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# Slanting the Holocaust in the Fairy Tale Form: Jean-Claude Grumberg's *The Most Precious of Cargoes*

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**Abstract:** This article analyzes Jean-Claude Grumberg's 2019 Holocaust fairy tale, *The Most Precious of Cargoes*, translated from French. This fairy tale adds to Grumberg's oeuvre of Holocaust fiction, including plays and children's stories. His fairy tale may be his most personal attempt to process his own Holocaust experience, as he includes an appendix with facts about his father and grandfather who died in Auschwitz. Specifically, the fairy tale is approached through an analysis of the fairy tale genre's pairing with the subject of the Holocaust. The article also examines possible readings of such a pairing through a close reading of the tale that analyzes the role of good vs. evil. Published interviews with Grumberg, theory on the fairy tale, and other Holocaust fairy tales establish a view that *The Most Precious of Cargoes* is unique in Holocaust fiction.

**Keywords:** fairy tale; Holocaust; readers

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Tell all the truth but tell it slant—  
Success in Circuit lies  
(Emily Dickinson)

## 1. Introduction

The way the Holocaust is presented matters. Jean-Claude Grumberg spent his career successfully presenting the Holocaust in over forty plays, multiple screenplays, short stories, novels, and children's books. In 1999, he was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Society of Dramatic Authors and Composers. In his eighties, Grumberg wrote a Holocaust fairy tale, *The Most Precious of Cargoes*, published in 2019 in French and translated into English in 2020 by Frank Wynne. This 100-page novella is about the life of a baby girl thrown by her desperate father from a train headed to Auschwitz and adopted by a poor woodcutter and his wife. In this paper, biographical criticism of Grumberg will be used to examine how he connected the events in his life to the events in the tale and to the end matter of the book. Genre criticism will be applied to *The Most Precious of Cargoes* (TMPoC) to explore how the text conforms and deviates from the fairy tale genre, including an examination of the implied reader<sup>1</sup> and the manifestation of good and evil. Overall, this paper explores how one Holocaust survivor, "out of his own grief", tells a Holocaust story and how his use of the fairy tale form creates "something beautiful from the ashes" (Wynne 2022, p. 104).

As a writer, choosing the genre of the fairy tale,<sup>2</sup> a wonder tale involving marvelous elements and occurrences, for the fictional category of TMPoC was natural for Grumberg, as most of his children's books are fairy tales that deal with the Holocaust, and there are fairy tale-like elements in many of his stories and novels.<sup>3</sup> TMPoC is, however, his most mature fairy tale. For the Jewish Grumberg, who spent most of WWII in hiding, TMPoC is his only work to approach Nazi concentration camps so closely and even to enter them. In its English translation by Frank Wynne, TMPoC has even been categorized as an adult fairy tale, a tale that uses fantastical elements and familiar motifs to explore complex,



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mature themes.<sup>4</sup> Fairy tales, whether for children or adults, are a genre that can house a powerful story within their attributions; they are not ordinary, everyday stories, nor are Holocaust ones. Jack Zipes, in his “Introduction” to *When Dreams Came True Classical Fairy Tales and Their Tradition*, explains that fairy tales set out to “conquer concrete terrors through metaphors. . . and provide hope that social and political conditions can be changed” (Zipes 2007, pp. 1–2). The most appealing quality of the fairy tale may be that the “Once Upon a Time” of the fairy tale genre is tantamount to a promise that good will conquer evil and end with “Happily Ever After”. Adults and children are attracted to the hopefulness of the genre, as Grumberg is, considering his return to it time and time again. Any literary genre can be hopeful, but Grumberg’s early life circumstances may have led him to the fairy tale in an elusive but tantalizing search for a “happily ever after” to the Holocaust.

Grumberg’s story begins in 1939 in Paris, France, where he was born to working-class Jewish parents, a French mother and a Romanian father. His mother, his brother, and he were nearly deported in the 1942 Vél’ d’Hiv roundup. His mother explained to Grumberg that “the trucks were full and that he [Nazi officer] wanted to go back to bed. . . That’s what saved us” (Herzberg 2023). Despite escaping the roundup, Grumberg reveals that “the children who survived the Vél’ d’Hiv roundup ceased to be children that day” (Herzberg 2023). Then, on 26 February 1943, his father and blind grandfather were deported on a train headed to Auschwitz; they were never heard from again. Grumberg and his brother were sent into hiding in the Free Zone of Moissac in an institution that housed Jewish children, and later, they stayed in the home of a generous family in Vercors. He reunited with his seamstress mother in 1945 in Paris; at that time, his mother still held out hope that her husband had survived. Not surprisingly, most of the themes of Grumberg’s plays are of the “broken family” during life after WWII (Wolitz 2014, p. 18), and the broken family is also a theme of *TMPoC*; however, *TMPoC* also contains the creation of a new family, the counterpart necessary in the optimistic fairy tale genre and the reason Grumberg may have been drawn to the genre.

All of Grumberg’s works deal with or brush up against the Holocaust, but *TMPoC* looks further back than any of Grumberg’s other works, taking readers to a World War II transport train like the one his father and grandfather were on. He admitted dealing with people who questioned his focus on “old history”. His reply is: “I have never tried either to forget or remember [the Shoah]. It’s there, that’s all” (Leyris 2019). Here, Grumberg implies that the Holocaust is ever present in his conscious and subconscious mind. It is reasonable, then, to assume that Grumberg thought many times about his father on a cargo train headed to Auschwitz, and Grumberg may have even imagined himself on such a cargo train headed to a concentration camp. These assumptions make sense, considering that he knew a cargo train would have been his fate had he not been in hiding. Those horrible thoughts play out in his fairy tale, borrowed from the German Brothers Grimm (Jacob and Wilhelm), about a baby girl and a baby boy, a set of twins, one living thanks to the generosity of a woodcutter and his wife, and one dying in the gas chambers “in the pit of hell” (p. 31). In the fairy tale genre, one twin must survive for good to prevail, and this surviving twin may be Grumberg’s way of easing his “what if” fears about his narrowly escaped fate and even recreating the childhood he says he lost in the war.

