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The “ Mundys ” Will Never Let You Die. Reproducing Images and Stories of Snow White in Bill Willingham’s *Fables*

Lucia Pozniak et Marie Émilie Walz

- ¹ At the end of volume 2 of Bill Willingham’s comic book series *Fables* (2002-2015), Rose Red explains that her sister Snow White’s miraculous revival after being shot in the head is due to the fact that the “ mundys ” (i. e. non-magical human beings) love her so much that they want her story to be told and retold in books and films. Her statement that they will never let Snow White (and other characters) die accounts for the endless reproduction of fairy-tale plots, protagonists, images, and motifs in traditional and modern media. Indeed, fairy tales are nowadays undergoing a *nouvelle jeunesse* (to refer to the title of this issue), as they are adapted into films, TV series, comic books, video games, photographs, adverts, window displays, theme parks and associated merchandising². Most of these modern *transcreations* give predominance to the visual elements of fairy tales, and Willingham’s comic-book series is no exception. In his definition of “comic books and graphic novels with fairy-tale contents” as “reproductions of well-known stories represented by drawn pictures”, Jack Zipes highlights the prevalence of visual images in the comic-book medium³. In *Fables*, Willingham draws on the popular tradition of Americanised fairy tales (especially Walt Disney’s animated films) and mixes it with another widespread American genre, that of DC and Marvel comic-book superheroes⁴. However, Willingham’s series also knowingly responds to the literary European fairy-tale canon (mainly Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm’s *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*), multiplying retellings of the tales and drawing attention to the relationships between the various characters that inspired them. Taking images and stories of Snow White in *Fables* as cases in point, this article focuses on how Willingham’s comic-book series reproduces, hybridises, and transforms fairy tales visually and textually. In doing so, this article highlights how *Fables* creatively and critically engages with both the visual culture of the American comic book and the

literary tradition of the European fairy tale, thus “mashing-up” these two genres’ inherent reproductive qualities to create new stories and even new fictional worlds.

1. Hybridisation and “Mashing-up”

- 2 The first part of this article explores how fairy-tale types are visually reproduced in *Fables*, taking as examples its heroine Snow White and the two male protagonists who are close to her : Prince Charming, her former husband, and Bigby Wolf, the father of her children. These three characters’ representations on the pages of the comic book draw on attributes, motifs, and colours characteristic of the fairy-tale figures on which they are based, making them unmistakably recognisable for readers familiar with the fairy-tale tradition⁵. However, their representations also visually reference the reception of the fairy-tale in popular culture, especially Disney’s animated films, as well as the comic-book superheroes of mainstream labels DC and Marvel. *Fables’* Snow White thus evokes both Disney’s princess of the same name and DC’s Wonder Woman, while Prince Charming recalls the princes of three Disney films (at least) and DC’s Superman. As for Bigby Wolf, he can be related to Marvel’s Wolverine from the *X-Men* franchise and Hulk from *Avengers*. These three characters in *Fables* are thus visual hybrids, i.e. they are “derived from heterogeneous sources, or composed of different or incongruous elements”⁶. However, because some of the protagonists in *Fables* are actual hybrids⁷, namely “offspring[s] of two animals or plants of different species”⁸, we use the term “mash-up” to refer to the mix of fairy-tale figures and comic-book superheroes. According to John Ladd, a “mash-up” is itself “a hybrid : half creative fiction in its own right, and half criticism or commentary on the original work”⁹. *Fables’* characters are indeed “half creative” individuals inhabiting a new fictional realm, and “half criticism or commentary on the original work[s]” on which they are based. The mashing-up of visual sources in *Fables* allows Willingham and his illustrators¹⁰ to revisit both the Disneyfied fairy tale and the mainstream comic book in the US.
- 3 The terms “hybridity” and “mash-up” are also employed when discussing the combination and adaptability of texts and stories, in particular in the second part of this article. Francisco Vaz Da Silva discusses two levels of hybridity in his analysis of the musical *Into the Woods*, which “describes how the characters from various fairy tales go into the woods in order to fulfil various needs and wishes [, ...] trespass into each other’s plots and establish unexpected relationships”¹¹. The first level, which he coins “inter-plot hybridity”, focuses on the shared feature(s) between the protagonists and plots of various fairy tales. The second concerns “a blurred period of open-ended possibilities in relationships and identities [...] before patterns are set anew”¹². *Fables* builds on both aspects. Specifically, the series shines a light on the protagonists’ common fate of fleeing their “Homelands” (i. e. their respective tales in the form of storyworlds) and finding refuge in the mundy world, establishing a tight-knit Fabletown community despite all their differences, griefs, and grudges. These circumstances allow for endless combinations of stories and characters resulting in the creation of complex identities, relationships, and adventures which evolve over time. Thus, Snow White and Bigby Wolf are paired despite their differences (human vs beast, princess vs pauper) and united “till death do us part”. In addition to being mash-up figures composed of more than one visual reference, Snow and Bigby’s stories are

“ literary mash-up[s] ”¹³ : Snow’s life-story more specifically borrows from the Grimms’ “ Sneewittchen ” and “ Schneeweisschen und Rosenrot ”. According to John Mullan, “ the art of mashing up involves putting together two completely incongruous genres, only to discover that something in the high-cultural original matches the low material with which it is mixed ”¹⁴. Although the fairy-tale genre cannot be qualified as a “ high-cultural original ”, its association with the comic book may at first seem surprising, and yet it reveals that fairy-tale characters and comic-book heroes have in fact more in common than we might think. *Fables* indeed originates in the unique blend between the fairy tale, a long-standing established form of narrative, and the more recent serial genre of the comic book which mixes text and image. With this in mind, we will show how, by recalling the Grimms’ “ Sneewittchen ” and “ Schneeweisschen und Rosenrot ”, Willingham not only reworks these tales as background stories for Snow White and her sister Rose Red, but also fashions a new generation of characters through Snow’s offsprings. In *Fables*, posterity is achieved through new births that in turn generate more stories, which allows the tale to continue and proliferate even after the last page of the issue is turned.

