

AT THE CROSSROADS BETWEEN LITERATURE, CULTURE, LINGUISTICS, AND COGNITION: DEATH METAPHORS IN FAIRY TALES¹

JAVIER HERRERO RUIZ
University of La Rioja

ABSTRACT. *This paper studies how several death metaphors (e.g. DEATH IS DEPARTURE, DEATH IS COLD, DEATH IS SLEEP, etc.) are able to account for the basic meaning and interpretation of more than thirty popular tales and myths. Besides, we offer the possibility of classifying tales according either to the basic metaphor they contain or to the combination of metaphors that may comprise them. Additionally, the paper explores in what ways the metaphors under scrutiny allow us to explain some of the uncanny elements of tales. Finally, we suggest that these metaphors may have contributed to an easier transmission of many fairy tales and also to make tales alike in different socio-cultural settings. The tales, which are representative of various cultures, have been extracted from the Project Gutenberg online library and belong to the British author and compiler Andrew Lang (1844-1912).*

KEYWORDS. *Metaphor, death, tales, uncanny, culture.*

RESUMEN. *En este artículo tratamos de estudiar cómo varias metáforas sobre la muerte (p.ej. DEATH IS DEPARTURE, DEATH IS COLD, DEATH IS SLEEP, etc.) pueden explicar el significado básico y la interpretación de más de treinta cuentos populares y mitos. Además, ofrecemos la posibilidad de clasificar cuentos según la metáfora básica que contienen o la combinación de metáforas que aglutinan. También, exploramos de qué formas las metáforas analizadas nos permiten explicar parte de “lo maravilloso” de los cuentos. Finalmente, proponemos que estas metáforas pueden haber contribuido a una transmisión más fácil de muchos cuentos de hadas y a que los cuentos sean similares en diferentes contextos socioculturales. Los cuentos, que son representativos de varias culturas, han sido extraídos de la biblioteca electrónica Project Gutenberg y pertenecen al autor y compilador británico Andrew Lang (1844-1912).*

PALABRAS CLAVE. *Metáfora, muerte, cuentos, “lo maravilloso”, cultura.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Of the various types of mythological literature, fairy tales are the simplest and purest expressions of the collective unconscious and thus offer the clearest understanding of the basic patterns of the human psyche. Every people or nation has its own way of experiencing this psychic reality, and so a study of the world's fairy tales yields a wealth of insights into the archetypal experiences of humankind. (Marie-Louise von Franz 1996: 1).

Fairy tales have been studied from many different theoretical angles (e.g. psychoanalytical, feminist, structuralist, anthropological, etc.). It is generally accepted that they have a huge semiotic potency and an ever-varying polysemous nature. Themes keep jumping around, and mix and remix giving as a result different meanings in different historical and social settings. Furthermore, the issue of metamorphosis, a defining characteristic of fairy tales, can also be observed in the multifaceted structure of the fairy tale itself. Also, their commonly accessible meaning makes fairy tales a productive place for cultural analysis since the essentials of each re-telling are historically and culturally tied. Nevertheless, while individual versions of fairy tales may vary, their motifs (the stylistic details used to relate the basic events) are quite consistent in their adherence to the plot outline (the sequence of basic events) of the tale type, which explains why they have been repeated over time and across national boundaries in similar forms.

But how have fairy tales transmitted all this knowledge and experiences over the centuries? Why are fairy tales similar across different national boundaries and even distant cultures?

Conceptual metaphor is pervasive in both thought and language. It is hard to think of a common subjective experience that is not conventionally conceptualized in terms of metaphor (...). Everyday metaphors are built out of primary metaphors plus forms of commonplace knowledge: cultural models, folk theories, or simply knowledge or beliefs that are widely accepted in a culture. (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 45-59).

In order to address the aforementioned questions, conceptual metaphor may give a huge clue since, as this piece of research attempts to show, besides being a reasoning tool that has conveyed and conveys our commonplace knowledge throughout human generations, it is not only a pervasive device used in fairy tales at a local level but even a full structuring mechanism of the plot outline that underlies the very essence of the fairy tale. With the help of this powerful tool, not only can we make sense out of the basic events of the tale (the journey of the protagonist, his final marriage and enthronement, the princess being isolated in a tower, etc.) but even fully understand the punishments, morality, love affairs, and the magic contained in it.

2. NEED AND PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH

The study of fairy tales has received much attention from different angles of study. However, to the best of our knowledge, no study has proved final on the issue. In this respect, we believe that the current theory of cognitive metaphor, applied to an analysis of fairy tales, may cast light onto the questions addressed above.

On the basis of these observations, our purpose in this piece of research is to show how conceptual metaphor may be considered not only the cornerstone upon which the fairy tale is understood and built, but even a sort of scaffolding which sustains its basic structure and allows its development. The following are also other complementary aims of our research:

- (a) It has long been a familiar fact that some forms of literature (fairy tales, mythology, etc.) involve metaphorical and symbolic structures. This piece of research will try to show some of the relationships between those structures and the metaphorical ones found in everyday language.
- (b) The fact that some forms of literature, especially fairy tales, have been found to be similar across different cultures and over time may be partly relatable to the existence of the so-called universal metaphors, that are thought to be a cross-linguistic norm.
- (c) As Bowe (1996) mentions, fantastic literature contains creatures and events which are impossible or at least highly unlikely in the real world. Nonetheless, fairy tales and myths can be considered constructs in which the bizarre is usual, and the laws which govern our reality do not always apply. But “Does this mean that there are no laws? Does the world where magic is possible, the world of fantastic literature, function entirely arbitrarily? Or does this world also have a structure, however differently it may be organised?” (Bowe 1996). In Case Study 1 of *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*, Lakoff (1987) points out “A topic such as the logic of emotions would seem... a contradiction in terms; similarly, it may seem strange to talk about the principles which structure the logic of the fairy tale”. What we may infer from these lines is that, as the logic of emotions appears to be structured by metaphor and other ICMs (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 1999; Lakoff 1987, 1989; Lakoff and Turner 1989; Kövecses 1990, 2000; Peña 2003, etc.), the inner logic of the fairy tale is as well structured by these mechanisms.
- (d) The fact that conceptual metaphor has been proved to be a reasoning tool that has conveyed our commonplace knowledge throughout human generations may explain why, in a similar way, fairy tales condense a sort of collective unconscious that has been transmitted since man was man.
- (e) The fact that tales have survived over time in similar forms, apart from being fully memorised and transmitted by story-tellers, may also be explained from an experiential perspective (Lakoff 1987; Johnson 1987). From this point of

view, metaphor is considered an internalised mechanism of thought and reasoning. Thus, upon the acquisition of these internalised patterns (which generally stem from the inner structure of the body and the way we conceive it in its interaction with the physical and social world), not only the understanding but also the retelling of these traditional stories –whose basic structure is based on metaphor– would have been facilitated to a large extent.

