1932.	153
5.5	Elzie Segar, "Thimble Theatre," King Features Inc., October 4, 1931.	154
5.6	Bobby London, <i>Mondo Popeye</i> , King Features Syndicate, 1987.	155
5.7	Elzie Segar, "Thimble Theatre," King Features Inc., November 6, 1929.	157
5.8	Elzie Segar, "Thimble Theatre," King Features Inc., January 4, 1931.	159
5.9	Elzie Segar, "Thimble Theatre," King Features Inc., November 29, 1931.	162

\*All Popeye images used by permission of King Features, Inc.

# Introduction

## Material Youth

How does the present appropriate the past? . . . How do aspects of culture become periodized in time just as under tourism they become localized in space? . . . The reproduction of folklore forms by the literary tradition, particularly as practiced from the late seventeenth century on, provides a deeply historicized set of answers to such questions.

Susan Stewart, *Crimes of Writing*

However we construct it and whatever it stands for to us, body is what we've got.

Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*

How are struggles of power historically written on the body? Can human subjects act independently of the limiting logic and language of their socialization? Questions of bodily boundaries, expression, and agency pervade ancient myth, medieval folklore, and industrial fairy tales, and are certainly no more satisfactorily answered today. Differing views on human potential for individual action often stand between modernists and post-modernists,<sup>1</sup> structural determinists and post-structural constructivists, and Marxists and post-Marxists in defining action. In this book I look at manifestations of youth agency (and representations of agency produced for youth) as depicted in fairy tales, childlore, and folkliterature,<sup>2</sup> investigating the dynamic of ideological manipulation and independent resistance as it can be read or expressed in bodies, first through social puppetry and then through coercive temptation (our consumption replacing the more obvious strings that bind us). Through industrialization, capitalism, and consumerism, folkloric agency has been reshaped from externalized representations into an intangible yet consumable product—from a power simply imposed upon the body to power operating on the subject from within.

Hans Christian Andersen can set a preliminary frame of reference for this investigation—a writer of his own country's industrializing age who focused frequently on issues of agency. When I first read Hans Christian Andersen I was surprised to find less triumph and hope (qualities added later to many of his stories, passed down in sweeter, more familiar versions) than I expected, and more physical suffering—for example, the “Ugly Duckling” suffers far more than mere ostracizing, the “Little Mermaid”

## 2 Consuming Agency in Fairy Tales, Childlore, and Folkliterature

is maimed, misunderstood, unnoticed by her prince, and finally reduced to purgatorial vapor, the “Red Shoes” dance their wearer into self-mutilation and near damnation—each reads more like a deterministic cautionary tale, and most refuse to end happily or provide any *dénouement* that would satisfy contemporary readers who fancy themselves free to act according to their own wills.<sup>3</sup> A sense of individual powerlessness pervades character and plot. In his discussion of Andersen as a “failed revolutionary,” Jack Zipes describes “The Little Mermaid” as

a religious and didactic tale that makes children responsible for the moral well-being of their parents. . . . [C]hildren must exhibit a certain purity of the soul and obedience to God’s laws to succeed in life and to make their elders content. (2006a: 230)

Such an emotional burden without power or autonomy pervades bourgeois constructions of child audiences.

Hans Christian Andersen seems to have been drawn, in particular, to the question of free will, or to twist it into more contemporary terms, the agency of social subjects in their ideological environment. In “The Steadfast Tin Soldier,” we follow the inner life of a tin soldier who loves a toy ballerina, a theme that’s become a familiar device for fiction in which the inanimate are secretly endowed with autonomous movement and/or sentience: kept especially popular by E. T. A. Hoffmann’s *Nutcracker* (1816) and Tchaikovsky’s ballet by the same name,<sup>4</sup> taken up quite philosophically in Russell Hoban’s *The Mouse and His Child* (1967), somewhat sentimentally in *The Velveteen Rabbit* (1922) and *Alexander and the Wind-Up Mouse* (1969), then commercially in *Toy Story* (1995, 1999) and its ilk.<sup>5</sup> I used to think that the popularity of this secret vivification theme reflected a reasonable but tired assumption about young audiences: they are struggling with ontology, learning to discern “reality” from the “unreal,” which includes discerning living things from representations. But after reading Andersen I see a more concrete explanation based on the social positioning of his young audiences. We want to imagine that an inanimate toy, which is dependent on our own dramatics for animation, can, outside of our sight or understanding, move and exist on its own terms (yet somehow exclusively to our own imaginations, as if we are the Berkeleyan god of their dreams).