2. Mashing-up Disney with DC and Marvel : Visual Reproductions of Character Types in Fables

- 4 From the beginning of the first issue, *Fables*’ Snow White is clearly a visual mash-up of Disney’s Snow White and DC’s Wonder Woman. As Karin Kukkonen puts it, she is an “ adult version [...] after [her] happy ending ”¹⁵ of the well-known fairy-tale heroine, transformed to fit the present-day New-York-city setting of the comic book. She is endowed with the professional status and responsibilities of a modern working woman. Yet, Snow’s depiction remains in line with traditional iconography. When she first appears in *Fables : Legends in Exile* (volume 1) as the deputy mayor of Fabletown, she is seated behind her desk which carries a nameplate leaving no doubt as to who she is. Even without this hint, however, Snow is utterly recognisable, displaying the characteristics that “ popular cultural memory ”¹⁶ has attributed to this character type after her mother’s wish comes true : her skin is very pale, she wears dark red lipstick, and her hair is raven black. But *Fables*’ Snow White also more specifically evokes the iconic heroine of Disney’s 1937 animated film. Adam Zolkoover remarks that “ [t]hough not a copy of Disney’s rendering, her chin, eyes, and lips are shaped very similarly ”¹⁷, and although her hair is not held by a red bow, it parts on the sides of her forehead in two waves that mirror the hairdo of Disney’s heroine. Perhaps most strikingly, *Fables*’ Snow White wears a turtleneck, whose dark blue shade is almost identical to that of the corset worn by the Disney princess above her yellow skirt as part of her famous look, as also noted by Zolkoover¹⁸. Thus, while Willingham’s character is an adult version of the fairy-tale figure, she nevertheless retains traces of the American visual tradition of fairy tales as conveyed by Disney.
- 5 Unlike Disney’s heroine, however, *Fables*’ Snow White is also eroticised, and as such she recalls DC’s Wonder Woman. Her black hair, which is longer than the Disney character’s, and red lips, which are darker than Snow White’s in the animated film, recall the attributes of the comic-book superheroine, while the colour of Snow’s turtleneck in *Fables* not only evokes the corset of Disney’s Snow White but also Wonder Woman’s iconic blue shorts/skirt. Likewise, Snow’s prominent breasts moulded by her

close-fitting outfit mirror Wonder Woman’s voluptuous figure, as her red and gold top accentuates her generous form. In the last issue of the first volume of *Fables*, as she attends the annual celebration of Fabletown, Snow no longer looks like the Disney princess but more and more like Wonder Woman (see fig. 1). Her black hair is up, she still wears dark red lipstick, as well as an elaborate pearl necklace; she is dressed in a sexy dark blue gown emphasising her curves and leaving her shoulders bare. Interestingly, the 2017 filmic adaptation *Wonder Woman* features a ball scene in which Diana appears in a long blue dress, a shade lighter than Snow’s in *Fables*, which reveals most of her shoulders and clings to her breasts as well, and her black hair is done up in a complicated bun. It may be that just as *Fables*’ Snow White takes after DC’s Wonder Woman, so Wonder Woman in the DC cinematic universe in turn borrows from Snow in *Fables*. At any rate, in Willingham’s fairy-tale comic-book series, Snow White clearly appears as a mash-up character between Disney’s princess and DC’s Amazon, highlighting the visual similarities between these two iconic heroines. There is indeed a striking family resemblance between Disney’s Snow White and DC’s Wonder Woman, both of them modelled from the same ideal of feminine beauty (dark hair, pale skin, red lips). However, these two heroines have radically opposed roles and therefore represent two opposite female stereotypes. Snow White is a child-like damsel in distress, passively waiting in her glass coffin for a prince to wake her up, or as Cristina Bacchilega puts it, the “frozen object of male desire” whose “only possible development is self-destructive reproduction”¹⁹. Wonder Woman, on the contrary, is an active and fully-grown woman, a strong and fierce warrior, who can defend herself and protect others. Despite these differences, they belong to a common universe of references²⁰, which *Fables* capitalises on to create its own adult and eroticised version of the fairy-tale figure, allowing her to become active and to transform her “self-destructive reproduction” into creative reproductions of many protagonists and stories.