Likewise, the conception of metaphor as a reasoning tool, that somehow determines the way in which we understand and perceive our surrounding world, and as a device that structures tales, may also explain the views which argue that fairy tales lead to a sort of embodiment of fundamental psychological dramas (cf. Bettelheim 1976).

- (f) The problem of classifying tales has always been the object of heated debate due to the vast array of forms in which they appear (cf. Aarne 1961; Propp 1998; Hans-Jörg 2000). Thus, the study of the tale as structured by conceptual metaphor may cast light onto this problematic and unresolved issue.

After reading these lines, the need for an analysis of the crucial role of metaphor in understanding and structuring fairy tales, and even other forms of literature, may be a bit more obvious. As far as we know, there are no preceding works within this line of research with the exception of Karen Bowe's Senior Honors Thesis (1996), and some other papers on metaphor and myths (e.g. Sweetser 1995).

In order to substantiate these points, we have worked with a computerized corpus of analysis containing 386 fairy tales written by Andrew Lang (1844-1912). The tales, which are representative of various cultures, have been entirely downloaded from the *Project Gutenberg* online library. The work of identification of underlying metaphors has been carried out with the help of the (encyclopedic) information provided in the *Berkeley Framenet Project*. This information has allowed us to make an exhaustive and systematic analysis of the lexical patterns of the metaphors. Then, we have made use of *WordSmith* and its tool "Concord" in order to find examples of key words and phrases that we expected to underlie metaphorical usage in the texts. This has allowed us to observe if a given metaphor applies in a given tale or not. Also, we have made use of Lakoff's *Conceptual Metaphor Home Page* (1994) and some *Google* searches in order to further back up our analysis of the metaphors in everyday usage.

3. DEATH IN FAIRY TALES

In this section, we analyse the different views that may be ascribed to death in fairy tales. As we will see, in terms of Lakoff and Turner (1989), many of these metaphors are related and may imply the others not because they are special cases of a more general metaphor or because they map onto the same target structure, but because they have the same grounding in everyday experience or commonplace knowledge. This is the case of metaphors such as DEATH IS NIGHT (from A LIFETIME IS A DAY and LIFE IS A

CYCLE OF THE WAXING AND WANING OF LIGHT AND HEAT), DEATH IS COLD (from LIFE IS HEAT), DEATH IS DARKNESS (from LIFE IS LIGHT), DEATH IS SLEEP, and DEATH IS REST, all of them linked by common shared knowledge that relates their source and target domains. In this connection, night is usually cold and dark, people sleep at night, and sleep is rest. Moreover, dead people are cold, as is the night (because there is no sunlight), and are immobile, as if at rest. Hence, night, dark, cold, sleep, and rest are correlated with one another in our commonplace knowledge. It is this correlation that makes the metaphors coherent with one another and explains the relationship between them.

3.1. *Death is Sleep*

The DEATH IS SLEEP metaphor is a common metaphor stemming from ancient times. For example, in the classical Greek tradition the god Thanatos was the personification of non-violent death (which became the root for some Latin words related to *death*, such as *tanatorium* –morgue–) and the twin brother of Hypnos (“Sleep,” hence a root for words such as *hypnophobia*, *hypnoanalysis*, *hypnosis*, and so forth). The DEATH IS SLEEP metaphor is really pervasive in many Greek tales and stories. In fact, the Greek mythology makes clear this relationship between death and sleep: the parents of these gods are Erebus (the pure darkness of Hades, the Underworld) and his mother Nyx (“Night”); Hypnos dwells with his twin brother Thanatos in a dark cave by the banks of the river Lethe (“Oblivion,” which also characterises our sleep), at the entrance to Hades (god of the Underworld and master of Hypnos and Thanatos); the cave is surrounded by opium poppies and other sleep-inducing herbs.

From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, the experiential basis for this metaphor comes from the fact that when we are sleeping, we clearly resemble a dead person, with our eyes closed, making no movements, and having no consciousness at all. These features which are characteristic of a person sleeping are thus mapped onto the image of a dead person: the corpse corresponds to the body of a sleeper because of its inactive appearance, the experiences of the soul after death correspond to our mental experiences during sleep (namely dreaming), and just as death is a particular sort of departure –a one-way departure with no return– so death is a particular sort of sleep –an eternal sleep from which we never wake–. We may also find instances of this metaphor in everyday language:

- (1) Evaporation is like the *death*, the *deep sleep* of snow.
- (2) She lay in the *eternal slumber* of death.
- (3) Brother Maroon, age 80, entered *eternal sleep* 12:43pm.

The metaphor under analysis may be also related to the metaphors DEATH IS LYING DOWN and DEATH IS REST, mainly because of the position of dead people, who are totally inactive. Besides, the DEATH IS REST metaphor may be also motivated by the fact that when we die there are no more troubles for us and we just seem to be

peacefully sleeping far from worries, as if it were not only a physical but psychological rest as well. These metaphors are opposed to the metaphors LIFE IS UPRIGHT and LIFE IS ACTIVITY. Some frequent linguistic examples of the DEATH IS REST metaphor appear in the following sentences:

- (4) The age-old custom of making an offering so that Mass may be celebrated for *the eternal rest* of the deceased is to be commended.
- (5) In his later years he suffered two grievous bereavements, losing his beloved daughter Annabelle and his equally beloved wife Sophy. (...) And now, he who served the community without rest, has been granted *his eternal rest*, and we who remain are the mourners.
- (6) It was perhaps the Pope who best encapsulated the memorial to an under-fulfilled life in stating he hoped she would find *eternal rest* beyond the travails of human life and the frailty she knew in recent years.

