#### **Editorial**

Sophie Raynard-Leroy\*, Charlotte Trinquet du Lys

# Gender Fluidity: From Euphemism to Pride

An Editorial with Comprehensive Bibliography on Gender Fluidity in Children's Literature and Fairy Tales

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The project for this special volume emanated from the accelerated frequency of the expression "gender fluidity" in the current vernacular and research theories. The general excitement over this new concept prompted reactions from some of our scholars of the early-modern, because we argue it is certainly not new (even if the expression *per se* is). It has always been pervasive in literature and in fairy-tale/folklore studies – cross-dressing episodes in particular. The various studies that we offer in this volume are meant to show how this concept has been represented over time – from the early-modern to the post-modern periods – in fairy tales and children's literature following a continuum from the implicit to the more explicit.

As an expression, "gender fluidity" has been only recently coined, therefore, it is essential to first define it as it is currently understood in order to be able to reflect back on those texts representing gender-bending phenomena and theorize about them using today's tools and new understandings about sexuality. A gender-fluid person will change either identity (identifying themselves as male or female) or expression (expressing their gender to the rest of society, i.e., dressing as male or female), or both, from the gender they have been assigned at birth, throughout the course of their life. It is understood that gender usually develops from early childhood to adolescence, and most people identify with a gender in their early adulthood.

However, gender-fluid persons can experience more than one gender change during their life, while transgender persons will identify and express themselves with a gender different than the one assigned at birth for the rest of their life, whether they go through gender reassignment (surgical and/or hormonal) or not. This often results for gender-fluid individuals in complex psychological hardship caused by the "othering" both from the transgender community, for whom they are not "trans" enough, or most contemporary societies, for which they are outside of the normative behavior set by the binary system of genders (Katz-Wise).

Cross-dressing, as a form of gender fluidity's expression mostly familiar to early-modern scholars, can be considered as one that is non-conforming to the assigned gender at birth. It is often frowned upon in our contemporary, western societies, where boys who dress like girls are called *sissies*, while girls who dress like boys are called *tomboys*. In French, the much more derogatory term of *garçon manqué* (literally, a failed boy) explicitly reflects failure on one's sexuality if the gender performance expectation of the female sex assigned at birth is not met.

The expression is still used nowadays without much reflection on its semantic significance and without the awareness that it might even be offensive to our new sensitive reception of old sexual designations. Today in France the reverse – calling a male a *fi-fille* (a girly-girl) – would be perceived as offensive to boys. So, this is not to say that the current vernacular is now completely accepting of gender bending: it is still biased and outdated though as a society the western world starts opening to various ways of gender expressions. In early-modern Europe, homosexuality and bisexuality were not acceptable by the standards of the Catholic Church nor the society at large. An example of this would be Paul Scarron's *Mazarinade* against Cardinal Mazarin, the *de facto* ruler of France since Louis XIV was too young to rule at the time.

<sup>\*</sup> Corresponding author: Sophie Raynard-Leroy, Department of Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature, Stony Brook University, 100 Nicolls Rd, Stony Brook, NY 11794, United States of America, e-mail: sophie.raynard@stonybrook.edu Charlotte Trinquet du Lys: Department of Modern Languages and Literatures, University of Central Florida, 4000 Central Florida Blvd, Orlando, Florida, 32816, United States of America, e-mail: Charlotte.TrinquetDuLys@ucf.edu

In his poem, Scarron associates Mazarin's presumed bisexuality with the failure of the French government, and his acts of sodomy are paralleled with him sodomizing France. Even if we should hesitate to claim a moralistic role given by Scarron to the poem, the author uses, however, Mazarin's bisexuality as an insult toward the Cardinal (Lyraud). Yet, despite the conservative public and/or satirical discourse and the strict binary system in place for assigning specific roles to males and females, gender nonconformity existed – as it has always existed in any society – and many early modern European folk and fairy tales as well as novellas treat the subject of gender transgression through actions, disguises, upbringing, etc. These texts were primarily written for an audience of adults and in the case of some French women-authored fairy tales, for an audience of young women as premarital education defying the patriarchal norm, but they were never intended for young children. As such, some of these stories can be seen as reflections of the institution of marriage within the patriarchal society, with sexuality being implicitly a large part of it. In the case of European fairy tales, the first attempt to write with a children's audience in mind would be Madame Leprince de Beaumont's Magasin des enfants (1757), followed in the nineteenth century by the Brothers Grimm, George Sand, and La comtesse de Ségur among others. It is only from the "infantilization of fairy tales," to use Lewis Seifert's term (Seifert 25-39), that we see a much stricter gender conformity in this genre, and most of the tales representing gender fluidity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries' European corpus are completely eliminated in volumes intended to children. For those texts aiming at adult/young adult audiences, with sexuality being a vital subject of interest, yet one to express in metaphorical terms and indirect ways, cross-dressing is often a resort (see Raynard's two studies of crossdressing in Catherine Bernard's Frederic de Sicile).