6 <Image en attente de droits>

7 Fig. 1 — *Fables : Legends in Exile* 99. © DC Comics (Vertigo).

8 Like Snow White, her former husband Prince Charming is a mash-up between Disney and DC heroes, with a twist. Known only as “Prince Charming”, he is the quintessential fairy-tale prince “from ‘Snow White and the Seven Dwarves,’ ‘Cinderella,’ and ‘Sleeping Beauty’ [who] is shown to be the same person, his multiple marriages explained by multiple divorces”²¹. In *Fables*, Prince Charming was married first to Snow White, whom he cheated on with her sister Rose Red, then to Briar Rose (Sleeping Beauty), and finally to Cinderella. He is also reminiscent of several princes from Disney’s animated films. The shape of his eyes, nose, and mouth, his square jaws, as well as his short haircut all evoke the characteristic features of Snow White’s nameless prince in Disney’s 1937 film, Prince Charming in *Cinderella* (1950), and Prince Phillip in *Sleeping Beauty* (1959). As such, *Fables*’ Prince Charming draws attention to the fact that all these male characters in Disney’s adaptations are character types, not protagonists, some of them even lacking proper names, and all of them looking so much alike that they could be interchangeable²². Furthermore, *Fables*’ Prince Charming also owes part of his visual DNA to DC’s Superman. His facial features (highlighted above) also mirror those of the comic-book superhero, and his sleek black hair recalls Superman’s haircut. Furthermore, at the annual celebration of Fabletown, as Bigby Wolf reveals the outcome of his latest investigation to the Fable community, Prince

Charming's facial expression is very close to the serious, brooding look characteristic of Superman (see fig. 1 above, top right-hand side of the panel). However, far from being the chivalrous prince of a fairy tale or the gentleman-superhero of a comic book, Prince Charming is a womanizer and an unfaithful husband, who shamelessly uses his charms to seduce women and obtain favours. This twist on fairy-tale princes and comic-book superheroes ironises the idealised representation of male character types in American popular and visual culture.

- 9 While Prince Charming is thus turned into a villain of sorts in Willingham's comic-book series, the Big Bad Wolf of fairy tales becomes one of the heroes of *Fables* as he is mashed-up with Marvel's Wolverine and Hulk and transformed into Bigby Wolf. Bigby's depiction does not reference a specific Disney cartoon, but is rather "the conflation of many storied wolves"²³. He is the result of Willingham and his cocreators' imagining what the Big Bad Wolf in human guise would look like: a tall, broad-shouldered, and muscular man, with unkempt and longish brown hair, roughly shaved, and chain-smoking (see fig. 1, bottom left of the panel). These attributes recall Marvel's Wolverine, whose name can also be linguistically related to the wolf and hence to Bigby. Both characters have animal instincts, strong physical conditions, highly developed senses, and the capacity to heal quickly. Furthermore, their pasts are filled with traumatic events, which contribute to their psychological states and status as "lone wolves". Yet, these anti-heroes are pillars of their respective communities in times of troubles: Wolverine integrates the X-Men and protects the children and youngsters in Charles Xavier's school while Bigby solves crimes as the sheriff of Fabletown and, in his wolf form, defends the other Fables against invaders (see volume 4, *Fables: March of the Wooden Soldiers*)²⁴. But Fabletown's sheriff also shares traits with another Marvel anti-hero, Hulk. Like Dr Banner who transforms into the Hulk when he cannot control his anger, Bigby's shapeshifting into a wolf is often caused by overwhelming emotions that he cannot control. Bigby in his wolf form is as huge and strong as Hulk, and while neither of them is in full control of their transformative powers, they usually use them to protect people. Through Willingham's mashing-up of characters from fairy tales and Marvel comics, the Big Bad Wolf becomes a hero in *Fables*, though a controversial one, subverting the usual oppositions in fairy tales and often in comic books between heroes and villains.

3. Hybridisation and Mashing-up of Popular Figures as Cultural Commentaries

- 10 *Fables* thus engages creatively and critically with the Disneyfied tradition of fairy tales and mainstream comic books produced by DC and Marvel, underlining in the process similarities between the two genres. Indeed, their stories deal with good and evil, right and wrong, often in a Manichean way, culminating in the success of the righteous and virtuous heroes and heroines²⁵. Moreover, Disney's happy endings always involve a wedding, and DC's and Marvel's story arcs often lead to the development of relationships between characters who share common traits. For example, in the DC universe, Wonder Woman and Superman have recurrently been imagined as a couple, but even without going this far, their depictions in the comic books easily suggest an association between them. They are both dark-haired and seductive, dressing in matching colours (blue, red, and white or yellow) which are reminiscent of the

American flag. They are quintessential American superheroes protecting this country at all costs, despite the fact that they both come from imaginary lands (Wonder Woman is an Amazon from Themyscira and Superman an alien from Krypton). Instead of creating a romance between their *Fables*' counterparts, however, the series playfully suggests that DC's Wonder Woman might be better paired with Marvel's Wolverine or Hulk and thus imagines new and even unexpected relationships between DC's and Marvel's superheroes. Published by Vertigo, an imprint of DC Comics intended for an adult readership and giving its authors more liberty in the treatment of their material, *Fables* is close to a literary universe and hence freer to hybridise its fairy-tale characters with comic-books heroes and to unexpectedly pair superheroes from competing labels so as to provide a cultural commentary on the state of the comic-book industry in the US.