Andersen’s tales present youth as a position in which the subject is hailed by power and at a disadvantage only for lacking socialized experience, but it is also a position of potential agency in being ideologically overlooked and thus able to operate freely of socializing constraints. Thus, it is a child in “The Emperor’s New Clothes” who can see and clearly state that the king is naked. This is the secret wish of subversives—that such a safe, disrupting social position exists to be filled. Especially so for all who would romantically construct the young as potential leaders of invisible revolution, working within yet against the system, unsuspected because of their

smaller size and presumed innocence. Brian Sutton-Smith sees recognition of this radical potential for power as an important aspect of our study:

Children's folklore as the struggle for power certainly has a different ring to it, doesn't it? If we studied children's folklore as an account of disempowerment and, at the same time, as an ecstasy of performance, then children's folklore, as contrasted with all the other scholarships of childhood, would indeed be dealing with a most radical concept of childhood. (1995: 277)

These dark and radical representations of youth, however, are tempered by the oppressive in Andersen.<sup>6</sup> As Zipes points out, child readers and characters have a presumed emotional responsibility to reciprocate love and earn adult approval. Naomi Wood offers insight into this pressure to exercise sympathy, which is particularly pertinent to enchanted fairy-tale objects: "Andersen's relentless personification of inanimate objects—tin soldiers, rubber balls, and fir trees—as well as his attribution of sentience to animals and birds—ducks, storks, and nightingales—multiplies exponentially the possibilities for pain in the universe" (2006: 196). But, Wood adds, this burden of compassion comes without a sense of ability to change one's environment:

Rather than offering the comfort of endlessly supportive imaginary companions, Andersen's account of the thoughts and feelings of dolls, toys, and china trinkets provides instead opportunities to experience vicarious pain, frustrated desire, and death. . . . Andersen's objects, like people, may wish to establish their meaningfulness in the grand scheme of things, but their efforts have only individual, microcosmic effects. (196)

In "The Puppeteer," Andersen dramatizes extremes of agency and potential pulls against it. A successful puppeteer confesses that he would prefer his puppets were alive: "I would like to be a director of a real live troupe of actors: real live ones!" (1983: 690). One might expect a little *Nutcracker* magic, pathos, romance, and adventure. But when his wish comes true he is distraught to find too many wills pitted against him and each other: "The actors were like flies in a bottle, and I was in the bottle too, for I was the theater director" (691–692). In short, he discovers that it is more comfortable to pull the strings than be pulled.

It doesn't take Carlo Collodi's Pinocchio long to realize the same thing, and he resists being a social puppet as much as he can, though he is frequently deluded about his ability to do so. His example also models how malleable are the hungry, and how children are molded when disciplined with food. Aware of the cultures of hunger that surrounded him, Collodi made a didactic (or mock-didactic) example with one of Pinocchio's many

#### 4 *Consuming Agency in Fairy Tales, Childlore, and Folkliterature*

character flaws: his over-particular appetite. When Pinocchio thinks he will die he cries: "Oh, hunger is a dreadful illness!" (1996: 24). After Pinocchio's unsuccessful attempts at procuring a meal, Geppetto comes to the rescue with the selfless offer, "These three pears were for my breakfast, but I willingly give them to you. Eat them, and may they do you good!" (33). Pinocchio's sudden pickiness (even though he's "dying of hunger") begins the classic struggle between adult economic, nutritional oversight and a child's appetite: he will not eat the pears unless they are peeled for him. Geppetto admonishes him: "We should get used, from childhood, to eating everything, and liking it; for one never knows what might happen in this curious world" (34). Once he has devoured everything but the peelings and cores, Pinocchio's appetite tempers his taste into including what remains, which he promptly finishes off. Pinocchio comes around to abiding by Geppetto's standard of a pragmatic diet, not because didacticism triumphs, but because he is hungry.