In fairy tales as in the real life of early modern Europe, trans representation and authentication were essential to the survival of women-to-men cross-dressers, and this idea does not really differ with postmodern representations of gender fluidity. The normalizing of transgender identities and experiences was essential to women warriors (ATU 514\*\*; AT 884a) if they wanted to succeed in their quests, whether it is on the historical battlefield, or in the fairy tales of Straparola, Basile, and female writers such as d'Aulnoy, Murat, or L'héritier (1690s). Even though the current terminology did not exist in the early modern European lexicon, the normalization of gender was often a question of life and death: being "caught" wearing a male outfit was a disgrace that a woman could not afford. At the same time, and especially in seventeenth-century women's authored fairy tales, the characters do not want to cut ties with their past, which is also the case for many transgender people today. Cross-dressed heroines never try to cut from their roots because they always know they have to come back to their original gender, being therefore fluid and not trans. It was not the intention of the protofeminist authors to radically reassign the gender of their heroines, but show that women of the time could be as excellent, and even superior, to some of their male counterparts. By virtue of their time spent cross-dressing within the tale, which represents a narrative liminal space in which they have to linger in order to succeed, these heroines exist outside of the binary categories of gender norms, and therefore have the freedom to display traits traditionally associated with both men and women.

Once their cross-dressing artifice is finally discovered – or if they no longer need their male gender expression – and they return to their female gender expression and the binary patriarchal society, these heroines, especially L'héritier's Leonore, future Marmoisan, continue to identify with both female and male genders, keeping the best of their assigned gender at birth (female) and the best of their male identity ("Marmoisan" *Œuvres Meslees*, 1696). The authors go even further in their trans representation as they never fully depict their heroines as having only traditionally female characteristics: Marmoisan is born with a twin brother whom she resembles to the point that they are indistinguishable physically, the only difference being that their behavior is opposite, with him having all the defects of a spoiled gentleman while she displays the best qualities of a woman and at the same time can also manipulate weapons with more skills than all the young men she meets on the battlefield. The credibility of Marmoisan's identity is put into question within the narrative because they refuse to follow the rules of a male gendered individual (brutal, rapist, bully, dirty, etc.). They are qualified as queer by their fellow soldiers but they incarnate what women want in men (soft, reverent, polite, mannered, yet strong, protective, etc.); hence, the woman they save from an abusive male soldier falls in love with them as a man. Therefore, they present as queer for both male and female individuals because even though they are identified, physically, as a man, they do not align to normative standards of gender.

Furthermore, after Marmoisan's return to a female expression, they still keep the role assigned to a male (savior, ruler, negotiator) and are better suited than any other man at court, according to the prince's father, to be the future king's primary advisor. In Murat's "The Salvage," the heroine Constantine, future Constantin, is immediately represented as identifying more as a male than a female in her youth, and the author reverses Straparola's presentation of the heroine by glorifying her male qualities and skills before even representing her as female (Straparola, "Constantin-Constantine," fable IV-1, Piacevole Notti, 1551; Murat, Histoire Sublimes et Allégoriques, 1699). In that sense, both Leonore-Marmoisan and Constantine-Constantin, after their cross-dressing episode, never come back to being only female, making them non-binary, even though the marriage with a prince/king at the end of the fairy tale would make the reader think that they are back to the patriarchal realm, and everything is back to normal. The male characters with whom the heroines end up married also question their own sexualities since both fall in love with the heroines as the latter identify and represent themselves as a man. It is even more obvious in a passage of Murat's narration, when the king, future husband of Constantine, is riding on a horse with the beast behind him, and the scene is clearly evocative of sodomy (Trinquet 2–17).