- 11 Likewise, *Fables* is at liberty to comment on the messages carried by the leading fairy-tale franchise in America, Disney, and especially on the motif of the traditional marriage concluding most of its animated films. In contrast, in Willingham's story arc, Snow White divorces Prince Charming and forms a strong companionship with Bigby Wolf, who becomes the father of her children before they are married. Moreover, instead of the fairy-tale formulaic ending "they lived happily ever after", *Fables* illustrates what happens after a marriage: Snow gets pregnant and gives birth to Bigby's seven "cubs"²⁶. Whereas many fairy tales, and Disney's versions specifically, tend to omit pregnancy and delivery²⁷, Willingham's comic-book series depicts its heroine realistically. Snow is pregnant through several issues, her belly getting bigger and heavier as the due date approaches. Further, in *Fables : The Mean Seasons* (volume 5), several panels show her giving birth to her seven children, her face covered in sweat and contorted with pain and effort. As she is giving birth to the sixth cub, Bigby, who is waiting in the next room, unconsciously starts changing into his wolf form as he can hear Snow's cries and understands that "[s]he's in a lot of pain. And at the absolute end of her endurance"²⁸. The end of the issue then features a full-page panel (see fig. 2) showing Snow White in a purple gown and white nightdress, with dishevelled hair and sagging breasts and belly, looking utterly exhausted and worried as she watches six of her cubs (the seventh is an invisible being) in the maternity ward and realises that they will never pass as mundys because of their appearances and magical abilities. While the comic book at first eroticised the depiction of Snow White, it here testifies to the bodily transformations and discomforts of pregnancy and does not censor or sentimentalise the aftermath of giving birth²⁹. It also replaces Disney's final marriage ball scenes and accompanying love-songs with a realistic depiction of its likely outcome, maternity³⁰. Through Snow White and Bigby Wolf's story, *Fables* thus creatively and critically comments on the Disneyfied notion of the happy ending.

- 12 <Image en attente de droits>

- 13 Fig. 2 — *Fables : The Mean Seasons* 96. © DC Comics (Vertigo).

- 14 While their mother and father are thus mash-ups of fairy-tale and comic-book characters, the cubs embody the hybridity of the protagonists depicted in *Fables* (see fig. 2). Only the one at the bottom of the panel looks completely human. The baby on the top right corner could pass as human, too, if it were not for his pointy ears. The four other cubs have furry bodies, in shades of red, beige, black, and grey, as well as features common to wolves (the one on the top left corner) or dogs (the one at the top of the panel). As such they draw attention to the fact that some of the characters in

Fables are hybrids or mash-ups between fairy-tale figures and comic-book heroes, as is the case of their own parents. Through Snow White, Bigby Wolf, and Prince Charming, *Fables* thus draws on two iconic popular visual American traditions, Disney's cinematic realm and the graphic universe of DC and Marvel, exposing their influence on modern-day representations of fairy-tale and comic-book characters. At the same time, *Fables* opens up new possibilities of hybridisation or literary mash-up between these traditions as both creative matrix and cultural commentary that challenges expectations about fairy tales and comic books alike.

4. Hybridising the Grimms' " Sneewittchen " and " Schneeweisschen und Rosenrot " : Narrative Reproductions of " Snow White " in *Fables*

- 15 Besides American visual and popular culture, Willingham's Snow White maintains strong literary ties with the German folktale tradition, especially the Brothers Grimm's *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. Snow's story in *Fables* draws on both " Sneewittchen " and " Schneeweisschen und Rosenrot ", whose plots we will summarise here. The first and well-known tale begins with a queen's wish to have a daughter as white as snow, as red as blood, and as black as ebony wood. She dies giving birth to Snow White, who fits that description, and shortly after the king remarries. His new wife is beautiful but terribly vain and soon grows jealous of Snow White's youth and beauty³¹. She orders a huntsman to take the girl into the woods to be killed, but the man takes pity on her and lets her run away. Snow White finds a cottage in the woods and meets its inhabitants, seven dwarfs. She looks after their home in exchange for board and lodgings, while the dwarfs are out mining. Having discovered that Snow White is still alive, the evil queen disguises herself as an old woman and makes three attempts on her life. Each time, except the last, the dwarfs manage to save her. In the end, after she bites into a poisoned apple, they cannot wake her. They place her in a beautiful glass coffin on the mountainside and watch over her. One day a prince and his party pass by and he immediately falls in love with Snow White. He begs them for permission to take the coffin with him and the dwarfs reluctantly give it. As the coffin is carried away, it is accidentally jolted, and the piece of apple stuck in Snow White's throat is dislodged. She awakes and follows the prince back to his castle. There, they are happily wed, in the presence of her stepmother, who freezes when she recognises Snow White. As punishment for her evil deeds, the woman is forced to wear white-hot iron shoes and dance until she is dead. The second tale centres on a poor widow living in the woods and her two daughters, Snow White and Rose Red. They are named after two rosebushes in their mother's garden. They are good children who love each other very much and no harm ever befalls them. One winter evening, a bear knocks on the door, looking for some warmth. The girls become close friends with the bear, but when spring returns he leaves them to watch over his treasures. During their wanderings, the girls come across a dwarf, whom they help on several occasions. However, he always complains and runs off with his treasure without thanking them. One evening, the sisters come across the dwarf as he is contemplating his prized possessions. He is suddenly attacked and slaughtered by a bear, the one the girls had previously befriended. Now that the cruel dwarf is dead, the bear is freed from his curse and turns back into a prince. He then marries Snow White while his brother marries Rose Red,

and they share the dwarf's treasures between them. The girls' old mother joins them and they live happily together for many years³².

