

Title: Jelinek und das Märchen:
Surface and Transcendence in *Der Tod und das Mädchen I-IV*

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This paper considers Jelinek's *Der Tod und das Mädchen I-V* (2003), discussing how these pieces employ on the one hand the Volksmärchen and Kunstmärchen of both popular and literary genres, and, on the other, surfaces and intertexts of pop culture. Fairy tales traditionally operate at historical, political, and social levels, telling us who we are and finally depositing the reader into a "happily ever after."¹ While numerous other writers, artists and filmmakers have utilized the classical fairy tale to various purposes, Jelinek's work continues to both use and interrogate the genre in new ways. This paper argues that throughout Jelinek's collection, the idea – and inscription -- of transcendence itself, an 'ever after,' becomes dynamically transformed into an idea of shattering, excess and iterability, which ultimately results in new space. The pieces play endlessly with constructing and deconstructing surfaces, and with compliance and noncompliance to these surfaces. Additionally, Jelinek's tales blatantly, rather than subversively, break taboos. In approaching Jelinek's work in connection with fairy tale, much of this paper will explore which surfaces Jelinek chooses to employ, and to what ends.

Clothing itself is one surface which repeatedly assumes a rhetorical function as the protagonists assume their roles: "Auch so ein Kleid, das seinen starken Hang zum Rhetorischen besitzt, man kann es sprechen und man kann es einem absprechen, wie Jack es getan hat." (aus *Jackie*) Dornröschen and her prince dress in stuffed animal costumes. The natural and the artificial, often a united nature within the classical fairy tale, are repeatedly transposed, aestheticized, and placed into conflict in *Der Tod und das Mädchen*, especially in connection with death and the attempt to become "natural." While Jelinek's figures (such as Schneewittchen) can seemingly never orient themselves within wilderness itself, Jackie remarks: "Die Natur kann man sich ja stundenlang anschauen, aber wenn sie kaputt is – weg damit! Kann man nichts machen. In mir können Sie eher die Geburt des Künstlichen mit ansehen, welches die Natur so geschickt verbirgt..." (*Jackie*)

The princesses' additional searches for truth, unity, an acceptable mate and literary influence remain comically unfulfilled, disrupted, or cut short by death, however, each piece accomplishes a series of broken taboos and shattered surfaces. "Heldenhafte Persönlichkeiten? Wir nicht. Vorteilshafte Kriegsführung? Können wir nicht. Wir sind trotzdem in jeder Hinsicht im Aufstieg begriffen, aber wir begreifen unsren Aufstieg noch gar nicht richtig... Die Wand is schon ganz zersplittert unter unsren Versuchen, unser Bild dort hinzuhängen" (aus *Die Wand*) Jelinek not only reinscribes the idea of transcendence as one of excess and shattering within the fairy

¹ In *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*. Jack Zipes writes: "...fairy tales were cultivated to assure that young people would be properly groomed for their social functions."

tale and other intertexts of classical and modern themes, but also opens a new space within these excesses.