D'Aulnoy's "Belle-Belle ou le Chevalier Fortuné" (Les Contes des fées, 1697), also an ATU 514\*\* (AT 884a) version based on the same Italian sources as Murat's and L'héritier's tales, is the exception to the rule. None of the heroes have any agency, the heroine's disguise is clearly nothing more than cross-dressing as she displays none of the male qualities of her counterparts in Murat's and L'héritier's tales, and the prince is behaviorally queer, displaying many traditionally feminine traits. However, in d'Aulnoy's "Finette Cendron" (Les Contes des Fées, 1697), even though the eponymous heroine does not identify as gender fluid, nor is a trans man, she has the behavior, advocacy, and experiences of a grown patriarchal man as she replaces her incapacitated father, taking care of her family's estate (saving her sisters, killing the ogress, etc.), while the prince she will eventually choose to marry is represented as a damsel in distress that the heroine will save (see Tringuet du Lys 2019 et 2006).

Women warriors in early modern fairy tales are always fighting to be accepted in their societies, but never while compromising the female characteristics that they value. They are at odds with societal norms because they are never accepted for who they are nor who they represent, especially in the case of Finette Cendron and Marmoisan. Their authors, by creating such characters, challenge, as early as the 1690s, the status quo of the gender binary, representation, realities, norms, and the place of gender-fluid individuals in society. This is the case for their heroines, as Erin Calhoun Davis states for real individuals of the transfluid-community, that "[t]he categories of man and woman fail to represent fully the diversity of individuals' experiences, behaviors, and self-understandings" (105).

Fast-forwarding a couple of centuries, we find adaptations of the same folk- or fairy tales that do not shy in keeping trans- and fluid-genders beyond the happy ending of the story. Often via a rewritten version of early modern and modern tales, or via the creation of new stories, we see that the evolution is representing a very different outcome, which goes hand in hand with Pride and the recent gender theories that have developed after the second feminist wave. If they are still few and far apart, these texts are nonetheless significant in representing the advances made in the arts within the LGBTQIA + community and are not to be ignored in children's literature. We are proud to feature in this volume the latest research on these stories.

### Essays on the Early-modern Legacy of Gender Bending onto the **Nineteenth Century**

Anne Duggan's article, "Gender, Class, and Human/Non-Human Fluidity in Théodore and Hyppolite Cogniard's féerie, The White Cat," analyzes a forgotten genre, the féerie (fairy play), at its peak in nineteenth-century France, inscribing the concept of gender fluidity within the nature of the marvelous in general. The most popular nineteenth-century féerie, The White Cat, is itself drawn from various fairy tales by seventeenth-century *précieuse* author Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy. It is a medley of sorts, combining all

possible amalgamations and transformations of d'Aulnoy's already very creative material. The resources of the marvelous are infinite: it can question all identities: sex/gender, species, and class, and this potential is of great interest to us today when we interrogate intersectionality. Note that race comes in much later in fairy-tale adaptations; one has to wait for twentieth and twenty-first-century post colonialist discourse to see it represented in productions though that aspect of intersectionality is still a relatively neglected aspect of fairy-tale adaptations to this day, and we can expect this will be addressed next. With this deep look at the Coignard Brothers' féerie, we can see that the nineteenth century already started to capitalize on the questioned intersectionality between sex/gender and species and class. That two post-revolutionary (1789) and 1848) male authors expand on seventeenth-century *précieuse* Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy's popular fairy tales (which by then had become the French tradition) is telling. She and her female counterparts (Henriette-Julie de Murat, Charlotte Rose Caumont de La Force, etc.) had made ample use of the resources that literary genre could give them as an escape from the constraints of reality. They created imaginary spaces where, through cross-dressing, metamorphoses and all that magic can produce, those restraints could be eliminated at least within the frame of fiction. In this one piece by the Cogniard Brothers, the gender performances are just one facet of what magical transformations can be: they come alongside species and class repositioning, not according to a mere phenomenon of inversion, but rather to show the full spectrum of possible positions. The carnivalesque nature of the féerie allows for constant mutation. Judith Butler's later explanation of her concept of gender as performance as "not a singular act" but "a ritualized production" (in order for the identities to be successfully received) is very helpful in helping us understand the concept of gender fluidity and how it is not a new concept: it was represented in those seventeenthcentury fairy tales such as d'Aulnoy's and her précieuse/baroque female counterparts, then more explicitly performed with great comic theatricality in those post-revolutionary productions such as féeries where class identity becomes an important target, and one could argue, the gender-bending continues to be there though not the object of the target that it has become today.