Regarding our corpus of fairy tales, the metaphor under discussion tends to be a central element in those tales in which the heroine is usually under a spell and falls into a deep sleep in such a way that she seems to be dead. This metaphor, making us see sleep as if it were death, somehow adds a rather climactic and tense element in the tale, which is normally contained in the outcome. In this sense, the widely known *Sleeping Beauty in the Wood* tells about a beautiful princess who is cursed to death by a witch, but a good fairy changes *death into sleeping* for a hundred years. When a prince hears about her and comes to rescue her from the curse, everybody is sleeping inside the palace as part of the spell the fairy made to overcome the evil curse of the witch, although we get the impression that they are dead:

He came into a spacious outward court, where everything he saw might have *frozen the most fearless person with horror*. There reigned all over a most *frightful silence*; the *image of death* everywhere showed itself, and there was nothing to be seen but stretched-out bodies of men and animals, *all seeming to be dead*. He, however, very well knew, by the ruby faces and pimpled noses of the beefeaters, that *they were only asleep*; and their goblets, wherein still remained some drops of wine, showed plainly that *they fell asleep in their cups*.

Similarly, *The Three Musicians* narrates the story of three friends who, after having heard about the wonders of a strange castle, decide to explore it. In so doing, although the first and second ones fail, the third one manages to outsmart the dwarf of the castle, thus discovering what was behind it. After being led to a room where a beautiful maiden had been sleeping for hundreds of years under a spell, he follows the instructions of the dwarf to bring her back to life. Again, sleep is parallel with death:

On the rich silk cushions embroidered with gold a lovely maiden lay sleeping. She was as beautiful as an angel, with golden hair which fell in curls over her marble shoulders, and a diamond crown sparkled on her forehead. But a *sleep as of*

death held her in its spell, and no noise seemed able to waken the sleeper. Then the little man turned to the wondering youth and said: 'See, here is the sleeping child! She is a mighty Princess. This splendid castle and this enchanted land are hers, but for *hundreds of years she has slept this magic sleep*, and during all that time no human being has been able to find their way here.

Finally, the outcome of the famous *Snowblood* (the traditional *Snowwhite*) also makes use of this metaphor when Snowdrop, after eating some of the poisonous apple, falls profoundly asleep, as if dead.

When the little Dwarfs came home in the evening they found *Snowdrop lying on the ground, and she neither breathed nor stirred*. They lifted her up, and looked round everywhere to see if they could find anything poisonous about. They unlaced her bodice, combed her hair, washed her with water and wine, but all in vain; *the child was dead and remained dead*. Then they placed her on a bier, and all the seven Dwarfs sat round it, *weeping and sobbing* for three whole days. At last they made up their minds to *bury her*, but she looked as blooming as a living being, and her cheeks were still such a lovely colour, that they said: 'We can't hide her away in the black ground.' So they had a *coffin* made of transparent glass, and they laid her in it, and wrote on the lid in golden letters that she was a royal Princess. Then they put the coffin on the top of the mountain, and one of the Dwarfs always remained beside it and kept watch over it. And the very birds of the air came and *bewailed Snowdrop's death*, first an owl, and then a raven, and last of all a little dove. Snowdrop lay a long time in the coffin, and she always looked the same, *just as if she were fast asleep*, and she remained as white as snow, as red as blood, and her hair as black as ebony.

3.2. *Death is departure*

The fact that organic corpses decompose in nature might have been the basis that made people in ancient times think that people set out on a journey when they die, which seems to be the ultimate basis of the metaphor DEATH IS DEPARTURE (which also implies the metaphor DEATH IS GOING TO A FINAL DESTINATION). Actually, many old civilisations regarded death as a sort of journey to a different world and that is why many tombs have been found to contain not only food but also personal belongings and useful things for the dead person's trip. As shown in this analysis, this seems to be a metaphor shared by many different cultures.

Many tales belonging to the Greek classical tradition also make use of this metaphor since it was by means of Charon's boat that people abandoned the place of the living people by crossing the River Styx. A famous sample is the tale of *Orpheus and Eurydice*, in which Eurydice dies after being bitten by a snake, her lover Orpheus thus setting out for the Land of the Dead.

When he reached the river Styx, Orpheus saw the spirits of the dead waiting in line for their trip across to Hades. He stepped into line behind them. Charon, the ferryman, welcomed each soul aboard, but he passed Orpheus, saying, "Only the dead are allowed." Charon stepped back to his boat. "The ferry is about to *leave*," he said.²

When Orpheus manages to convince Hades of letting her go with him, what is between the world of the living and the world of the dead is also depicted as a journey.

Orpheus thanked Hades and he and Eurydice started on their long journey home. (...) The trail was long and seemed to take an eternity, but he knew they were almost back in the upper world.

The ancient Celts also believed in life after death. Their sense of "death as departure" was so big that they even believed that after a person's death the soul needed a physically clear path to make its way to the Other World. Hence, when a person died, all windows, doors, etc. of a house were opened to make sure that the dead person could follow a clear path. The tales within the Arthurian cycle also depict the voyage towards the island of Avalon as the way to depart from the world of the living beings, as is the case of King Arthur in the film *Excalibur*.

In a similar way, the Norse tradition used the symbol of a boat which contains the corpse floating open-sea and being generally surrounded by flames. In this connection, *Baldur's Death* tells about the Norse god Baldur who was going to die according to a prophecy. In order to avoid that, the gods decided that every creature in heaven and on earth must swear a holy oath to never do harm to Baldur. Nevertheless, there was a little plant that, seeming so meek and harmless, had not been included in the oath. After Baldur was mortally wounded by the plant while engaged in a game (in which the gods kept aiming weapons at him since he resisted everything because of the oath), everything is set for his final journey:

Then the Giants pushed the ship out into the open waters and wild flames accompanied *the God on his last journey*. When the ship finally sank into the depth of the ocean, it seemed as if the whole world went into a twilight.³

Even one of the first books in English literature, *Beowulf*, demonstrates a similar procedure. Indeed, in the story, Beowulf cannot be sent out to sea as Scyld Shefing was, because he was "too earthly in his desire to see the wealth," besides the fact that the sea had been corrupted by the bodies of the monsters resting in its depths. Therefore, Beowulf must be buried on land, with the treasures of mankind surrounding his ashes, pointing the way for all men that should happen to sail over the sea.