Grumberg, since he was only three when he went into hiding, is also part of the “generation after” that bears “the transmitted memories of the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before”, as per Marianne Hirsch’s post-memory theory (Hirsch 1997, p. 127). As part of the generation after, Grumberg carries the trauma of his father’s train ride and death. W. Mieder, an expert in folklore, believes that fairy tales reveal “the frustrations of adults, who to this day long for a better and fairer world, where people can finally live happily ever after” (Mieder 1987, p. 91). Therefore, it is not simply an interest in children’s literature that drives adults to read or write fairy tales; instead, it is, as mentioned previously, the need to believe in a happy and fair ending. Readers and writers seek fulfillment in these tales by escaping the troublesome world, even for a while. In *TMPoC*, Grumberg creates mythology, “imaginatively elucidating [his] origins” as those

of a child with a surviving father, the “hero”, as the tale refers to him (Codde 2009, p. 43). The choice of the fairy tale genre is akin to a message from Grumberg that his Holocaust story does not belong in a traditional autobiographical telling but in a fairy tale that can reveal a kind of truth that is “truer than the truth”.

## 2. The Most Unlikely Pairing of Them All

This “truer than truth” idea by American author Tim O’Brien can serve as the framework for understanding *TMPoC*. In a short story about his experiences in the Vietnam War, O’Brien explains that “You can’t even tell a true war story. Sometimes it’s just beyond telling” (O’Brien 1998). He argues, “A true war story does not depend upon that kind of truth. . . . A thing may happen and be a total lie; another thing may not happen and be truer than the truth” (O’Brien 1998). O’Brien was compelled to write fictional short stories in his *The Things They Carried* (O’Brien 1990) that were based on his experiences; he felt these better expressed his own life. O’Brien wrote autofiction, a genre of literature that combines elements of autobiography and fiction, letting a writer fully express his or her story without the confines of facts and facts alone. Authors of autofiction are genre benders with a story to tell. They choose autofiction because of a lack of facts, an unwillingness to relive their experiences through the first person, and/or an artistic calling toward fictional genres that can contain more literary language. These authors are more interested in capturing the essence of their experiences and/or their feelings about their experiences. Nicola King’s concept of *Nachträglichkeit* (belatedness) is relevant here, as it suggests the complications of memory as a direct avenue to the past (King 2000, p. 11). In terms of the Holocaust, the faultiness of memory does not reduce the pressure on those writing about the Holocaust to be truthful and provide facts, nor the importance of these tasks. However, autofiction may be the correct category for most autobiographies and memoirs, as James Young, in his work *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust*, suggests that the line between fact and fiction is a “winding border that tends to bind these two categories as much as it separates them, allowing each side to dissolve occasionally into the other” (Young 1990, p. 52).

A traditional autobiography by Grumberg would include those experiences that he participated in during the Holocaust: the near roundup at Vél’ d’Hiv, his time in hiding in the Free Zone, reuniting with his mother, and trying to carry on with life after WWII. Many of these memories would be difficult for the young Grumberg to remember in any detail, making them, as Young suggests, a winding border between fact and fiction. His plays are an example of that winding border and may be considered autofiction themselves. Grumberg is what Susan Rubin Suleiman calls the “1.5 generation”, child survivors of the Holocaust who were there during the Nazis’ reign of terror but were too young to have an adult understanding of the events (Suleiman 2002, p. 277). The haziness or lack of memories of the 1.5 generation does not prevent WWII from being part of their story. The lack of knowledge about Grumberg’s father’s specific experiences on the cargo train and at Auschwitz does not preclude those events from being part of Grumberg’s story either. The unknown is part and parcel of the Holocaust survivor’s story. Grumberg’s emotions cannot be definitively classified in this analysis. Still, the near miss of his deportation, his separation from his parents, and the disappearance of his father and grandfather had to be traumatic for the young Grumberg. Thus, all the unknowns of Grumberg’s past combined with the trauma of his past circumstances set the stage for Grumberg to focus on the historical event of the Holocaust in writings that do not fall under the strict category of nonfiction.

Maria Jesus Martinez-Alfaro explains that “Holocaust literature comes down to. . . a search for meaning that is also a search for medium to tell the story of what happened, thus defying the view of the Holocaust as unspeakable and therefore unrepresentable” (Martinez-Alfaro 2020, p. 39). Holocaust survivors have used nonfictional and fictional mediums to tell their stories. They have been successful in writing about the arguably unspeakable events and emotions of the Holocaust in nonfictional genres, such as autobiographies, memoirs, published diaries, essay collections, psychological texts, etc.<sup>5</sup> They have also been drawn to

fictional mediums, including novels, poems, short stories<sup>6</sup>, and plays, as in Grumberg's case<sup>7</sup>, to express the emotions of the Holocaust. Grumberg's search for a medium often led him to the more unconventional genre, in terms of writing about the Holocaust, of the fairy tale. Many generation-after survivors<sup>8</sup> have written unconventionally about the Holocaust in works such as fantasy novels and graphic<sup>9</sup> works, like *Maus* (Spiegelman 1986) by Art Spiegelman. These unconventional works are becoming conventional for post-generation-after survivors. As Phyllis Lassner explains, "Holocaust writers attest to the need for non-realistic forms of narration to provide coherence and accessibility to their otherwise unfathomable stories" (Lassner 2014, p. 168).

Many Holocaust writers chose to use a traditional form like the novel and then infuse it with fairy tale qualities, such as the novels by Lois Lowry (*Number the Stars*, 1989), Elie Wiesel (*The Forgotten*, 1992), Jonathan Safran Foer (*Everything is Illuminated*, 2002), and Markus Zusak (*The Book Thief*, 2005). There are also works designated as Holocaust adult or young adult fairy tales, like Jane Yolen's *Briar Rose: A Novel of the Holocaust* (Yolen 1992) and Louise Murphy's *The True Story of Hansel and Gretel: A Novel of War and Survival* (2003). *TMPoC*, however, reads much more like a traditional fairy tale than a novel. It is novella-length with a distilled use of words. It uses epithets and includes a storyteller. It is both a fairy tale for children and adults. *TMPoC* evokes wonder, as its genre requires, but may even work to wake up readers from their comatose<sup>10</sup> view of the Holocaust. These qualities, combined with Grumberg's history, make *TMPoC* a unique work. Grumberg writes of the tale's hero: "Having vomited up his heart and choked down his tears, set about shaving and shaving the thousands of heads that arrived on cargo trains from the farthest reaches of the countries occupied by the murderous devourers of yellow stars" (Grumberg 2020, p. 43). This passage is an example of how *TMPoC* is both metaphorical and historical. The unsayable has become sayable, and after reading this work, readers' understanding of the Holocaust is very likely deepened.