Polly Mangerson's premise in "Naughty Girl or Not A Girl? Behavior and Becoming in Les Malheurs de Sophie" is that little Sophie's misfortunes come from the fact that she is mis-playing her gender. By doing so, Sophie merits the punishments to which she is continually subjected and that are reflected in the title of her stories. In France, everyone still knows and rejoices about Ségur's fictional character Sophie de Réan, and that naughty little girl from another age is remembered and sympathized with for the harsh misfortunes she has to suffer for her unruly behavior that is not deemed suitable for a Second-Empire upper-class girl. This study argues that Sophie's *malheurs* (misfortunes) essentially come from the fact that she behaves in a gender non-conforming way in contrast with les petites filles modèles (the model little girls) according to the standards of the time period (Second Empire). The very fact that Les Malheurs continues to be a best-seller shows that those expectations for girls are still somewhat understood if not embraced. But, more importantly for us here, it also shows that Sophie's gender-bending ways can serve as a model to fantasize about as we believe they were then when Ségur decided to make them the objects of her literary/pedagogical mission. We would like to contend that Ségur would not have made Sophie her titular heroine if she did not find this character worth staging in so many of her stories (there are a few other volumes featuring her beside Les Malheurs). Instead, Ségur may have been somehow fascinated by her alter-ego's boldness and vindication of more agency and anti-conformism. The universality of Les Malheurs could precisely reside in the conflicting presence of opposite models of feminine behavior, with the behavior of Sophie being much more worth noting and fantasizing about than that of her counter-example les petites filles modèles. In other words, the two opposite constituencies in terms of gender theory (the traditionalists and the progressives) can both find water to bring to their well in these (mis)adventures of Sophie: using them as cautionary tales or, in reverse, identifying with those rebellious acts.

In "Ah!Nana's fairytale punk-comics: From the Comtesse de Ségur's 'Histoire de Blondine, Bonne-Biche et Beau-Minon' to Nicole Claveloux's 'Histoire de Blondasse, de Belle-Biche et gros Chatchat," Valentina Denzel invites us to take another look at Comtesse de Ségur's work, this time her fairy tales – presumably targeting an audience of young children (girls in particular) of the likes of Sophie and *les petites filles modèles*. Denzel makes us discover a bold second-wave feminist adaptation – transmediated through a comic – of one of Comtesse de Ségur's fairy tales by author Nicole Claveloux (1976). To go from a

nineteenth-century didactic fairy tale to a queer punk tale celebrating the monstrosity of female characters and advocating the exploration of new sexual pleasures, it is practically undergoing a full reversal in tone and message. Or is it? Claveloux operates on the humoristic parodic mode in re-presenting Ségur's (arguably corny characters given their names in the first place) in reverse, with the conventional models of femininity literally turned upside down. Denzel's reading of it can aptly serve as a companion to Mangerson's article on Ségur's ambiguous texts (as explained above). The very fact that Claveloux did the illustrations for Ségur's fairy tale, "Histoire de Blondine, Bonne-Biche et Beau-Minon" (1856), as an intermediary phase to her own subversive adaptation of it can only corroborate our idea that Ségur's texts contained that subversive possibility of an alternative reading. At any rate they still come across as counter examples of what we, twenty-first-century readers, now expect from the fairy-tale genre.

Friederike Frenzel invites us to reconsider the Victorian classics of children's literature, The Adventures of Alice in Wonderland and Peter Pan, in a gender perspective. In "A 'Fabulous Monster' and a 'Wonderful Boy': Gender and the Elusive Victorian Child in Alice books and Peter Pan," Frenzel proposes to stray from the classic binaries by framing those narratives within the concept of "genderless" children developed in Victorian Era artistic circles that influenced Carroll and Barrie. Peter and the Neverland he rules elude the binary dynamics of heteronormative family life, just like Alice can be situated among the queer creatures she encounters in Wonderland. Furthermore, in these narratives, "genderlessness" and "betwixt" gendermodels are inseparably linked to the "dream lands" (Wonderland, Looking-Glass land, Neverland) as distorting, satirizing mirror images of an oppressive "grown-up" society. Alice is represented as an evertransforming and self-aware visitor of a fantastic realm, while Peter's very existence is otherworldly, oblivious, constant, and cyclical. We are invited to read those texts using the pretext of a-historicity in fantastic children's and fairy-tale stories, and applying Ricoeur's postmodern theory of the linear quest of the hero and the circularity of the journey itself, so as to pay attention to the act of storytelling (as repetition), and the authors in their role as narrators who indirectly perform a gendered, maternal act.