This appealing metaphor seems to have been kept throughout the different generations in the history of humankind, and that is the reason why even we regard death as a journey nowadays. For instance, we speak about death as "the journey beyond," or

“the final journey”. If we focus on the verbs used for death, the idea of “departure” is clearly shown:

- (7) Anastasius survived this event a very short time, and *departed to the other world* after a reign of twenty-seven years, three months, and three days.
- (8) Maybe they pop into hell for a few minutes, and then come back into the real world, taking a “*trip to the world of the dead*” without actually dying.
- (9) As Mary Iyabo Esan *begins her last journey to the world beyond*, here is wishing the members of Esan’s family to consider *mama’s exit* as that of living an eternal life hereafter.

In our corpus, the best representation of the tales that exploit this metaphor is “In the Land of Souls,” from the Red Indian tradition of North America, which tells about the sudden death of a girl the night just before her wedding. The lover sets out on a long journey to the “Land of Souls” to recover her. Curiously enough, the whole tale is constructed upon the metaphor DEATH IS DEPARTURE: from the very beginning, the Land of Souls is depicted as a sort of distant country.

He remembered having heard from the old, old people of the tribe, that there was a *path that led to the Land of Souls* –that if you sought carefully you could find it. So the next morning he got up early, and put some food in his pouch and slung an extra skin over his shoulders, for he knew not *how long his journey* would take, nor what sort of *country* he would have to go through.

Moreover, when the protagonist enters the Land of Souls, he metaphorically dies by leaving his body behind him (which may also be based upon metaphor DYING IS LEAVING ONE’S BODY):

That is the Land of Souls, but no man enters it without *leaving his body* behind him. So, *lay down your body* here; your bow and arrows, *your skin* and your dog. They shall be kept for you safely.

Finally, upon the demand of the Master of Life, the protagonist must return home, coming back to the land of the living people, hence recovering his body:

And gladly would these two have walked thus for ever, but in the murmur of the wind he heard the Master of Life saying to him, ‘*Return whither you came*, for I have work for you to do, and your people need you, and for many years you shall rule over them. At the gate my messenger awaits you, and you shall *take again your body* which you left behind, and he will show you what you are to do.

The Rumanian tale *The Voice of Death* is the story of a man who tries to avoid death by means of living in a town where people didn’t die. However, from time to time a voice was heard calling first one and then another, and whoever heard that voice got

up and went away, and never came back. In fact, death did exist although in the form of a distant land; therefore, dying is departing:

And he went back to his home and got all his possessions together, and, taking his wife and family, he set out resolved to go and live in that country where the people did not die, but where instead they heard a voice calling them, which they followed *into a land from which they never returned*.

The opposite metaphor, BIRTH IS ARRIVAL, is motivated by the fact that a child actually comes into existence in this world. This metaphor is present in multiple tales and stories in which children come either out of the blue, sent by Heaven, in a huge shell, or in a small boat found in the river. It may even be seen within the explanation of birth as the arrival of the stork (as in the tale “The Gold-bearded Man”). Everyday language contains instances of this metaphor, too:

- (10) *He arrived to this world* on December 1st and we received a call on December 4th asking if we wanted a newborn.
- (11) Talking about Bobby Cruz, *he came to this world* on Feb 2, 1938, in a small town [...].

Turning to our corpus, the tales *The Hazel-Nut Child* and *The Sunchild* show an unhappy couple who are sent children after praying to the Heavens. *Little Wildrose* also tells about a childless couple in which the husband sets out to find a child. On the journey, a strange hermit tells him that he will have a daughter, and after sleeping, he just comes across a girl who comes to him.

When he woke up he saw something strange lying on a bank a little way off, amidst long trails of pink roses. The old man got up, rubbed his eyes, and went to see what it was, when, to his surprise and joy, it proved to be a little girl about two years old, with a skin as pink and white as the roses above her. He took her gently in his arms, but she did not seem at all frightened, and only jumped and crowed with delight; and the old man wrapped his cloak round her, and set off for home as fast as his legs would carry him.

In a similar fashion, *Stan Bolovan* also narrates the tale of a man who starts a journey to find children, and, upon returning home, his house is crowded with children that had just arrived.

3.3. *Dying is leaving one's body*

In terms of Lakoff and Turner (1989), this would correspond to the metaphors LIFE IS BONDAGE and DEATH IS DELIVERANCE, whereby life can be conceived in terms of bodily bondage since the soul of the person leading the life is metaphorically a bound prisoner. Being embodied is metaphorically the chain or other physical device

that binds the soul. Hence, life can be said to imprison the soul in the body, which in turn can be seen to be a dungeon trapping the soul. Therefore, the event of death symbolises the event of being released from imprisonment, as when the chains break, or as when the prisoner is released from prison. In this sense, death may be personified as someone who frees the prisoner from bondage, via the following interactions. Through LIFE IS BONDAGE, human death is release from physical imprisonment. The scenario for that release shows an agent who releases the prisoner from imprisonment; the fact that people die or death itself may metaphorically be seen as the cause of each individual death, and thus as the agent who releases the soul from the body. Hence, the general phenomenon of death can be personified as the person who breaks the chains or opens the prison door.

This view of the body as a sort of prison has been very influential in philosophy and religion. For example, Pythagoras, the Greek philosopher and mathematician, claimed that the soul was immortal and resided in the body; therefore, it survived bodily death. Plato, another famous Greek philosopher, shared similar views with Pythagoras in that the soul of man was eternal, pre-existent, and spiritual, but it tends to become impure during the bodily inhabitation.

Some instances of everyday language which exploit this metaphor are:

- (12) When *he left his body* on 25 September 1995, in the service of his Master till his last breath, people from all over the world had found together through him to work in the name of Sant Kirpal Singh (...).
- (13) As soon as he complained he was being given poison, the poison was apparently increased, and so *he departed from his body* shortly thereafter.
- (14) *He abandoned his body* the instant the knife touched him.

As we have already seen, *In the Land of Souls* clearly conveys the idea that death is leaving one's body. This idea is also transmitted by many tales such as *Story of the King Who Would See Paradise* in which a king loses his kingdom because he was not content to wait patiently to see the Paradise of the faithful. From then on, he lives a contemplative life until he eventually dies, death being personified as an angel who releases people:

And he turned and left the hall without a word, and went into the jungle, where he lived for twenty-five years a life of prayer and meditations, until at last the *Angel of Death* came to him, and *mercifully released him, purged and purified* through his punishment.