- 16 These two tales are very different³³ and yet they share certain similarities, namely the main protagonists' names, which both translate into English as "Snow White" – while in German there is a slight nuance between the two, even though both *weiss* and *witte* mean "white". In his own rendering of the tale, Willingham conflates the central motifs and protagonists from both stories, creating a hybridised version: while Snow White and Rose Red's childhood follows the Grimms' "Schneeweisschen und Rosenrot", Snow White's adolescence is based on "Sneewittchen". Telling the story in a flashback in *Fables: Rose Red* (volume 15), Willingham also introduces a few interesting twists in both tales. When helping the dwarf escape his dire situation in the retelling of "Schneeweisschen und Rosenrot", the sisters are cursed and told: "For one of you, seven evils await. For the other, the loss of one dear"³⁴. This anticipates the sisters' falling out and Snow's horrible experience to come. Indeed, instead of Snow marrying the prince, she is sent away for her own protection, because the prince's father rebukes their union and wants her killed (p. 57). She goes to live with her aunt, who embodies the vain stepmother in "Sneewittchen". Thus, from that moment onwards, the plot revolves around that of the Grimms' well-known "Snow White" tale (probably thanks to Disney). Yet there is a catch: the seven dwarfs that Snow White encounters in the wood are the exact opposite of those in the fairy tale. They are the sons of the dwarf who got killed by the bear-prince and are even more evil than he was. They make Snow their slave, abuse her sexually (p. 69), and as such represent the "seven evils" that awaited her (p. 47). She is even left for dead in the woods after biting into the poisoned apple (p. 71). However, Prince Charming finds her and his love overcomes the poison (p. 72). She goes to live with him and recovers from her trauma. After a while, she remembers her initial family and seeks them out, in the hope that she will finally be reunited with them (p. 72). However, Rose Red has lived believing that her sister died, and upon discovering that Snow White is still alive and living in a castle with a prince she married, she feels betrayed and seeks revenge (not unlike the jealous stepmother in "Sneewittchen") (p. 75). This constitutes the second part of their curse. They have therefore lost each other as sisters, and it will take the whole comic-book series for them to be reunited and, hopefully, reconciled.
- 17 The mashed-up content of Snow White's childhood in *Fables* therefore remains quite close to the classic tales and yet significant changes have been made to fit the story arcs established by Willingham and to create the identity and background story of his adult Snow. Importantly, he introduces Rose Red's character in his version of the "Snow White" story. However, instead of the sisters being thick as thieves as adults, they are estranged. There is rivalry between them, as demonstrated in an emotional scene in *Fables: Animal Farm* (volume 2). Snow has just finished recovering from a violent assassination attempt. Rose has come to visit her and exclaims: "Look at you! You're alive! [...] your head was blown all over my fucking shirt! [...] and yet you got better! How is that even possible?"³⁵, expressing her disquiet at her sister's recovery. She goes on to vent her frustration and envy by declaring that "the mundys adore [her] ... by the hundreds of millions!" and they "keep making their godawful animated movies and writing their endless children's stories about [her]" – for that reason Snow "can't die!" because "they'll never let [her]!" (p. 108). If it had been the other way around, Rose believes she would "be dead as a doornail", because "not one in a million"

“ remembers ” her (p. 109). In portraying Rose Red as the forgotten fairy-tale character in Snow White’s backstory, Willingham gradually places Rose Red at the centre of his own story, as an equal to her sister. Indeed, although she starts off in Snow’s shadow and as an “ original wild child ”³⁶, Rose evolves into an important protagonist in her own right as the issues unfold, becoming leader of the Farm and then of a new version of Camelot. Thus, despite one tale (“ Sneewittchen ”) originally supplanting and outliving others (such as “ Schneeweisschen und Rosenrot ”) in popular memory, Willingham has chosen to even the odds in *Fables*, by conflating both tales into a new narrative. Snow White and Rose Red are not only characters in a new tale ; they fully embody the narratives they are each a part of and actively participate in making their stories known to present-day readers. As such, they reflect on canon formation as mysterious and somewhat arbitrary. Likewise, the new elements Willingham adds to the traditional tales not only update the Grimms’ storyworlds in light of new cultural norms and social concerns (such as physical and sexual abuse, divorce, etc.), but they are also emblematic of the process which consists in mashing-up different stories displaying similar motifs. Thus, they illustrate the reproducible nature of the source texts which anticipates further transformations, hybridisations, and interminglings.

5. Human Progeny as a Source for Literary Creation

18 The multiplicity of such transformations and hybridisations is further depicted in the two fold-out pages found at the end of the series and which show two different views of Snow White and Bigby Wolf’s large family clan (see fig. 3). On the outside of the fold-out is a depiction of the clan from a distance ; on the inside, we are presented with Snow, Bigby, and their offspring at a close angle. While the Grimms’ “ Sneewittchen ” and “ Schneeweisschen und Rosenrot ” end with a royal marriage but do not mention any children, Willingham includes pregnancy, birth, and parenthood in his version of Snow White’s story, and her seven children become full-fledged protagonists over the course of the series. In this crowded picture, the reader recognises Snow and Bigby in an embrace (bottom right), as well as Rose Red (in the top left corner), trying to reach her sister. On the left-hand side, are Snow and Bigby’s son Connor, an adventurous soldier, their daughter Blossom, a hunter and protector of another world named after her, and their invisible son Ghost, who is exceptionally visible here. On the right-hand side, closer to the married couple, are their two other daughters, Therese, the ruler of Toyland, and Winter, the embodiment of the North Wind, on the arm of a humanoid who could easily be ripped from the pages of the Marvel universe³⁷. Below them, positioned similarly to their parents, are their brother Ambrose, the writer of the family, and his wife. Last but not least, the cubs’ deceased brother, Darien, is represented by a photograph hanging in the top-right corner of the panel. Around them converge many other family members, who are “ descended from ” (p. 148) sons or daughters of Snow and Bigby, or who have been “ grandfathered into the family ” (p. 147). In this concluding image, Willingham and his illustrator, Mark Buckingham, portray not only the Wolf family’s core, but also the twenty-odd generations that have been born since (fig. 3).