Still, the Holocaust and the fairy tale might seem the most unlikely pairing of them all. One is fictional with a happily ever after; the other is factual with the genocide of millions. Anna Hunter, in her article "Tales from Over There", argues that the fairy tale is an "ill-fitting frame" for the Holocaust with its reductivist frame of suffering and redemption in terms of the "individuality of each survivor's narrative" (Hunter 2013, p. 73). Unfortunately, the time for the individual voice of the Holocaust, which Hunter argues is preferable, has passed, as almost all of the survivors have passed away, and even though the fairy tale genre is reductivist in its very nature, with its villain and hero dichotomy leading to a happily ever after, that reductivism is an asset in terms of remembering the broad emotions of the event and distinguishing good from evil. Most importantly, as American writer Neal Shusterman argues, any genre is welcome as it keeps the Holocaust memory alive with "a constant light shined upon it, from as many different angles as we can" (Shusterman 2023, "Introduction").

It is, however, hard to disagree with Anna Hunter's point that Holocaust literature does "not even come close" to the Holocaust (Hunter 2013, p. 7). However, Codde, in his *Transmitted Holocaust Trauma*, believes that, in particular, "fairy tales and myths provide the narrative frames for the otherwise unnarratable trauma" (Codde 2009, p. 64). When a fairy tale frames the Holocaust, it is understood by most as just that, a frame, not the complete picture. Codde argues "that well-known myths and fairy tales are used as substitute narratives that facilitate both the reader's and the narrator's engagement with an unknowable past by framing it within the familiar" (Codde 2009, p. 64). As most read *TMPoC*, they will be familiar with the fairy tale character of the Woodcutter, also named the Huntsman, from "Hansel and Gretel", "Snow White", and "Little Red Riding Hood". Upon reflection, readers may remember that this character must save the protagonist, but in some cases, he initially makes terrible choices or is morally challenged. When readers encounter the archetypal Poor Woodcutter of *TMPoC*, the adopted father of the Precious Cargo (the baby girl twin), they are invited to use their foreknowledge of his characteristics to help them understand him and the narrative.

For the 1.5, second, and later generations, the Holocaust was their fairy tale, as Anna Karpf, a second-generation survivor, explains, “Other children were presumably told stories about goblins, monsters, and wicked witches; we learned about Nazis. . .and no fictional evil could have possibly rivaled the documentary version” (Karpf 1996, p. 94). Grumberg did not need to imagine evil monsters in his fairy tales; he could use the ones that killed his father and grandfather. Marita Vaul-Grimwood, in her *Holocaust Literature of the Second Generation*, argues that when “powerful stories of the Holocaust enter children’s frame of reference as they are struggling to differentiate lived and fictional experiences, the stories seem to be particularly hard to categorize” (Vaul-Grimwood 2007, p. 86). This is not to suggest that the adult Grumberg cannot distinguish fact from fiction; it is to suggest that, in many ways, the Holocaust entered his psyche as a real fairy tale. It is no wonder he is still writing about the Holocaust in this genre near the end of his life.

Specific attributes of the fairy tale may help readers interact with the essential events of the Holocaust. Part of the narrative frame of fairy tales is that they are fictional tales. As Codde argues, “fictional narratives provide a shield against accusations of insensitivity or inappropriateness that may be engendered by a more realistic attempt” (Codde 2009, p. 68). By writing a fairy tale, Grumberg does not have to appropriately speak about the realities of his father and grandfather being transported to a concentration camp, nor does he have to worry about getting the facts straight. He is not trying to make a factual telling of the Holocaust, and this is beneficial to his ability to express the emotions of the Shoah and readers’ ability to understand them. This is well established; a reader like Ernst Van Alphen (1997) explains that his study of Holocaust fiction, not Holocaust history, “finally succeeded in calling [his] attention to this apocalyptic moment in human history” (Van Alphen 1997, p. 3). Facts do not always contain their corresponding emotions. For readers, Holocaust facts can be shocking and often alienating. For writers, the facts can form tight restraints. In the fairy tale frame, a story can be stage-managed by a writer to express his or her emotions more accurately than straightforward facts. Such a rendition is often a better guarantee that those same emotions are drawn forth in readers, offering them a better understanding of the Holocaust. In his essay “The Sleeping Beauty”, Ralph Harper writes: “And even though to tell a story is to tell some kind of untruth, one often suspects that what seems to be untruth is really a hidden truth” (Harper 1985, p. 11). The fairy tale’s fictional frame brings forth the hidden truth of the Holocaust.

The fairy tale is not one of complicated language and dense passages of text. In a fairy tale, readers experience the stunning simplicity and immediacy of the story. This kind of tone honors the Holocaust, as fairy tales reside in a liminal space between the ordinary and sacred realms. The fairy tale frame, according to Jack Zipes, can lead to the highest feelings of “astonishment” and “admiration, fear, awe, and reverence” (Zipes 2006, pp. 50–51). The unsayable roadblock is best bypassed by simple language in the present tense. The result from Grumberg is a beautiful tale. Brett Ashley Kaplan (2007) argues in *Unwanted Beauty* that the indisputable beauty of many fictional depictions of the Holocaust “encourages us to see the complexity of the Shoah in ways that conventional works fail to achieve” (Kaplan 2007, p. 3). In describing the selection process at camps, Grumberg writes in *TMPoC*: “The remainder—the rejects: the elderly, the men, the women, the children, the infirm—vanished into thin air or the boundless depths of the desolate Polish sky” (Grumberg 2020, p. 32). Grumberg, in speaking about the crematorium, does not write specifically about the smoke of burned bodies but about how the victims were eradicated so entirely that they seemed to vanish magically; this is how it must have felt for those left behind, and this is the emotion that the simplistic, metaphorical language of this fairy tale relates. The fairy tale genre is not the place for specific brutal facts. Grumberg uses the wonder of the genre, including euphemisms like “slipped the surly bounds of earth” (Grumberg 2020, p. 32) in place of cremated and turned to smoke and ash, not to protect readers but to give connotations to the brutal facts, to make them representable. The Holocaust fairy tale does not pretend that death and destruction are not a part of the Holocaust, but it does not let those occurrences drown the memory of the Holocaust in negativity; the use of emotional words in a fairy

tale keeps the Holocaust in that liminal space. In other words, the facts of the Holocaust are heavy and opaque, and it is essential to express the reality and brutality of the Holocaust; however, when simple, emotional language is used in a fairy tale, the facts become concepts, light and transparent, imaginatively evoking the horror of the Holocaust and the beauty of it. Like Grumberg's, imaginative evocations are not aggressive; they float into view. The Holocaust is like looking directly into the sun, the best and worst of humanity, but Grumberg's *TMPoC* offers some shade from which he can write the otherwise unsayable, and readers can process such extremes.