3.4. *Death is an adversary*

Among the various personifications that death may have, a basic metaphor for death is DYING IS LOSING A CONTEST AGAINST AN ADVERSARY. According to Lakoff and Turner (1989), this metaphor is part of a more general basic mapping, STAYING ALIVE IS A CONTEST, that comes into play when the possibility of dying

is contemplated. Just as different kinds of contest exist, there are special cases of this metaphor (a race, a wrestling match, a combat, a game, etc.). As happens in any contest, one has adversaries which may be personified as Death: seen as someone trying to catch you, a warrior battling against you, a beast attempting to devour you, or your opponent in any game.

In this connection, *The Prince Who Would Seek Immortality* tells about a prince who sets out on a journey looking for immortality. He visits different countries where he is offered the possibility of living for many years until he eventually finds the Land of Immortality. After a thousand years, the prince decides to come back and see his family, but he discovers that all his acquaintances are dead. On his way back he revives the people he knew (who think they have been sleeping and not dead), but when he reaches his father's kingdom he cannot find the palace. Instead, he meets Death, who was looking for him. After being helped by his friends, the prince manages to arrive at the Land of Immortality, although he is captured by Death just at the boundary of the country. Then, a wager is set to decide the prince's fate: he will be thrown up into the sky and depending on the side he falls, he will belong either to the Queen of the Immortals or to Death.

3.5. *Death is cold/life is heat*

Since living organic beings have a corporal temperature which is lost at the instant of death, we conceive death as being characterised by coolness, while life is prototypically warm. In everyday language we find these metaphors, too:

- (15) Brilliant colors highlight the melancholy age-old balance between *the warmth of life* and the iciness of death, spiced with the sardonic humor of irony.
- (16) The last of his strength about to desert him and *the cold slumber of death* awaiting, Crom, seated upon a rude throne surmounted by a monstrous skull and surrounded by grim, dark eyed warriors, suddenly appeared to Conan.
- (17) But we did not celebrate her birthday, instead we buried her mother. *It was a cold, gray day.*
- (18) She grasped his hand and as he squeezed her fingers, *the warmth returned to her body and she returned to life.*

These metaphors tend to work at a local level within fairy tales, as is the case of *Thumbelina*, in which a passage tells about how a girl warms a frozen swallow, bringing it back to life:

Then she laid her head against the bird's heart. But the bird was not dead: he had been frozen, but *now that she had warmed him, he was coming to life again*. In autumn the swallows fly away to foreign lands; but there are some who are late in starting, and then they get so cold that they drop down as if dead, and the snow comes and covers them over.

The Tale of a Youth who Set Out to Learn what Fear Was also contains a whole passage in which the protagonist revives a dead man, characterised by cold, through warming him.

They placed the coffin on the ground, and he approached it and took off the cover. In it lay a dead man. *He felt his face, and it was cold as ice.* "Wait," he said "I'll heat you up a bit," *went to the fire, warmed his hand, and laid it on the man's face, but the dead remained cold.* Then he lifted him out, sat down at the fire, laid him on his knee, and rubbed his arms that the blood should circulate again. When that too had no effect it occurred to him that if two people lay together in bed they warmed each other; so he put him into the bed, covered him up, and lay down beside him; *after a time the corpse became warm and began to move.*

Nonetheless, the metaphor DEATH IS COLD may also structure a whole story, such as *The Story of King Frost*, a tale in which a girl is abandoned in the freezing forest by her father upon the demand of her stepmother. There, King Frost, which somehow symbolises death by cold, visits her and, after being touched by her ill-state, takes her with it in its carriage. The girl went back home, radiant and beautiful, in a dress all glittering with silver and gold. After seeing that, the real daughter of the wicked stepmother is also placed in the forest to get jewels but, as she was really rude to King Frost, she is frozen to death, experiencing the same fate the stepmother will suffer.

3.6. *Death is renewal*

The Aztec culture contains several myths and legends that tell about human sacrifices used to offer the dead's blood to the Sun god, so that it could go on shining the next day. The orange colour bears certain resemblance to the red colour of blood, which may have motivated this identification. Besides, pagan traditions have always regarded death in nature (winter) as a necessary stage to let new life develop and thus restart the natural cycle of seasons (this is clearly related to the metaphor LIFETIME IS A YEAR, according to which SPRING IS BIRTH, DEATH IS WINTER and so on). From this perspective, even human death may be seen as natural and essential in letting new generations develop.

From a Christian point of view, Easter coincides with a symbol of spring and new life since Jesus' death brought new life to Christians. Nevertheless, in the same way as in many other cases regarding the Christian tradition, there are Judaeo-Christian and pagan traditions behind this celebration. Thus, Easter is not only celebrating the death by crucifixion and subsequent resurrection of Jesus, but it is closely related to the phases of the moon and the Spring Equinox, and subsequently the return of the sun to the northern hemisphere as a sort of life resurrection after winter. We may even have a look at the presents given in this time of year, namely, Easter flowers and eggs. Flowers are obviously a symbol of the regeneration of plants, while eggs are of course representative of fertility. Afterwards, the Christians adopted this tradition and the Easter egg became

a religious symbol, meaning the tomb from which Jesus appeared and the new life within. There are also the so-called “Easter Bunnies;” the tradition going back to the pagan festival of *Eostre*, an Anglo-Saxon goddess whose earthly symbol was the hare. The motivation for this lies within the fact that rabbits and hares are among the most procreative animals.

Coming back to the classical Greek myths, the seasons of the year are ultimately explained by the following story: Demeter’s daughter, Persephone, should remain three months of the year in the underworld, where she would reside with her husband Hades, and then be returned to her mother for the remaining nine months. While her daughter was away, Demeter would curse the crops and the earth would be barren and cold. But upon the maiden’s return, Demeter, happy again, would once again bestow her blessings upon the earth and the world would again become fertile with new life. This is why the crops do not bear fruit during the winter months, but sprout again in spring.

Regarding fairy tales, many of them show from the very beginning that old parents die, giving their possessions to their offspring in such a way that their death is portrayed as something natural which somehow allows new generations to develop (e.g. *Puss In Boots*, *Felicia*, etc.). Regarding seasons, there is a very closely related story with the aforementioned Greek one, called *The Flower Queen’s Daughter*, in which a prince sets out to free a beautiful princess who happened to be the daughter of the Flower Queen. Since she is part of nature, she must comply with the natural cycles, in such a way that she is underground (see the metaphor DEATH IS BEING UNDERGROUND) in winter, and returns from her death afterwards.