#### Post-modern Revisions of What was Perhaps too Modern Back Then

"Double Trouble: Gender Fluid Heroism in American Children's Television," Lou Lamari's and Pauline Greenhill's joint study of the current reboot of She-Ra: Princess of Power (1985-1987), renamed She-Ra and the Princesses of Power for Netflix (2018-2020), also presents a revision with respect to gender and sexual representations going beyond hetero-normative expectations, to the extent of including perhaps the first transgender character on American television for a children's audience. Yet the study also points at a limitation of this progressive adaptation with the equivocal representation of transgressive character Double Trouble. If the idea that all locations in the gender spectrum can now be exemplified and fully liberated in children's popular culture is a big first step toward inclusivity, it is important to continue to address issues of discrimination to rectify the fraught process of liberating oneself from cis-hetero-normative standards. More inclusive intersectional representations would avoid potential harm to audiences who may feel misrepresented and further marginalized - and to those who risk having their misconceptions confirmed. She-Ra and the Princesses of Power, though a positive intervention, indicates that there is still room for improvement. And without charging members of the LGBTQ + community with sole responsibility, they in particular need to lead the trend, rather than mercenary big studios capitalizing on new ideological trends without a personal or informed knowledge of the realities behind gender fluidity representation. This piece reminds us that liberation comes at a cost. And while joy and celebration are important, we have yet to see representations of the trauma and pain undergone by gender-bending characters in order to achieve them.

Diana Burgos's article, "The Queer Glow Up of Hero-Sword Legacies in She-Ra, Korra, and Sailor Moon," echoes Lou Lamari's and Pauline Greenhill's study of the evolution of She-Ra's TV show with respect to gender representations and gender fluidity vindication but also adds two other animated shows, Sailor Moon and The Legend of Korra, as objects of comparison within the magical girl trope. The original

Sailor Moon anime, which was based on the famous shojo manga, debuted in 1992 as a show with groundbreaking queer-coded characters and themes. However, Cartoon Network and North American licensing companies felt a duty to erase its queerness and anglicize the show's Japanese characters through the English dubbed version that was broadcasted from 1995 to 2000. Despite this, its original queer legacy was not forgotten, and fans created and shared their own subtitled versions of the original Japanese series (fansubs). In 2014, the series was rebooted as Sailor Moon Crystal and the English dub did not censor queerness or race. As anime's most famous magical girl, Sailor Moon extends her influence on American TV shows like The Legend of Korra and She-Ra and The Princesses of Power, whose animation and magical girl narratives are inspired by anime. Burgos gives us a very close reading of each of these series (often focusing on specific episodes) so that readers - who are both familiar and unfamiliar with their context - can discover how their gender representation steers away from hyper-masculine heroes, promotes feminine heroic strength, vindicates emotional fulfillment for the heroine, and teaches healing and empathy for the enemy in a context of warfare. She also explicitly presents Netflix's She-Ra reboot as a queer retelling of the original 1980's She-Ra: Princess of Power through an interesting Jungian reading of gender fluidity with focus on the shapeshifting nature of gender performances. Contrary to Greenhill and Lamari above, Burgos commends the effort of inclusion in the creation of the new gender-plural character, Double Trouble (in effect the first transgendered character in a children's show) in the fourth season of She-Ra. Korra's case study less explicitly illustrates the pro-gender fluidity agenda than the other shows but does that symbolically and perhaps just as efficiently via the representation of the Spirit World where the heroine travels and encounters queer spirits and animals who guide her and tame her fears. Korra's finale symbolically implied a same-sex romance between Korra and Asami Sato, which Bryan Konietzo (one of the series' creators) later explicitly confirmed in both his blog post and the series' graphic novel sequels. Social discourses helped gueer representation in the rebooted She-Ra escape the LGBTQ + subversion and erasure depicted in *The Legend of Korra* and the original *Sailor Moon*; they indicate that audience involvement plays a pivotal role in the continuing evolution of queer representation in children's popular media.