The fairy tale usually includes magic to move beyond the unsayable nature of the Holocaust. In the fairy tale framework, the bounds of reality do not constrain the Holocaust. With the fairy tale genre, Grumberg chose a "universe where anything can happen at any time" (Zipes 2006, pp. 50–51). The Holocaust is an "I know how this is going to end" situation. A Holocaust fairy tale does not present as a *fait accompli*; it temporarily rewrites history. For example, in another magical genre, magical realism, Alice Hoffman wrote in her Holocaust novel *The World We Knew* about a golem that protects a young girl during WWII. Unlike real Jewish people, the protagonist is protected by this powerful creature formed from the earth.<sup>11</sup> With a magical genre, like a fairy tale or work of magical realism, writers can go beyond reality to say something to readers that cannot be fully expressed in the realm of the real. The protagonist's mother conjuring the golem and the golem fighting hard to protect her ward from the Nazis more fully expresses to readers what the words "protection from the Nazis was an extraordinary feat" do not. Fairy tales, like all fiction, require readers to suspend their disbelief and have poetic faith that the narrative is true, allowing them to interact openly with the Holocaust. Magic, however, works differently in *TMPoC*; in this fairy tale, Grumberg does not include enchantments or mythical beings. Readers do not have to suspend disbelief in giant golems or fairies. The absence of magic in the traditional sense suggests that the atrocities and the scope of human goodness during the Holocaust require the same kind of suspension of disbelief as magic does. Most who think or read about the Holocaust in fiction or nonfiction must suspend their disbelief because the Holocaust is so hard to believe; people are that bad and that good.

Thus, a Holocaust fairy tale does not necessarily need magical elements. It is enough that a family would be put on a train and sent to a camp to be killed for their religion, that a baby could survive being tossed from a train, that a nearly starving woman would risk all to save a child, and that her anti-Semitic husband would sacrifice his life to save that child. This tale requires what magic requires from readers in most fairy tales: a logical acceptance of astonishing events. Grumberg bypasses the unsayable and unrepresentable nature of the Holocaust by not using magic in a genre that allows for magic. The events in *TMPoC* are unconventionally magical because they realistically show humanity's shockingly unbelievable evilness and goodness.

Holocaust fairy tales do not meet the standards of historical fact, but in many ways, they "have contributed to the shift of critical emphasis from "the unsayable" to the "sayable"" (Glowacka 2012, p. 11). Grumberg uses the fairy tale to frame and present the unsayable emotions of the Holocaust, and in doing so, he is contributing to an even more significant shift in Holocaust remembering from the unlistenable to the listenable.

### 3. Readers' Role: Remembering, Understanding, and Honoring

Robert Eaglestone argues that genre is not only a way of writing but also a way of reading (Eaglestone 2004, p. 6). The relationship between readers and Holocaust literature is particularly complex. For instance, Holocaust testimony, as Eaglestone notes in *Holocaust and the Postmodern*, resists "the very strong and often taken-for-granted power of identification" between the survivor and the reader (Eaglestone 2004, p. 39). This resistance challenges the assumption that readers can quickly identify with or fully comprehend the experiences described in a text. It underscores the singularity and extremity of the Holocaust, which defies complete understanding for those who have not experienced it firsthand. The refusal to allow identification highlights the limitations of empathy when

confronting trauma of such magnitude. Despite the reader's efforts to engage with the testimony, an insurmountable gap remains between the survivor's lived reality and the reader's attempt to comprehend it. As a result, reading Holocaust testimony involves not just an encounter with shared suffering but also a recognition of the difficulty of grasping the full scope of what occurred. In contrast, Holocaust fiction creates a different reading experience. The gap between the reader's understanding and the characters' experiences is narrower precisely because the characters are fictional. Georges Poulet describes this phenomenon as "a falling away of the barriers" between the reader and fiction, resulting in the reader being "inside it" (Poulet 1970, p. 57). This narrowing effect may be even more pronounced when the fictional genre is a fairy tale, which tends to be more inviting. Fairy tales often feature archetypal characters—simple, universal figures representing broader human traits such as innocence, evil, courage, and greed. Their universality allows readers to identify with the characters more easily. When reading Holocaust nonfiction, readers generally acknowledge that they cannot fully understand a survivor's experience; they see their role as witnesses, bearing witness to the events through their reading. In fairy tales, however, readers are more inclined to identify with the hero or heroine, sharing their trials and triumphs. Sabrina Ora Mark, in "Cracked Fairy Tales and the Holocaust", compares fairy tale themes to the "reflection of the human gaze" (Mark 2018, p. 4). Fairy tales invite readers to explore the depths of their psyche, encouraging readers to become part of the narrative.

As in most fairy tales, an unnamed, self-aware storyteller guides the reader. In *TMPoC*, the third-person omniscient Storyteller begins, "Once upon a time", but then shortly after brings readers into the narrative by speaking directly to them: "No, no, no, fear not, this isn't *Hop O' My Thumb*. Far from it. Like you, I hate that mawkish fairy tale" (Grumberg 2020, p. 1). This fairy tale is not your usual fairy tale; the Storyteller reassures readers. This Holocaust tale is far from the exaggerated or childish sentimental *Hop O' My Thumb* that the storyteller dismisses. The Storyteller sets readers up to take this story seriously by confirming the tale has a historical setting: "Yes, yes, yes, the World War" (Grumberg 2020, p. 2). This act of reassurance and engagement signals that this fairy tale is not the typical fantastical story but a story with historical authenticity. The storyteller is interested in the readers and their understanding of the story. The Storyteller's self-awareness indicates a keen interest in guiding readers' perceptions by building a rapport as a trusted narrator and by addressing the readers directly and expressing a shared distaste for traditional tales' "mawkish" elements. This approach is crucial in helping readers navigate the complexity of a Holocaust narrative presented in a fairy tale format. It creates an environment where readers are encouraged to take the story seriously, recognizing that, despite the familiar structure, the content will challenge them to engage with history in a deeply personal and reflective manner.

In *TMPoC*, the Storyteller continues to address the reader throughout the tale, mainly in the form of rhetorical questions that reveal the mindset of the characters. While on the cargo train, the biological father of the twins, the hero, struggles mentally to find a way to save his family; he asks himself: "What could he do? What could he do?" (Grumberg 2020, pp. 14–15). When the desperate hero accepts that his wife does not have enough milk for both twins, he chooses one twin randomly, determined to give the unchosen baby enough to eat and the chosen one a chance off the train with a kind stranger. The hero's agonizing decision is a compelling moment that gives texture and serves as a counterpoint to Holocaust testimonials, memoirs, and autobiographies in which similar things happened. In some cases, it may also challenge readers to wonder about the countless untold nonfictional stories of the Holocaust. The storyteller explains:

He felt powerless and helpless; he no longer knew what to do. He could not simply stand by and do nothing, he had to reassume his role, he had to find a solution. . . Two days they had been traveling already. The smell, the unbearable stench. The bucket in the corner of the wagon and the shame, the collective shame. . . First they had been reduced to nothing, then to less than nothing, until

there was nothing human left in them, so be it. He had his duty to his children, he thought as he watched them suckle at their mother's dry breast; he had to find a solution" (Grumberg 2020, pp. 12–14).