When the Flower Queen heard that her daughter wanted to marry the Prince, she said to him: ‘I will give my consent to your marriage gladly, but my daughter can only stay with you in summer. In winter, when everything is dead and the ground covered with snow, she must come and live with me in my palace underground.’ The Prince consented to this, and led his beautiful bride home, where the wedding was held with great pomp and magnificence. The young couple lived happily together till winter came, when the Flower Queen’s daughter departed and went home to her mother. In summer she returned to her husband, and their life of joy and happiness began again, and lasted till the approach of winter, when the Flower Queen’s daughter went back again to her mother.

Finally, in *The Wonderful Sheep* princess Miranda is condemned to death by her father, but she is allowed to live by the captain in charge of killing her. In order to deceive her father and make him believe that she is dead, three friends of the princess commit suicide so that she goes on living.

3.7. *Death is underground/ life is over ground*

These metaphors may stem from the ancient tradition of burying people underground, which can already be seen in instances of the gods of the Egyptian culture

(e.g. Anubis as God of the underworld) or the Greek one (Thanatos and Persephone as inhabitants of the infraworld, as we have observed before). The experiential basis for this seems to be clear as well, since during life we are present in the world (on earth) and after death we are absent and, if buried, underground. Common everyday language makes use of these metaphors as well:

- (19) The ancient Greeks believed that after a person died, his or her spirit *went to the world below* and dwelled for eternity in the depths of the earth.
- (20) Farmgirl has decided to stop living for a few. Farmgirl would probably love to be resurrected. Farmgirl *is pushing up daisies*.
- (21) Dust you are and *dust you will be*.
- (22) She burst into tears at the sight, and in heaven, as she had done when a little *child on earth*, she wept and prayed for poor Inge.

In our corpus of study, the metaphor DEATH IS UNDERGROUND may be found in tales such as *The Flower Queen's Daughter*. In this story, the daughter of the Flower Queen, who is part of nature, must comply with the natural cycles in such a way that when she is "dead" because of winter, she is underground. But, when summer comes, she somehow comes back to life and returns to earth. *The Underworld Workers* also tells about a man who sleeps, being exposed to the freezing weather, and metaphorically dying (see the metaphors DEATH IS SLEEP and DEATH IS COLD). He is then woken up by some men who take him to the underworld.

The metaphors under analysis may not only motivate other metaphors such as DEATH IS DARKNESS, DEATH IS NIGHT (and their opposites LIFE IS LIGHT, LIFE IS DAY) but also, on account of the obvious fact that light does not reach what is underground and, since typically death is ascribed negative connotations, the BAD IS UNDERWORLD metaphor. The latter may be illustrated by means of the tale *King Kojata*, a story about a king who, being out of his palace, is deceived by a strange creature who asks him for his future son (without the king's awareness that he was going to have a child). When the prince grows and discovers that, he sets on a journey to free himself. In so doing, he meets a princess who happens to be the daughter of the creature, who was in fact a wicked magician and ruler of the underworld.

Finally, following up with the aforementioned connections and relationships, we have also come across the metaphor BAD IS BLACK/DARK, which characterises many tales and especially characters. One of tales which is most widely known throughout the world may be Hans Andersen's *The Ugly Duckling*, a tale about a duck that is not white like his brothers but rather dark in colour. His dark colour will always be the reason for the persecutions and loneliness he suffers until he discovers he has changed plumage and is indeed a beautiful white swan.

3.8. *Death is transformation*

The DEATH IS TRANSFORMATION metaphor may be a direct consequence of the metaphor DYING IS LEAVING ONE'S BODY, in such a way that our soul abandons the body at the very moment of death and it moves into a different physical vehicle (in this sense, a body or any other physical entity could be seen as a vehicle for the soul). That is, transformation could be regarded as a change from one way of being to another.

It is well known that the Egyptians believed in reincarnation or the transmigration of the soul. They thought that the soul transmigrated from body to body. This was the reason why they embalmed the body, in order to preserve it, so that it could journey (see the metaphor DEATH IS DEPARTURE) along with Ka. This god was a sort of animating force believed to be the counterpart of the body, which would accompany it in the next world or life. Afterwards, the concept of soul arose in many other cultures and religions (especially in Eastern ones, e.g. Buddhism) with a further view that the soul departed from the body at death and entered the body at birth: the soul leaving a dead body would seek another body to enter, or enter an animal or any other lower-life form. It was also believed that the soul left the body during sleep, which may be explained as well on the basis of the metaphor DEATH IS SLEEP.

The experiential basis for this metaphor may have stemmed from the fact that when people are buried underground their bodies disappear and, generally, a dense vegetation grows in the place where the dead were. Another reason could be related to family resemblances, which lead to the belief that the soul transmigrates to an infant of the dead person's family.

With regards to fairy tales, *The Snow-Daughter and the Fire-Son* tells about a couple who had a daughter who personified snow and a son who personified the sun. The two siblings couldn't approach each other because they felt either too much heat or cold but, after a fight in which they got near, both of them ended up dead and transformed into water and cinder:

When the Snow-daughter saw this she turned on her brother and flew at him. Then a fight began, the like of which had never been seen on earth. When the people, attracted by the noise, hurried to the spot, they saw the *Snow-daughter melting into water and the Fire-son burn to a cinder.*

In some other tales, normally a witch or magician transforms people into stone or other things, and they are presented as if they were dead:

Then he mounted his golden horse, and rode off till he reached the forest where *his brother lay transformed to stone*. The old witch came out of her house and called to him, for she would gladly have cast her spells on him too, but he took care not to go near her, and called out: '*Restore my brother to life* at once, or I'll shoot you down on the spot. (*The Golden Lads*)

The Dead Wife, from the Iroquois Indian tradition, tells about the wife of an Indian hunter who died, leaving him solitary. Because of his sorrow, the Great Spirit sends her back with the proviso that she shouldn't be touched till they meet their tribe. However, he can't resist the temptation and, as soon as he touches her, she vanishes and is substituted by a doll.

But he would not listen to her, and caught her to him, and behold! *he was clasping the wooden doll*. And when he saw it was the doll he pushed it from him in his misery and rushed away to the camp, and told them all his story. And some doubted, and they went back with him to the place *where he and his wife had stopped to rest, and there lay the doll*, and besides, they saw *in the snow the steps of two people, and the foot of one was like the foot of the doll*. And the man grieved sore all the days of his life.