19 <Image en attente de droits>

20 Fig. 3 — *Fables : Farewell* 147-150. © DC Comics (Vertigo).

21 Willingham (as well as Buckingham with his illustration) thus draws a parallel between biological reproduction and the reproduction (i.e. rewriting, retelling, re-illustrating) of stories. Indeed, this picture of an extended family reunion, depicting a very large number of Snow and Bigby's descendants discussing their bloodline, can be read as a representation of stories as they are reproduced by being rewritten time and time again, as is the case in *Fables*, but also in its spin-offs³⁸, as well as in past, parallel, or future versions of these characters and their tales³⁹. Moreover, the various forms of Snow and Bigby's progeny materialise as well as celebrate hybridity as a "period of open-ended possibilities in relationships and identities [...] before patterns are set anew", in Vaz Da Silva's words⁴⁰. This statement applies to *Fables* as a whole. Willingham's project supplements existing fairy tales by creating a "multiverse", in association with the context of comic books, the films they inspire, and their heroes and heroines, where new relationships and adventures become possible. In doing so, he has set new patterns for future fairy tales, which will be fashioned by new generations of storytellers and visual artists. In *Fables*, Willingham even depicts himself in Ambrose Wolf, the author of *Fables* writing their history (*Fables : Farewell 2* and 78). Thus, the entire series of *Fables* is defined as an account of past events, but more importantly, as Zolkover argues, it consists in a "fairy tale in its own right"⁴¹, a new tale of sorts. Through this character, Willingham demonstrates that he is aware of the significance of his own work and how it will live on beyond the limits of the series. In fact, Ambrose embodies three different aspects of reproduction. First, as Snow and Bigby's son and heir in the fiction, then as a double of the author of *Fables* himself : he is portrayed as an old-fashioned writer (see fig. 4) using pen and paper. He could be Willingham's self-portrait : the brown hair and old-style haircut, portly figure, similar facial features and choice of outfit certainly hint at the possibility. Last, but not least, Ambrose reproduces *Fables* by writing fresh stories : on top of his project to write the *History of Fables*, he is also shown inventing and publishing new tales for children (see the three books starring the adventures of "Maestro Mouse" in fig. 4) and in doing so he passes on the creative process of (re)writing fairy tales and animal fables to the next generation. By anticipating his legacy through Ambrose Wolf, his own progeny, Willingham humorously reflects on his personal achievement, and by offering a glimpse of the future of fairy tales, he also encourages readers to return to the source texts and read them in light of their modern-day re-imaginings.

22 <Image en attente de droits>

23 Fig. 4 — *Fables : Farewell 2*. © DC Comics (Vertigo).

6. Conclusion

24 As a fairy tale in comic-book format, *Fables* is thus a mash-up between the literary tradition of the European fairy tale and the visual culture of the American comic book. Hybridisation is a means to creatively experiment with and transform fairy-tale and comic-book characters and stories, as well as comment on and respond to them in a critical way. The representations of Snow White, Prince Charming, and Bigby Wolf allow *Fables* to challenge both Disney's fairy-tale notion of the happy ending and to question the competition between DC and Marvel in the comic-book industry. Likewise, Willingham's take on the Grimms' "Sneewittchen" and "Schneeweisschen und Rosenrot" underlines the processes at work in the popularisation of fairy tales. As it

mashes-up European fairy-tales and folktales, both canonical and forgotten, their Americanised versions in film, and American comic books, *Fables* reproduces and (re)creates new protagonists and stories in a contemporary context and for a new generation. Such creative reproduction is embodied by Ambrose Wolf as a figure of the author, who, in turn, seems to be encouraging readers to write their own stories based on *Fables* and so continue the age-old tradition of storytelling in new genres and media. This authorial gesture is not unlike the Grimms’ in the 1810 manuscript for their “ Snow White ” tale. In this first collected version, the story is told, despite some notable variations, more or less as we know it. This classic variant, however, is followed by an alternative beginning, an “ Anderer Anfang ”⁴², which radically differs from the one that tradition has retained. Furthermore, there is only this alternative beginning to the story and no ending: the text stops abruptly, mid-sentence, and without a punctuation mark. This “ Anderer Anfang ” is therefore both an invitation to continue and finish this tale, as well as a call for new and different stories to be written. Like the Grimm Brothers, then, Willingham does not provide closure to his stories. Using the inherent open-endedness and “ creative and expansive form ”⁴³ of the comic book, as exemplified in cliffhangers at the end of issues or in the extension of its narrative in the form of spin-offs, *Fables* transforms the closed world of each classic fairy tale into a growing universe in which multiple stories come into contact with one another. This mash-up of comic book and fairy tale thus highlights that these two genres are intrinsically and forever open to visual and narrative reproductions, their storyworlds never ceasing to expand⁴⁴ and the mundys never letting their favourite characters die.