This scene may evoke feelings of desperation in readers, frantically searching their minds for a solution and then tortured by their historical knowledge that no solution will guarantee the twins' safety. Readers are also connecting to the Holocaust experience broadly as they may think about the emotional and physical hell of being on a train bound for a concentration camp and those who decided to jump or toss a loved one from a train.<sup>12</sup>

Sometimes, the readers are directly asked questions about the state of mind of a character. As the hero fights to stay alive at the end of the war, the Storyteller asks readers: "How did he find the strength to stand, to walk, and walk, and carry on walking? Had the song of the nightingale been enough to kindle the thought that his daughter, his beloved, unknown little daughter might also have survived?" (Grumberg 2020, p. 84). Giving up is not the hero's path, and readers may experience the hero's spirit when asked these questions. The most heroic act is the first time the hero finds his daughter (the Precious Cargo) directly after the war. As he wanders, he stumbles across the happy and contented Woodcutter's Wife and his young daughter selling cheese. The Storyteller turns to readers with questions the hero asks himself, but that readers are also expected to answer: "Why reveal himself? Why upset the balance? What did he have to offer his own daughter?" The hero steps up and makes a decision that takes a "superhuman effort mingled with joy and sorrow" (Grumberg 2020, p. 93). He "tore himself away" (Grumberg 2020, p. 93). Readers may try to turn back to the child, but the hero "strode off quickly" (Grumberg 2020, p. 93). Readers are schooled in what it means to make a hero's sacrifice. When the Storyteller spotlights readers with questions, many readers may experience the Holocaust as a character in the tale, asking themselves if they are heroic enough to have walked away.

These moments of daring decision-making punctuate the text, opening a spot for readers in the character's place. Readers may stand with the Woodcutter's Wife as she "blocks" the path of her anti-Semitic Woodcutter husband, who tries to return the baby to the woods near the train where the Woodcutter's Wife found her (Grumberg 2020, p. 27). She tells him that he will have to throw her "under the wheels of the cargo train" if he dares to do so to the baby wrapped in a prayer shawl (Grumberg 2020, p. 27). Readers can be brave with the Woodcutter's Wife again as she ventures into a forbidden part of the forest to find milk for the Precious Cargo. "No one ever comes to gather wood" in that part of the forest, but the "petrified" poor Woodcutter's Wife is determined that the baby will not starve (p. 36). If successful, these situations in the tale remind readers of all the bravery that occurred during the Holocaust, encouraging them to honor those real souls while reading about these fictional ones.

Fairy tales, then, possess all the elements in their language, characters, and plot that implicitly presuppose what Umberto Eco describes as the 'model reader' (Eco 1979). In the context of fairy tales, a model reader engages with the story in a way that allows the tale's moral to resonate and take root. *A model reader of a Holocaust fairy tale is expected to reflect on the moral implications without questioning or resisting the narrative's intent.* The story can then guide readers toward a deeper understanding of the historical and moral gravity of the Holocaust. Judith Fetterley's concept of the "resistant reader" involves a critical approach that questions or challenges a text's assumptions (Fetterley 1978); this kind of reading is not conducive when engaging with the Holocaust fairy tale *TMPoC*, which aims to preserve and honor the memory of those who suffered, as well as foster understanding and compassion. Overall, the dramatic scenes of *TMPoC* are meant to bring the Holocaust to the present moment for readers, making it harder for them to push these scenes away as sad history.

#### 4. Two Sides: Good and Evil

A Holocaust fairy tale teaches its lesson through the actions of good and evil characters, usually clear-cut in fairy tales. Fairy tales invite readers to consider the implications of



these good and evil actions. Not surprisingly, the Holocaust fairy tale *TMPoC* contains good characters, like the biological and adoptive mother of the Precious Cargo, and strictly evil characters, like the “Devourers of Yellow Stars”, responsible for the death of the hero’s wife and son. This fairy tale has pre-assigned these good and evil roles. Questions about the complexity of evil, in terms of understanding for those indoctrinated with anti-Semitism, do not fit the conversation put forth by this tale. This Holocaust tale tells readers that during the Holocaust, there was very clearly a right side and a wrong side.

Mothers are strictly good in *TMPoC*. The Precious Cargo’s biological mother, Dinah, struggles to feed her twins. Her life ends a short time later when the Storyteller reveals that in the gas chamber, she slips “the surly bonds of earth and reached the heavenly limbo promised to the innocent” (Grumberg 2020, p. 32). The Precious Cargo’s adopted mother, the Woodcutter’s Wife is also good; she never wavers in her commitment to the baby, and from the first night she finds the baby girl, she “sleeps the sleep of the Just. . .high above the Eden bestowed upon the fortunate, far above, far above, she in the garden reserved for gods and for mothers” (Grumberg 2020, p. 22). The Woodcutter’s Wife can even see the goodness in her Woodcutter husband, which is not yet revealed to readers. The Woodcutter’s Wife has the steadfast vision of the Woodcutter as the baby’s loving father; “She will be my joy and yours”, she declares even as she is banished to the woodshed. The Woodcutter’s Wife does not falter, and her goodness is further emphasized by her patience and faith in her husband. In *TMPoC*, she serves as a symbol of maternal love and how it can transcend cultural, racial, and religious divisions. This fairy tale honors mothers, and they are firmly and unquestioningly rooted in the good side of life. They are the ones who convey the idea that, even during the darkest times, the nurturing and protective qualities associated with motherhood can become acts of profound resistance, creating a bridge between hope and survival.

Although there is very clearly a right and wrong way to act, good and evil are much more complicated in the father characters of the hero (biological father) and the Woodcutter (the adoptive father). The hero in *TMPoC* acts in ways that, in a vacuum, are not traditionally good, and the Woodcutter starts on the evil side and changes to good. Through these complex fathers, more than the mothers, the real emotions of the Holocaust are expressed to readers, and good and evil are no longer straightforward concepts in children’s fairy tales.