Finally, *The Girl-Fish* reflects the transformation of a girl into a fish after she eats a magical fish who tried to prevent her from eating it; the transformation is described in such a way that she seems to die in her human state in order to pass into being a fish.

'Didn't I say that fish would be delicious?' she cried; and plunging her spoon into the dish the girl helped herself to a large piece. But the instant it touched her mouth a *cold shiver ran through her*. Her head seemed to flatten, and her eyes to look oddly round the corners; her legs and her arms were stuck to her sides, and she *gasped wildly for breath*. With a mighty bound she sprang through the window and fell into the river, where she soon felt better, and was able to swim to the sea, which was close by.

3.9. *Death is old age*

Since old age is the nearest stage in life to death as regards the life cycle, many personifications of death are based upon the depiction of an old man with features such as wrinkles, white hair, a white beard, etc.

In our corpus, we have even found a tale, *The Prince who would Seek Immortality*, which includes this representation of Death:

He turned away sadly and wandered back into the streets, hardly knowing where he was going; when a voice behind him cried: 'Stop, prince, I have caught you at last! It is a thousand years since I first began to seek you.' And there beside him stood the old, white-bearded figure of Death.

3.10. *Death in the illustrations of fairy tales: the baddies*

In the sections above, we have examined the connections between death, darkness, being underground, night, cold, badness, etc. In order to support the aforementioned hypotheses, we will further make use of the illustrations contained in fairy tales, since they

are quite telling of how death is normally understood, relative to all of those terms. In fact, all those aspects tend to be defining characteristic traits of the baddies in fairy tales, which ultimately exploit the metaphor DEATH IS BADNESS (obviously opposed to LIFE IS GOODNESS). In order to account for all this, let us take a look at the following picture which contains the illustrations of some of the baddies in several of Disney's films and books, which are usually based upon traditional tales, myths, and legends.



Figure 1. *Disney's baddies*⁵

As we may observe in figure 1, the baddies in many illustrations are characterised by either one or a mixture of the following features:

- (a) Icy, cyanotic aspect which stems from the metaphor DEATH IS COLD (obviously, cold is characterised by blue and white colours because of our experience with cold things such as snow, ice, etc.). This is the case of Hades in *Hercules*, Ursula in *The Little Mermaid*, Maleficent in *The Sleeping Beauty*, Cruella Devil in *101 Dalmatians*, etc. Note that the primary metaphor AFFECTION IS WARMTH (and its opposite NON-AFFECTION IS COLD) may apply here as well since all these bad characters tend to be presented as rather cold in terms of emotional proximity to the viewer. In so doing, the protagonist wins the interest of the viewer, as opposed to his antagonist. For example, consider the cases of the stepmothers in *Snowwhite* and *Cinderella*.
- (b) Skinny, skeletal aspect. Although the images of skeletons, skulls, or just bones have usually been taken for metaphors of death (just consider the image of the grim reaper –a skeleton with a scythe⁴–, or the flag of a pirate ship –with a skull and crossbones–), the skeleton is actually a metonymy for death. More specifically, it is an EFFECT FOR CAUSE metonymy, which could be diagrammed as follows:

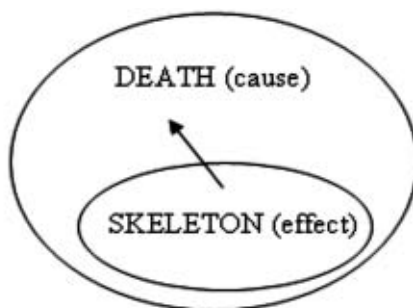


Figure 2. *Skeleton for death*

As can be seen, a skeleton is the clear effect of death. Moreover, the contextual effects of the skeletal aspect of the baddy may be really shocking to the viewer since, from a linguistic viewpoint, cause takes cognitive precedence over effect, in terms of saliency (Langacker 1993). Finally, as Ruiz de Mendoza and Otal (2002) have shown, the EFFECT FOR CAUSE metonymy is a source-in-target metonymy.

In the illustrations of tales, this holds true for Snowwhite's stepmother acting as a witch, Scar and the hyenas in *The Lion King*, Hades in *Hercules*, Cruella Devil in *101 Dalmatians*, etc.

- (c) Black and dark attire and garments which characterise the baddies. This is a direct consequence of the metaphors DEATH IS DARKNESS/BLACK and BLACK IS BAD. As can be observed, almost each one of the baddies depicted above shares this trait. Besides, not only black garments but even black atmosphere (with no light) may surround them, which may be explained on the basis of metaphors such as NIGHT IS BAD. In fact, colours are normally quite telling of the characters they represent: the metaphor BLACK IS BAD (which underlies expressions such as *To blacken someone's name*) or its converse WHITE/BRIGHT IS GOOD apply for instance to tales such as *The Lady of the Fountain*, related to the Arthurian cycle, in which a bad knight appears as a black man. These metaphors that link colours with attributes may stem from the logical relationships we have seen at the beginning of this section of metaphors related to death. Furthermore, the frequent connection of white colours and purity (which lead to the metaphor WHITE/BRIGHT IS PURITY) may be due to the experiential fact that things get stained and thus dirty and finally show dark colours rather than bright ones. When we talk, for instance, about pure gold, we mean gold without any other substance that can be seen as the "impurity;" in other words, something which is absolutely clean, i.e. it is free from everything else but the substance itself. In fact, if we focus on the etymology of the term "pure," it comes from the French *purée* (in Old French), the feminine past participle of *purer* (*to strain, clean*), which in turn comes

from the Latin *purare* (*to purify*), which originates in *purus*, *clean*. Besides, something which is clean *per se* is of a uniform colour. So, this may account for the connection between pure, i.e. clean, and white. Then, as applied to human beings, there is a metaphorical projection based on physical purity which leads to moral, behavioural purity. Hence, a soul that has led an obedient life according to the moral principles of society would be clean, with no spots or stains, whereas a soul which has sinned presents spots of impurity. In fact, in terms of moral purity, religious and sacred beings have generally been depicted as surrounded by a sort of bright/white aura, since they are always pure.

- (d) Living underground, which stems from the metaphors DEATH IS UNDERGROUND and BAD IS UNDERGROUND. The best representative is, no doubt, Hades –God of the Underworld– in *Hercules*.
- (e) Features of old age, such as white or grey hair, wrinkles, decrepit aspect, etc. which are related to the metaphor DEATH IS OLD AGE. This is the case of Hades or Ursula.