Jay Mechling has explained the potent centrality of such scenes: "So much of the child's biological and psychological developmental drama centers on the body that it is little wonder that no bodily function escapes the child's folk repertoire: sex, food, and excretions appear prominently in the lore" (1986: 113). Marina Warner writes that

Control of food lies at the heart . . . of famous fairy tales, like "Hansel and Gretel," and less familiar ones that feature ogres and ogresses like Baba Yaga. . . . Food—procuring it, cooking it, eating it—dominates the material as the overriding image of survival; consuming it offers contradictory metaphors of life and civilization as well as barbarity and extinction. (1999: 12–13)

First noting that Melanie Klein believes "cannibalism is a phantasy universally experienced by infants," Carolyn Daniel explains the prevalence of the "eat or be eaten" conflict:

Stories about monsters with abominable appetites have multiple functions: they may reflect a desire for familial or social integrity; they may reveal culture unease about social hierarchies; they may warn of dangers and therapeutically rehearse the fears invoked by such threats, wearing them out through repetition; they may explore issues regarding intergenerational and familial rivalries, confirming the individual's place in society; they may reveal society's concerns about the need to discipline the appetites and behavior of children; and they may reflect social anxieties about enemy others, the identity of whom changes over time. (2006: 141–142)

Much has been written psychoanalyzing the developmental significance of eating in folktales and fairy tales, but Daniel also touches on social

anxieties over power inequities experienced, presumably by the small and young. Socio-historic realities, such as insecurities about social justice and the unequal distribution of wealth and power, will be privileged in my treatment over the dense symbolic readings of psychoanalytic criticism, which often essentialize the young with universalizing phenomenological theories of development. Jack Zipes suggests the need instead for direct avenues of inquiry when he likens the widespread “eat or be eaten” dilemma in fairy tales to the conformist socializing purpose of the tales themselves: “tradition feeds off the young to maintain itself and will do anything to preserve itself” (2006b: 235).

Pinocchio has learned this fundamental principle of survival within networks of social power—illustrated frequently through his most basic need (food) and gravest danger (hunger)—so that by the time he washes up on the shore of Busy Bee Island, he asks a dolphin, “Would you be so kind as to tell me if there are inhabited places on this island, where one may eat without fear of being eaten?” (138). Unlike most artificial beings, Pinocchio needs to eat—he embodies the ultimate weakness of flesh (vulnerability to hunger) without the benefits of being ‘real.’ For this reason I begin my first chapter with his example (to establish the complexities of ‘agency’ as well as to theoretically situate the common histories of consumerism and childhood), but I close with a chapter on contrasting idealizations (fleshlessness being more typically depicted as a strength) in cyborgs, robots, and even magical/mystical creations, like the golem and homunculus, who made of basic or even organic materials, are nonetheless invulnerable.

*Consuming Agency* concentrates on the agency of young subjects through material relations, especially where food signifies the invisible strings used to control them in popular discourse and practice, modeling efforts to come out from under the hegemonic handler and take control, at least of their own body spaces, but ultimately finding less power than the ideal holds. Wendy R. Katz writes, “The plenitude of food in children’s books is directly related to the essentially comic spirit of children’s literature. The characters of comedy, like the characters in children’s literature, are quintessential earthlings, fleshly and vulnerable” (1980: 199). I propose that we attempt to understand the dark side of being “fleshly and vulnerable.” Like Pinocchio, children who necessarily depend upon adults for allaying their own hunger are also vulnerable to what, even in the most benevolent cases, can be considered ideological control.

My readings should invite inclusive understandings by focusing in a historically anchored manner on similar material patterns—honeycakes in “Hansel and Gretel,” candy in Halloween ritual and lore, molasses in “Tar Baby,” and spinach in *Popeye*. First I socially, theoretically, and historically contextualize the ‘ingredient’ chapters with an analysis of *Pinocchio* and his American intertexts, arguing that with consumer capitalism child agency has diminished, even though sometimes it is framed as empowerment. Then, I demonstrate that foods are constantly held up

as lures to children and bartered for agency. Finally I stress the socio-political uses of hunger and nutritional reform to further indicate the significance of structurally determined and resistant appetites. Like *Voracious Children: Who Eats Whom in Children's Literature*, by Carolyn Daniel (2006), my book closely analyzes the importance of food in the representation of children; it focuses, however, on folk and popular culture in the U.S. rather than British children's literature. Like Nicholas Sammond's *Babes in Tommorrowland: Walt Disney and the Making of the American Child, 1930–1960* (2005), it greets the rising demand for inter-disciplinary materialist scholarship on childhood discourses. Like *When Toys Come Alive: Narratives of Animation, Metamorphosis, and Development*, by Lois Kuznets (1994), it will do so by focusing on representations of material relations. However, unlike the psychoanalytic leanings of this and other children's literature criticism, my method is historically materialist with a more explicitly child-rights-oriented purpose. Though complementing the more comprehensive collection of approaches to food found in Kara Keeling and Scott Pollard's *Critical Approaches to Food in Children's Literature* (2009), my critical purpose is more narrowly concerned with consumer culture. As my focal materials were chosen for their folkloric relevance, my textual examples are not limited to the indefinite category of "children's" literature.<sup>7</sup>