Abandoning one’s child is not intrinsically an act of goodness; however, the hero, the biological father, turns away from his daughter twice, tossing her from a train and walking away from her after the war. These acts do not appear good, but both are sacrificial acts for the greater good. They are also emotionally challenging for the hero, highlighting them as all the more good. The Storyteller even reveals the hero’s regret and doubt about tossing his daughter out of the train. His wife never speaks to him again, and he never holds his son again; a short time later, they are separated forever. The hero, who is labeled painfully as the “ex-father of the twins”, is tormented by his decision to toss his daughter off the train, asking himself: “Why, why, why that frantic, fatal gesture? Why not accompany his wife and their two children to the end, to the ends of this journey” (Grumberg 2020, p. 81). The hero’s doubts do not diminish the goodness in his actions; instead, they make him all the more heroic. As he questions himself, readers are urged to see him as vulnerable and desperate to believe he has done the right thing. The hero could not be self-assured about tossing his daughter from a train; confidence would have made him unrelatable and unlikable. The hero’s choice is not presented as a mistake, and it is especially not presented as evil. The biological father is the hero despite his doubts and “in spite of himself” (Grumberg 2020, p. 43). If they listen, the moral message to readers is that actions cannot be judged in a vacuum. The moral framework shifts in extreme circumstances; what is typically evil or wrong may become necessary for survival or resistance. In *TMPoC*, readers are prompted to evaluate goodness and evilness not by their inherent rightness or wrongness but by their necessity and the potential outcomes they could achieve.

In *TMPoC*, one can turn away from evil and become good. Evil is presented as a choice, as seen in the Poor Woodcutter, the adoptive father. In his *Answer to Job* (1952), Carl

Jung, the Swiss psychiatrist, attempted to clarify his views about evil and good and was convinced that evil cannot be separated from good. For Jung, the conscious part of the individual only becomes a whole with its dark shadow, so evil is integrated with good, making an object a whole (Jung 1977, pp. 355–475). In this sense, the Woodcutter is the most whole character; he shows the most important element of goodness, that it is a choice. This is no subtle message about the Holocaust or humanity; we all have evil in us, but we can choose which side of ourselves to allow to dominate.

The Woodcutter starts out as evil as any fairy tale monster and sleeps “the sleep of the unjust” (Grumberg 2020, p. 46). He hates Jewish people and labels them, and by connection, the Precious Cargo as “The Heartless”. He tries to bully his wife with his beliefs: “Don’t you know that to shelter the heartless is forbidden on pain of death? They are the ones who killed God” (Grumberg 2020, p. 25). The Woodcutter, at first, cannot even see a baby. He sees a heartless creature devoid of purity and innocence. His hatred-fueled labeling dehumanizes Jews, making it easier for him to devalue their lives. The words of the Woodcutter, especially the epithet of the Heartless, as well as his actions, reveal the Woodcutter’s evilness and, in turn, suggest, not so subtly, to readers the evilness of Nazis, the “bureaucracy of death” (Grumberg 2020, p. 31).

The Woodcutter’s transformation is so beautiful that it speaks volumes about those who chose love over hate during the Holocaust.<sup>13</sup> It is a good character, his wife, who must show him that the heartless have a heart by catching his “calloused paw” and laying it on the Precious Cargo’s chest, whispering: “Can you feel? Can you feel? Can you feel the tiny beating heart?... The heartless have a heart. The heartless have a heart like you and me” (Grumberg 2020, p. 48). The Woodcutter roars with denial, but the Storyteller tells readers that on that night, the Woodcutter sleeps “the sleep of the almost just” (Grumberg 2020, p. 50). The days progress in the narrative, and the Woodcutter’s heart softens until “he too called the heartless thing his own little cargo” (Grumberg 2020, p. 51). The Woodcutter is now good, and he brims with joy at the Precious Cargo’s first steps: “Oh Mother! Come! Come and See! Come and See!” (Grumberg 2020, p. 52). His brave decision to turn away from the prejudices he was taught about Jewish people and allow himself to love the Precious Cargo highlights his inherent goodness. This transformation is more powerful when contrasted with the depth of his earlier cruelty. While readers are not given insight into the specific inner challenges he faced in making this change, they will likely consider them because of the speed of his transformation. Such a quick shift highlights the undisclosed struggle, and readers are urged to contemplate the intensity and painfulness of confronting deeply ingrained beliefs and redefining one’s sense of self, which rarely happens with such fairy tale speed.

By Chapter 11, the Woodcutter’s evolution to a good character continues outside the family home. The Storyteller highlights the difficulty of speaking up and saying the right thing by calling the Woodcutter in the narrative “*Our* poor Woodcutter” (Grumberg 2020, p. 57). The “our” is in italics, blurring the line between the storyteller and readers. The Storyteller expresses empathy with the Woodcutter and a connection with readers by inviting them to feel a sense of solidarity and shared responsibility for the Woodcutter. Readers are now partners in the Woodcutter’s struggle, which encourages them to reflect on the difficulty of his change. The adjective “poor”, in this case, is not financial but emotional, as the Storyteller wants readers to know that the Woodcutter is in an unenviable position. The Woodcutter makes the thorny, astonishing decision to stand up to his laborer friends who cheer: “To the death of the heartless!” The Woodcutter cannot stay silent and counters calmly with “The heartless have a heart” (Grumberg 2020, p. 57). He is not just a good father at this point but a defender of all Jews; he even repeats the line “The heartless have a heart” in a “thunderous voice that he had never before felt in his throat” (Grumberg 2020, p. 58). His character has become heroic, and he is not done yet. In Chapter 15, he kills the militiamen who come to take his child, ultimately resulting in his death by gunshot. He dies not just as good but as a martyr. His sacrifice is magical, not in the usual fairy tale way that bends reality, but in how human acts of love can be. In *TMPoC*, the ultimate goodness

of the mothers and the complicated goodness of the fathers provide the moral message necessary in any fairy tale about right and wrong, but, more importantly, they send the message that even in a complicated situation like the Holocaust, goodness is available and is the right choice.

### 5. A Happily Ever After?

*TMPoC* is a fairy tale that simultaneously enraptures readers and disquiets them. The tale is written simply and evocatively but is punctuated with factual references to the Holocaust. The fairy tale mood and the Holocaust reality are pairings that let readers enjoy the story's drama while remaining disturbed by its historical tragedy. The first words of the tale, "Once upon a time", are quickly followed by the Storyteller admitting to readers that this tale is indeed set during the World War. The fairy tale is simultaneously in the nebulous "once upon a time" place and in the historical setting of a war.