Now, although it may seem contradictory at first sight, the depictions of some of these characters include fire and flames when they are enraged or they prepare their curses: even though they seem to be characterised by a blue colour that can be explained on the basis of the metaphor DEATH/BAD IS COLD, there is a visual incongruence based on the mixture of their characteristic cold colours and their temporal warm colours.



Figure 3. *Hades enraged, surrounded by flames*
(photogram of Disney's *Hercules*)



Figure 4. *Ursula preparing her attack (photogram of Disney's The Little Mermaid)*

Nonetheless, it is by means of the study of conceptual metaphor that we are able to make sense of this seeming paradox. In fact, the metaphor THE BODY IS A CONTAINER FOR THE EMOTIONS accounts for this visual paradox. By means of this metaphor, George Lakoff and Zoltán Kövecses provided an impressive analysis of metaphoric understandings of anger in *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things* (1987). This analysis reveals the required mapping between folk models of heat and folk models of anger. In this mapping, a heated container maps onto an angry individual, heat maps onto anger, smoke/steam (a sign of heat) maps onto signs of anger, and explosion maps onto extreme, uncontrolled anger. This can be exemplified by the following instances of everyday language:

- (23) He was steaming.
- (24) She was filled with anger.
- (25) I had reached my boiling point.
- (26) I was fuming.
- (27) He exploded.
- (28) I blew my top.

However, Lakoff and Kövecses also noted that an important basis for this metaphor was found within the folk theory of physiological effects of anger: increased body heat, blood pressure, agitation, and redness in the face. On this basis, metonymic connections relate emotions to their physiological effects, which may be seen in:

- (29) He gets hot under the collar.
- (30) She was red with anger.
- (31) I almost burst a blood vessel.

SOURCE →		TARGET
"physical events" container heat steam explode boiling point	"emotions" person anger sign of anger show extreme anger highest degree of emotion	"physiology" person body heat perspiration, redness acute shaking, loss of physiological control

Figure 5. *THE BODY IS A CONTAINER FOR THE EMOTIONS metaphor*

Nevertheless, Turner and Fauconnier (1998) managed to explain this metaphor under the perspective of conceptual blending. In this model, we find the people and their emotions projected from a target input space; and we find the corresponding physiological reactions projected either from the source input of physical heat, explosion, and boiling, or from the target input of the body's physiology linked to the emotions. In this new account, the following set of correspondences holds:

SOURCE	BLEND	TARGET	
<u>Input Space 1</u> "physical events" container orifice heat steam explode boiling point	<u>Blended Space</u> person/container ears/orifice heat/anger steam/smoke explode boiling/highest degree of emotion	<u>Input Space 2</u> "emotions" person ears anger sign of anger show extreme anger highest degree of emotion	<u>Input Space 3</u> "physiology" person body heat perspiration, redness acute shaking, loss of control

Figure 6. *I could see the smoke coming out of his ears*

All this may also be explained on the basis of the metonymy COLOUR FOR EMOTIONS, which stems from the subjective judgment of emotions (depression, embarrassment, etc.) and the sensorial experience of visual perception. This metonymy is based upon the primary experience that our colour changes in different situations, and underlies expressions such as *There were a few red faces about it; the blue face, after splitting up with his girlfriend, left without paying; he was quite grey* (grey standing for dull, serious), etc.

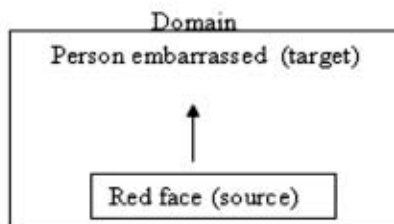


Figure 7. Source-in-target metonymy

In the written tales, the metaphor THE BODY IS A CONTAINER FOR EMOTIONS is also reflected, usually in the punishments. For example, in *The Twelve Brothers*, the king's wicked mother slanders his wife constantly, who is under an oath of silence and cannot speak to defend herself, until the king decides to kill her. Literally "a great fire was lit in the courtyard of the palace, where she was to be burnt (...). The flames were licking her garments with their red tongues". Therefore, even though the story does not tell us about the old queen's emotions, we can assume she is motivated by pure jealousy since the young queen is her rival. This is represented by means of the heat of the flames, which is even further realised by the "red tongues" licking the young queen, symbolising the slander. Also, in *Snow-Drop* (the story of the famous Snow-White) the wicked queen is punished to step into a pair of red-hot iron shoes and dance until she is dead. Since the story of *Snow-Drop* does not concern an attempt to stop a marriage (the prince only appears at the very end of the tale), the real crime of the story is the queen's jealous rage at Snow-Drop's displacing her as "fairest in the land." This rage is metaphorically portrayed by means of the red-hot iron shoes.

4. CONCLUSION

In this paper we have shown how several death metaphors are able to account for the basic meaning and interpretation of more than thirty popular tales and myths. Besides, we have offered the possibility of classifying tales according either to the basic metaphor they contain or to the combination of metaphors that may comprise them (for example, whereas *The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood* is characterised by the metaphor DEATH IS SLEEP, *The Flower Queen's daughter* makes use of various metaphors such as DEATH IS RENEWAL and DEATH IS UNDERGROUND). Additionally, this paper has explored in what ways the metaphors under scrutiny allow us to explain some of the uncanny elements of tales (e.g. princesses who fall in everlasting sleep, people who are changed into fish or dolls, the characters's strange colours, etc.). Finally, we suggest that these metaphors, because of their strong experiential grounding, may have contributed to an easier transmission of many fairy tales (as it would be easier to memorise their basic patterns), and also to make tales alike in different socio-cultural settings (we have shown how tales from different

sources share the same basic motif: e.g. the metaphor DEATH IS DEPARTURE applies to Norse, North American, Celtic, and European tales).

NOTES

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2. Available at: <http://www.business-esolutions.com/starmyths/myths/lyra4.htm>
3. Available at: <http://fanzone50.com/Tales/Nordic-Baldur.html>
4. The view of death as the Grim Reaper was explained by Lakoff and Turner (1989) in terms of the EVENTS ARE ACTIONS metaphor, and by Fauconnier and Turner's (1994, 1998) metaphoric blends.
5. All the images have been reproduced with kind permission of the Walt Disney Company.

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