# Reflections on the Alternative Possibilities Offered by the Genre (Fairy Tales and Folklore) on Issues of Gender and Sexuality

In "The Transgender Imagination in Folk Narratives," Psyche Ready chose to study in depth the often-discarded case of ATU 514, "The Shift of Sex," as a way to demonstrate that transgender themes have always been featured in folk tales. Her premise is that the transgender characters' happy endings that are characteristic of these tales validates that representation: with the trans hero being systematically rewarded for their transgression, through change of sex. We share Ready's comforting thought that "this radical story has accompanied humanity for generations" and that this tale type creates a safe space for expressions and experiences of non-normative gender. One could see Ready's enterprise as one of rehabilitation of traditional gender representations. This was made possible, she argues, by queer and transgender theory and their critical attention to sexuality and transgressive expressions of gender and gender roles. With folk narratives openly addressing societal taboos, today, the genre can be used to explore alternatives to normative sexuality. The presence of world-flipping episodes in folktales (and fairy tales) incites the reader to re-imagine cultural structures, including sexual norms.

Jeana Jorgensen's "A Tale of Two Trans Men: Transmasculine Identity and Trauma in Two Fairy-Tale Retellings" corroborates Psyche Ready's theory on transgender identities in the fact that she too considers ATU 514 as the exception to the rule, the rule being for transgender identities to be routinely underrepresented or discarded both in fairy tales and society. Her perspective starts more pessimistically in that she points at the limitations of queer theory in general and as applied to fairy tales. The main problem is that it focuses essentially on the LGBTQ aspects while ignoring the T. In this study, she analyzes two retellings that feature transgender characters, only to show that representing transgender experiences is

not always done in a positive manner. Worse, she contends that one of the two texts she proceeds at deconstructing for us, actually contributes to reinforcing the negative stereotypes about transgender people. Jorgensen's own expertise in gender and sexuality studies allows her to point at historical constructions of trans identities that reified them as pathological and different. Making trauma the reason for the character to transition is a classic misunderstanding of transgender identities in popular culture. There is indeed a persistence in western culture to pathologize transgender people and this tendency in turn permeates the media. Even in contemporary fairy-tale scholarship, she argues, gender fluidity tends to be addressed from a cisgender perspective, with cross-dressing in particular receiving plenty of attention as the only one generally accepted by audiences as a sexual transgression (as the success of English pantomimes can confirm). Magic can also be a problem in fairy-tales' representations of transgender identities with the gender transition being possibly attributed to a mere magic spell, thus robbing the character of the dignity of their own identity. So, while Psyche Ready leaves us with some hopes at seeing alternative representations, Jeana Jorgensen tends to focus instead on the transphobia she detects in these new attempts at representations (from misgendering to othering) and blames it on the persistence of strict binary gender roles as the sexual norms despite the recent adjustment the medical profession made from disorder to dysphoria as psychiatric labels given to transgender experiences. A stigma persists in society, even in the fantastic realm, therefore she concludes that gender fluidity is still mostly rejected and trans people characterized as deviant. In fact, for her it is even a treacherous act from the part of authors to introduce transgender characters if in doing so they aim at rejecting them and prompting cisnormativity. She even makes a case at taking authors to task when they trick us so, because in these misrepresentations, they may contribute to further victimization and marginalization.

Drawing from this improved though still sad state of affairs vis-a-vis the representation of transgender people in children's media, one can only hope that the new and upcoming LGBTQ + characters will be predominantly heroes rather than villains, but especially authentically trans, that they be the creations of gender-fluid authors themselves or informed by a gender-fluid fanbase. And fairy tales are yet again the perfect genre to experiment with given their long tradition of serving as voices for the disempowered. Instead of using them to further other marginalized characters, we can use them to humanize them, as Burgos prescribes, comforted by the example of the 2014 She-Ra reboot. And what a great prescription it is to do social good via entertainment? May fairy tales and other narratives of popular culture be the safe space where human rights, gender, and sexuality can happily intersect.

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## Appendix: Comprehensive Bibliography on Gender Fluidity in Children's Literature and Fairy Tales

This bibliography is designed to help researchers find their way through the diverse scholarship on the topic, for multiple countries and centuries. We apologize in advance if we omitted works that are worthy of being cited here.

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