Chapter 1 does not reference WWII<sup>14</sup> specifically, nor does any chapter, so the fairy tale maintains its elusiveness; however, by Chapter 2, we readers know precisely which war, as the fairy tale Storyteller uncharacteristically provides us with a date: "spring of '42". Most readers also quickly know the slant of this tale as it is revealed that twins were born that year under "a baleful yellow star" and "already registered" (Grumberg, pp. 7, 9). Readers are even given the name of a real street where the twins were born, and readers find out the Jewish family is from Romania and has been interred in Drancy, both real places. A short time later, while on the cargo train, a fellow passenger speaks of the pogrom in Iasi. All these facts in Chapter 2 are followed by the fairy tale mood once again in Chapter 3 as the Woodcutter's Wife thanks the "god of the cargo train" for the Precious Cargo and "feels herself become a mother" (Grumberg 2020, p. 20). This trend continues with chapters of the Jewish father reading more realistically and the chapters with the Woodcutter and his wife reading more like a fairy tale. Overall, the factual details do not break the spell of the fairy tale. However, the seamless blending of facts and otherworldliness does not sustain itself until the tale's end. The fairy tale feeling fades.

Near the end of the tale, when the full name of the Precious Cargo, given to her by the poor Woodcutters, is revealed as Maria Tschekolova, the fairy tale ends. Readers no longer feel submerged in the Holocaust in the abstract. This realism is paralleled at the end of the tale as the Woodcutter's Wife no longer trusts the "gods of the trains", whom she had initially given credit for her Precious Cargo. The Poor Woodcutter's Wife seems to be stepping out of the fairy tale world when she acknowledges that her child's survival "was no thanks to them [gods of the train], it was thanks to the hand that had dropped her from the train into the snow, it was thanks to the righteousness of the man with the rifle and the goat. 'May they blessed,' she said at length" (Grumberg 2020, p. 88). Real people are the focus of her thanks. She has come to be a flesh and blood woman with a flesh and blood child, with a full name, and the Storyteller insists that it is time that readers "allowed" this young Maria to "live her life" (Grumberg 2020, p. 94). The fairy tale spell that let readers abstractly but powerfully experience the brutal and astonishing realities of the Shoah has changed because, after all, the Holocaust must be remembered as real.

And as for the "happily ever after"? Despite locating his grown-up daughter by recognizing her on the *Youth and Joy* magazine cover many years after the war, the Storyteller explains: "We therefore do not know, and we will never know, whether or not he [the father] was finally reunited with his daughter" (Grumberg 2020, p. 96). The future is left to readers' imaginations, but many readers know that most, like Grumberg and his father, did not have a happy reunion. Sadly, this kind of "Happily Ever After" may have been an ending that Grumberg could not even imagine, or he did not want to offer a happy ending when no complete one was the reality for any survivor. Instead, the fairy tale ends more like a cautionary tale with a warning about the existence and consequences of evil. On some book covers, the tale is even labeled as a fable<sup>15</sup>—a narrative more concerned with conveying a moral lesson than providing a sense of closure and happiness. The allegorical

label is also relevant to *TMPoC* as the characters and settings within the story serve as symbols that help convey the moral message of compassion and empathy.

Overall, this shift away from a traditional “Happily Ever After” encourages readers to reflect on the complexities of life when evil temporarily prevails. The focus becomes less on fantasy fulfillment and reuniting the father and daughter and more on imparting wisdom against particular mindsets and behaviors. The transformation away from a fairy tale adds depth and realism to *TMPoC*, emphasizing that life’s challenges, such as the Holocaust, do not always lead to straightforward or happy resolutions but instead offer valuable lessons that one must heed.

## 6. Peritext Influence

The fading of the fairy tale feeling at the end of the main text continues in the post-peritext<sup>16</sup> materials of *TMPoC*. No poetic faith is needed when reading these pieces. Jack Zipes explains that in fairy tales, “The ending is actually the true beginnings” (Zipes 1988, p. 10). The end pieces of *TMPoC*, the peritext materials, are unusual additions to a fairy tale, and they are the beginning of a new way to understand the main text. *TMPoC* has a fictional “Epilogue” and a nonfictional appendix, “The Appendix for Lovers of True Stories”. Specifically, these peritext pieces urge readers to change their understanding of the main text as a fairy tale that exists only in the imagination. These pieces also start a conversation about what it means to make a folkloric tale from the Holocaust.

The “Epilogue” is a metafictional piece that argues that stories can shape our understanding of reality. The relationship of the “Epilogue” to the main text, its intratextual task, is to legitimize the story. In the “Epilogue”, the Storyteller’s omniscient voice continues with an emphatic denial that the tale is true, which emphasizes the truth of the Holocaust and its evil realities even more. The Storyteller’s questions imply that many readers will have already connected the tale to the Holocaust: “You want to know if this is a true story? A True story? Of course not, absolutely not” (Grumberg p. 97). The Storyteller affirms this work as fictitious, but then there proceeds a long series of disavowals that only the most stubborn and malicious of Holocaust deniers could support:

“There were no cargo trains crossing war-torn continents to deliver urgently their oh-so-perishable cargo. No reunification camps, internment camps, concentration camps, or even extermination camps. No families were vaporized by smoke after their final journey. No hair was shorn, gathered, packaged, and shipped. There were no flames, no ashes, no tears. . .” (Grumberg 2020, p. 97).

Readers with even the most basic fundamental knowledge of the Holocaust are prompted to read the Epilogue as an ironic negationism.<sup>17</sup> History records that all these things happened; thus, readers are directed to connect all that happens in the main text of *TMPoC* to historical facts and the pre-peritext, a standard disclaimer sentence on the copyright page (“This is a work of fiction”) becomes the real fiction. *TMPoC* joins other Holocaust fiction that contributes to the truth. The “Epilogue” ends with the Storyteller explaining to readers what is true: “The one thing that is true, genuinely true. . .the only true thing, truly true, is that little girl—who did not exist—was thrown from the window of a cargo train, out of love and out of despair. . .and a poor woodcutter’s wife—who did not exist—gathered her up, fed her, treasured her and loved her more than anything. More than life itself. There” (Grumberg 2020, p. 99). Now, we readers are told that for the Storyteller, the truth is not in the factualness of the tale but in the people and their genuine emotions, love and despair. It does not matter that this is not a memoir; the Storyteller implies that the most essential part of history is how humans acted and felt; that is how the Holocaust can be understood.

After the “Epilogue”, readers encounter another peritext addition: “The Appendix for Lovers of True Stories”. Despite its creative title, this nonfiction piece is documentary in nature, a factual report with information about three convoys to Auschwitz. The Appendix begins with information about Convoy 45, the one Grumberg’s blind grandfather, Naphtali Grumberg, was on. This convoy left with 778 people, but only two survived.