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NOTES

1. This article stems from Lucia Pozniak's master's thesis for which Marie Emilie Walz was second-reader. We would like to express our gratitude to Jennifer Thorburn for her insightful comments on this article, as well as to the external readers and the editors of the present volume for their very useful feedback at various stages of the project.
2. Recent fairy-tale films include *Mirror Mirror* (2012), *Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012), and Disney's live-action reboots of its animated films, such as *Maleficent* (2014), *Cinderella* (2015), and *Beauty and the Beast* (2017). *Once Upon a Time* (2011-2018) and *Grimm* (2011-2017) are examples of recent TV series. *Fables* (2002-2015) is probably the most striking instance of a fairy-tale comic book which was moreover adapted into a video game, *The Wolf Among Us* (2013-2014).
3. J. Zipes, "Comic Books and Graphic Novels", p. 122.
4. American comic-book superheroes are also currently encountering a huge success in the film industry, as DC (owned by WarnerMedia) and Marvel (owned by the Disney Company) continue to multiply cinematic adaptations of their well-known heroes' story arcs.
5. Karin Kukkonen calls such familiarity "popular cultural memory", which implies that "[f]or understanding the connotative dimension of a text, audiences draw on their previous experience with media texts, recalling character types, iconography, speech styles or standard situations from their share in popular cultural memory and using these as context knowledge" ("Popular Cultural Memory", p. 261). She further argues that "images are one of the main modes through which popular cultural memory is elicited" (p. 264).
6. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, "hybrid", n. 2.a.
7. Snow White and Bigby Wolf's children are a prime example of hybrids in *Fables*. As the daughters and sons of a human (Snow) and a wolf (Bigby), they display the physical features of both species. Bigby himself can be qualified as a hybrid, too, since he is the son of a she-wolf and the North Wind.
8. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, "hybrid", n. 1.
9. J. Ladd, "Dawn of the Literary Mash-up", §4.
10. *Fables* is written solely by Bill Willingham, but the series is illustrated by many artists: Cristina Bacchilega cites "Mark Buckingham most prominently, but also Lan Medina, Steve Leialoha, Charles Vess, Mark Wheatley, and others" (*Fairy Tales Transformed*?, p. 156). Although they have different styles, colour palettes, and ways to use the format of the comic book, the various artists illustrating *Fables* are careful to maintain continuity in characters' representations, keeping their respective attributes from one issue to the next so that readers can always easily identify them.
11. F. Vaz Da Silva, "Hybridity", p. 188.
12. *Ibid.*
13. J. Ladd, "Dawn of the Literary Mash-up", §4.
14. J. Mullan, "Literary Mash-ups", §2.
15. K. Kukkonen, "Willingham, Bill (1956-)", p. 1103.
16. K. Kukkonen, "Popular Cultural Memory", p. 261.
17. A. Zolkover, "Corporealizing Fairy Tales", p. 43.
18. *Ibid.*
19. C. Bacchilega, *Postmodern Fairy Tales*, p. 76.
20. The iconography of Snow White with its three distinctive colours, white, black, and red, has also been exploited in many illustrations of the tale, whether in albums for children or in erotic pictures, while the looks worn by Snow White in *Fables* and Diana in the *Wonder Woman* film are part of a universe of references which includes for example the cartoon character Betty Boop and the cinema icon Audrey Hepburn in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*.
21. B. G. Aldred, "Graphic Novel", p. 424.

22. Jokes about the interchangeability of Disney's princes have also circulated on the internet, as testified for example by the famous digital image titled "What Disney princes teach men about attracting women" (<<https://9gag.com/gag/2387405/what-disney-princes-teach-men-about-attracting-women>>, last accessed on 23rd July 2018) in which every male character's depiction is accompanied by the caption "Be rich, charming, famous, and good looking" or slight variations of it. As Cristina Bacchilega notes, "the cartoon has elicited a great number of comments responding to its bonus question –'What are these guys' names? (Aladdin doesn't count)'– as well as attesting to the success of its irony" (*Fairy Tales Transformed* ?, p. 11).

23. *Ibid.*, p. 157.

24. Several online forums actually discuss or even take bets on fictional battles between Bigby Wolf and Wolverine, questioning who would win; see for example <<https://comicvine.gamespot.com/forums/battles-7/wolverine-vs-bigby-wolf-fables-1513728/>>, last accessed 23rd July 2018.

25. It is worth noting that recent filmic adaptations of fairy tales portray their protagonists as fighting heroes and heroines resembling those of comic books. In the case of female characters especially, this phenomenon parallels a growing interest in the figure of the woman warrior. The two adaptations of "Snow White" in *Mirror, Mirror* (2012) and *Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012) are cases in point: their heroines achieve their happy endings through impressive swordsmanship. Tellingly, the huntsman in the latter film and its sequel, *The Huntsman: Winter's War* (2016), is portrayed by Chris Hemsworth, who also has the role of the god Thor in the Marvel cinematic universe.

26. B. Willingham, *Fables: The Mean Seasons*, p. 89.

27. The beginning of "Sneewittchen" is a case in point here. The Grimms' text moves from the queen's famous wish for a daughter "so weiß wie Schnee, so rot wie Blut und so schwarzhaarig wie Ebenholz" to her wish being fulfilled: "Bald darauf bekam sie ein Töchterlein" (*Kinder- und Hausmärchen, Band 1*, p. 269).