In my first chapter, "What Good Little Girls and Boys Are Made Of," I concentrate on the material production of consumer childhood and the folkloric recurrence of questioning (child) agency through tales. I describe a demographic shift occurring from the mid-nineteenth century to mid-twentieth (from the industrial age to the post-industrial), in which children as a political group shrunk from being a majority in the population and were marginalized to what Viviana Zelizer calls "sentimental uselessness." Concurrently, Americans appropriated and consumed international folktales and fairy tales into their own social context. Continuing my analysis of *Pinocchio* and its intertexts, with side-glances at such texts as *The Wizard of Oz*, *The Velveteen Rabbit*, *Raggedy Ann*, *The Brave Little Toaster*, *Corduroy*, and *Rudolf, the Red-Nosed Reindeer*, I argue that the pervasive themes of secret vivification (animism), imagined object sentience, and puppetry illuminate social challenges to children's agency. Ultimately, I argue that they also represent a "passifying" threat to children's rights in a culture transitioning into consumerism.

In my second chapter, "Honey(cakes)," I hone in on issues of agency in light of the ideological allure held by foods. Unfolding old and new visitations of "Hansel and Gretel," while making connections to narratives on consuming like *In the Night Kitchen*, *Bread and Jam for Frances*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, and the Candy Land board game, I give special attention to gingerbread motifs to show the extent to which young people are socialized (trapped?) by food, in this case prototypically through the (folk)luring<sup>8</sup> power of honeycakes or showy sweets.



Using the case of Halloween rituals in my third chapter, “Sweet Teeth,” I show how child resistance to the power of food socializing has been brought under control by the majority adult culture (concurrently with shifts described in Chapter 1). Through analyses of child consumer rights, trick-or-treating rituals, and the candy industry, I hope to show that youth have been “tricked” out of reciprocal social power with the rise of the middle class, capitalism, and eventually consumerism. Sample texts range from traditional fairy tales and childlore to *Malcolm in the Middle* and the film *Hoodwinked*.

Sharman Apt Russell writes, “Hunger begins your exchange with the world” (2005: 230). “Molasses,” my fourth chapter, pries more deeply into the social causes of our ideological identification with and malleability through food, reminding us that in societies of extreme wealth inequality, food utopias and dystopias emerge to reflect luxuriousness or basic hunger. Gastronomic utopias are not just the product of hungry dreams; they can be fantasies created to fool and control their listeners by inviting audiences to concentrate on desires that cannot be fulfilled, ultimately deferring power. Such intimate expressions are especially prevalent in cultural productions socializing children, because food is one of the primary vehicles of struggle and control in child culture. In this chapter I demonstrate the political dimensions of collective hunger by looking at folkloric sources for food utopias and dystopias in varied Brer Rabbit tales, especially “Tar Baby,” with the aid of works by Richard Wright, Toni Morrison, Virginia Hamilton, and critic Andrew Warnes. By analogy I wish to consider how a child’s cravings are likewise exploited and agency is deferred.

As an over-consuming nation, the U.S. has a unique history of nutritional reforms motivated by class interests and food-marketing rather than an earnestly applied concern for the health of the young. In my fifth chapter, “Muscle and Greens,” I look at the history behind Popeye and his diet in this context, including a background in related pediatrics, nutritional science, and agriculture, to consider the pugnacious “sailor-man” as an icon for resisting gendered, classed ideologies of diet that Roland Barthes has called the “nutritional rationalizing” of power. Through Popeye’s example spinach becomes a lure for children, an appealing commodity that makes power seem consumable. Agency canned for kids.

Explicitly referring back to my first chapter’s focus on artificial life and agency, I will conclude with “Flesh and Blood,” an investigation of hunger as a weakness of the flesh along with countering representations of resisting hunger in order to idealize potential power—from medieval golems and blood-sucking vampires to Oz’s early industrial cyborgs and Scott Westerfeld’s “specials” in the *Uglies* series. Such exceptions merely highlight the rule that hunger is a symptom of the oppression of a social body, and likewise, that individual appetites can be exploited. Ultimately, I want my readers to more transparently observe the processes by which consumerism reduces youth agency within the family and the larger social community.