Next, readers hear about Convoy 49, the one that Grumberg's father, Zacharie Grumberg, was on. Grumberg's facts about the convoys his grandfather and father were on take on the emotions (confusion, despair, humiliation, and desperation) of the train ride in the main text of the fairy tale. Also, on his father's convoy was a baby, Sylvia Menkes, "born on 4 March 1942, and gassed on 4 March 1943, the anniversary of her birth" (Grumberg 2020, p. 101). Only six survived out of thousands on this convoy. Why mention, in addition to his father, that a baby also died? To remind readers that actual babies did die. By giving the information about these convoys, Grumberg is speaking of the Holocaust in a historical, factual way. These historical facts connect to the fairy tale and change it, as the convoy that the hero and his family are on in the fairy tale is the same number as the one his father was on: "Convoy 49" (Grumberg 2020, p. 18). The factual works to validate and enlighten the fiction and vice versa. Lastly, Grumberg explains that *The Memorial for the Deportation of Jews from France*, which lists alphabetically the names of Jews deported from France, serves as a "family vault" for the children of deportees like himself. This memorial is his family vault. He stands for the fictional hero in the main text as a man who has lost part of his family. Grumberg ends the Appendix explaining that on Convoy 64 there were twin girls deported at 28 days old. The implication is that twins like the ones in his story rode trains to concentration camps. These historical twins legitimize the twins in his tale. Grumberg's factual Appendix is disturbing because, by the time readers finish it, the truth of the main text has been substantiated; the myth has died.

## 7. Conclusions

In *TMPoC*, the elemental power of a fairy tale is layered with historical facts. Such a fascinating palimpsest rises to meet the horrors and wonders of the Holocaust, offering readers a fresh understanding through a tale that makes a more vivid impression than one of pure facts. Jean-Claude Grumberg gives testimony to the Holocaust and his family by taking the "beautiful gamble" that is storytelling (Leyris 2019). With a sigh, many of us readers will return from the abyss that is the Holocaust, having survived and possibly even been redeemed by the journey.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The implied reader is Wolfgang Iser's 1970s concept of an imagined, idealized reader that the text seems to be addressing or expecting (Iser 1972).
- <sup>2</sup> A fairy tale is a magical story for children that begins with "Once Upon a Time", ends with "happily ever after", and in between introduces characters that exemplify good and evil. Genre here means a type of written work, such as poetry, novel, short story, etc. Fairy tales like the Grim Brothers' 1812 *Nursery and Household Tales* were initially meant as tawdry stories for adults after the kids went to bed. The Grim Brothers sanitized their tales to market them to children. This was a financial decision.
- <sup>3</sup> Grumberg's plays have been translated to English, the *TMPoC* is his only fairy tale/children's book to be translated to English so far.
- <sup>4</sup> In its English translation by Frank Wynne, *TMPoC* has been categorized as an adult fairy tale and is recommended for older teens and adults. The work is recommended for middle school children and above in its original French version. Some French readers even recommend the book to children above 3rd grade. This change has more to do with American culture than the translation. American parents and educators consider the study of the Holocaust in any form to be a subject for older teens and adults. This may be due to the idea in America that children should be protected from specific examples of evil. The MPAA (Motion Picture Association of America) movie ratings may also be at play here. Although most consider them outdated, they still influence ideas about what is and is not appropriate for children.
- <sup>5</sup> To name a few: Elie Wiesel's *Night*, Anne Frank's *The Diary of Anne Frank*, Primo Levi's *If This is a Man*, Viktor Frankel's *Man's Search for Meaning*.

- <sup>6</sup> *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentleman* is a collection of short stories by Tadeusz Borowski inspired by his own concentration camp experiences.
- <sup>7</sup> *Dreyfus* (1974), *L'Atelier* (1979) and *Zone libre* (1991) form his famous, critically acclaimed trilogy of Holocaust plays.
- <sup>8</sup> Second-generation Holocaust survivors are descendants of Holocaust survivors who have no direct experience with the Holocaust, but were powerfully marked by the event because of the experiences and influence of their older family members.
- <sup>9</sup> *Courage to Dream: Tales of Hope in the Holocaust* (2023) by Neal Shusterman is a recent Holocaust graphic work.
- <sup>10</sup> Fairy tales were written for an adult audience in the 17th century and did not become children's property until the 18th and 19th centuries in Western Europe. (Duncker 2002, p. 226). By the 1930s, fairy tales were addressed solely to children (Kaliambou 2007, p. 53). Adult fairy tales came back around with Anne Sexton's 1971 fairy tale book of poems, *Transformations*, a collection in which she tried to wake "comatose" adults from adulthood (Sexton 1971, p. 1).
- <sup>11</sup> Moreover, Shusterman's graphic novel *Courage to Dream* includes a Gollum who breaks into a concentration camp to save prisoners. In a different chapter, the magic manifests as a porthole to other worlds that opens to suck out the evil Nazis like a vacuum and then reopens in a paradise to welcome the terrorized Jews.
- <sup>12</sup> Nobody knows how many survived this feat, but one new study reveals that 764 Jews reported that they jumped from trains from France, Holland, and Belgium (Haaretz 2014). These were the survivors who spoke up. Others were shot as they jumped, died in the fall, or were hit by an opposite-running train. Still, others never spoke of how they survived due to feelings of guilt about those they left behind on trains and the threat of the Nazis that one escapee would equal death for all those left. Ruth Vander Zee's children's book *Erika's Story* is based on Erika's experience with being tossed from a train. She told her story to Vander Zee: "My mother threw me from the train. She threw me from the train onto a little patch of grass just past a railway crossing. People standing there, waiting for the train to pass, saw me hurled from that cattle car. On her way to death, my mother threw me to life" (Vander Zee 2013, p. 8–9). Erika was taken to a woman, one of the *Righteous among the Nations*, who risked her life to care for her. Erika grew up happily and had a family of her own. The exact number of children thrown from trains will never be known. Like Erika, who never knew her real name or anything about her Jewish family, children tossed from trains were unlikely to find their biological families.
- <sup>13</sup> A change in the Woodcutter's character in fairy tales is familiar, as in the Woodcutter father in *Hansel and Gretel* who welcomes back the children he previously abandoned and the Woodcutter of *Snow White* who decides not to kill the young princess. The Woodcutter from *TMPoC* has a similar drastic change, as he changes from an anti-Semite at the beginning of the tale to a free-thinking, loving father in Chapters 9 and 10.
- <sup>14</sup> The Holocaust is also not mentioned in the text, but at least one of the book covers does mention the Holocaust.
- <sup>15</sup> The Picador 2022 edition has the subtitle: "A Fable of the Holocaust".
- <sup>16</sup> Peritext materials are images or textual elements that surround the main body of the text, named by Gerard Genette in 1991 (Genette and Mclean 1991).
- <sup>17</sup> Negationism, coined by French historian Henry Rousso, refers to politically motivated denial of the Holocaust. This is different than historical revisionism.

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