28. B. Willingham, *Fables: The Mean Seasons*, p. 83.

29. In her piece "Comics and Graphic Novels: Fairy-Tale Graphic Narrative" for *The Routledge Companion to Media and Fairy-Tale Cultures*, Emma Whatman argues that the illustrations of female protagonists in *Fables* "reinforce stereotypical and misogynist representations of femininity" (p. 478) because they sexualise and eroticise them in ways that recall comic-book heroines. The depiction of Snow in this scene, however, functions as a counterexample to such a line of argument.

30. Dina Goldstein's photo series entitled *Fallen Princesses* (2007-2009) also represents the effects of maternity on Snow White after her happy ending. In the piece "Snowy" (2008), the fairy-tale princess in full Disney costume is depicted as the mother of four, caring for her children while her prince slouches in an armchair with a beer in his hand watching television (<<https://www.dinagoldstein.com/fallen-princesses/>>, last accessed on 23rd July 2018).

31. In some versions of the tale, the evil queen is Snow White's own mother. Yet, as argued by Maria Tatar, "in an effort to preserve the sanctity of motherhood, the Grimms chose to record a version with a stepmother [...] as villain" (*The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales*, p. 234).

32. The tale of "Schneeweisschen und Rosenrot" recalls at least two other fairy tales, Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy's "Le Nain jaune" and Peter Christen Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe's "East of the Sun and West of the Moon", a Norse version of the "Beauty and the Beast" tale in which the beast is a white bear. Interestingly, *Fables* puts together the tales of "Snow White" and "Beauty and the Beast" through the theme of cross-species coupling hinted at by both "Schneeweisschen und Rosenrot" and "East of the Sun and West of the Moon" when in *Fables: The Great Fables Crossover* (volume 13), Bigby in his wolf form and Beast fight violently until they are stopped by Snow and Beauty who throw themselves between the two huge monsters. Before going to stop

her husband, Beauty remarks to Snow that their getting in the middle of the fight is a "stupid damned way to test the strength of two very unlikely marriages" (p. 20).

33. According to the Aarne-Thompson-Uther Classification Index, "Sneewittchen" and "Schneeweisschen und Rosenrot" belong to different tale types, ATU 709 and ATU 426 respectively. The similarity between the main characters' names, the presence of dwarfs, and other key motifs is mostly an effect of Willingham's rewriting and reinterpretation.

34. B. Willingham, *Fables : Rose Red*, p. 47.

35. B. Willingham, *Fables : Animal Farm*, p. 108.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

37. This figure resembles certain representations of Marvel's Dr Strange (in his masked form), his archenemy Eternity, as well as the supervillain Graviton, resulting in a possible visual – and noteworthy – mash-up of popular comic-book protagonists.

38. Most certainly due to its great success, as well as a desire to develop certain characters' personal stories, the writers participating in the *Fables*' project delved into the lives of a chosen few in the form of spin-offs such as *Jack of Fables* (recounting the numerous adventures of the *Fables*' protagonist of the same name) and *Fairest* (concerning more specifically the ladies of the *Fables* universe).

39. It can be argued that Ambrose Wolf is not the only child of Snow and Bigby's to actively participate in the perennity of *Fables*. His siblings might not write down their adventures, but they contribute simply by creating and living their stories. Furthermore, they perpetuate and immortalise their family history, by their own existence (i.e. they are immortal). An example of this is Winter, taking on the mantle and duties of the North Wind, after her grandfather passes away.

40. F. Vaz Da Silva, "Hybridité", p. 188.

41. A. Zolkover, "Corporealizing Fairy Tales", p. 49.

42. Brüder Grimm, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen, Die handschriftliche Urfassung von 1810*, p. 79.

43. H. Chute, "Comics as Literature?".

44. For further studies on expanding storyworlds, see among others A. Goudmand's "Les séries transmédiatiques" and A. Besson's "De l'ensemble à la totalité".

RÉSUMÉS

Cet article porte sur la reproduction visuelle et textuelle des contes dans la série de *comic books* *Fables*. À partir de l'exemple des contes de «Sneewittchen» et de «Schneeweisschen und Rosenrot», nous examinons la manière dont l'œuvre proliférante de Willingham reproduit, combine et transforme les histoires familiales. Nous mettons notamment en lumière la façon dont la série puise de manière créative et critique à la fois dans la culture visuelle de la bande dessinée américaine chez DC et Marvel, et dans la tradition littéraire du conte de fées européen, en particulier dans les *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* des frères Grimm, s'inspirant des caractéristiques communes aux deux genres pour générer de nouvelles histoires et même de nouveaux univers fictionnels en constante expansion.

This article examines the reproductions of fairy-tale images and stories in the comic-book series *Fables*. Taking the tales "Sneewittchen" and "Schneeweisschen und Rosenrot" as examples, it focuses on how Bill Willingham's comic book reproduces, hybridises, and transforms fairy tales

visually and textually. This article highlights how *Fables* creatively and critically engages with both the visual culture of the American comic book, led by DC and Marvel, and the literary tradition of the European fairy tale, especially the Brothers Grimm’s *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, thus “ mashing-up ” these two genres’ inherent reproductive qualities to create new stories and even new fictional worlds¹.

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