

## **“Put Not Your Trust in Princes”:*Fables* and the Problematisation of Everyday Life.**

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### **Abstract**

DC Comics's *Fables* is a postmodern pop culture pastiche which involves both the extraordinary vision of fairytales and a carnivalesque counter-cultural subversion of Disney-inflected norms. Accordingly, this paper explores the ways in which *Fables*'s narratives and semiotics reveal everyday life to be a construct normalised by its subjects. Issues such as intertextual dialogue, carnival, active audiences, and the neo-Victorian prosocial diadecism of the fairytale genre are discussed.

*Fables* is an ongoing comic book series published by DC Comics's mature-audience-targeted Vertigo imprint. It has proven popular enough to warrant a spin-off companion series, a prestige-bound hardcover collection, and a script order for a television pilot (Futoncritic.com np). The series is written under two central conceits: that public domain fairytale heroes and villains—such as Snow White, The Big Bad Wolf, Baba Yaga, Sinbad, and Prince Charming—all exist in a shared narrative continuity, and that they live in present-day New York, having been driven from their homelands by the evil Adversary. It thus subverts the traditional fairytale structure where the hero(ine) is plucked from a comforting domesticity, and called to adventure in a wonderland that becomes curiouser and curiouser with each turn of the plot (Campbell 12): the *Fables* adventure and live their immortal lives in a quotidian—for the audience—chronotope characterised by all-night diners, deserted back alleys, and apartment buildings. This paper thus explores the ways in which the narratives and semiotics of *Fables* problematises everyday life, and reveal it to be a construct normalised by its subjects. As a postmodern pop culture pastiche which involves both the extraordinary vision of fairytales and a carnivalesque counter-cultural subversion of Disney-inflected norms, *Fables* provides a uniquely potent case study around which to do so. Issues such as intertextual dialogue, carnival, active audiences, and the neo-Victorian prosocial diadecism of the fairytale genre will be discussed.

To begin, both the everyday and the extraordinary are mutually-reinforcing contradictory constructs; they depend largely on being their opposite number's Other to define themselves. Where the everyday is the sphere of 'routine, repetitive taken-for-granted experiences, beliefs and practices; the mundane, ordinary world' (Featherstone 160), the extraordinary is an ever-changing sphere where imagination and possibility are both given free rein and which '[does] not claim to be definitive or knowing. Lacking finality, it interrogate[s] authoritative truths and replace[s] them with something less certain' (Jackson 15). The extraordinary is thus 'the sphere of danger, violence and the courting of risk' (Featherstone 165) where its 'juxtaposition of incompatible elements and resistance to fixity' (Jackson 15) serves to 'threaten ...the possibility of returning to everyday routines' (Featherstone 164). It also dramatically contrasts the notion that 'the characteristic mode of experiencing the everyday is that of habit' (Felski 18), and that this familiarity further 'combines with the promise of protection and warmth to create the positive everyday association of home' (Felski 22). Yet, the everyday remains integral to understanding the extraordinary; it 'constitutes a base, a taken-for-granted grounding which allows us to make forays into other worlds' (Felski 22), and foregrounds the latter's associated exotic points of departure from it.

The theories of Henri Lefebvre thus bear exploring. Lefebvre sees everyday life as an experience intertwined with modernity, and as an exploitative, oppressive 'bureaucratic society of controlled consumption' (*Everyday Life* 68); it is the site of (and the crucial condition for) the reproduction of the relations of production (*Everyday Life* 41). He asserts that the everyday is marked by 'two modes of repetition: the cyclical, which dominates in nature, and the linear, which dominates in processes known as "rational"' (Lefebvre, *Everyday and Everydayness* 10); 'the activities of sleeping, eating, and working conform to regular diurnal rhythms that are in turn embedded within larger cycles of repetition: the weekend, the annual holiday, the start of a new semester' (Felski 18). This repetition—along with the mass production that industrialisation engenders—invests everyday life with conformity (Lefebvre, *Everyday and Everydayness* 10). Organised passivity thus dominates: 'in leisure activities, (it means) the passivity of the spectator faced with images and landscapes; in the workplace, it means passivity when faced with decisions in which the worker takes no part' (Lefebvre, *Everyday and Everydayness* 10).

For Lefebvre, the advent of the “total person”—created via the de-alienation of human beings from the everyday—will herald the positive transformation of everyday life (*Everyday Life* 72). As such, fleeting intimations of the sublime are needed, ‘moments of vivid sensations of disgust, of shock, of delight and so on, which although fleeting, provide a promise of the possibility of a different daily life, while at the same time puncturing the continuum of the present’ (Highmore 116). The utopianly classless space of Mikhail Bakhtin’s carnival, marked as it is by its ‘atmosphere of joyful relativity’ (107) through its topsy-turvy abolishment of everyday power relations, thus holds great attraction for Lefebvre:

During [those] feasts there was much merry-making: dancing, masquerades in which boys and girls changed clothes or dressed up in animal skins or masks — simultaneous marriages for an entire new generation — races and other sports, beauty contests, mock tournaments... It is the day of excess. Anything goes. This exuberance, this enormous orgy of eating and drinking - with no limits, no rules... (Lefebvre, *Critique* 202)

While this carnival could be read as ultimately restrictive rather than emancipatory—after all, authorities may co-opt it into official culture so as to provide a pressure valve where malcontents release their frustrations in ways harmless to the hegemony—Lefebvre maintains that it remains effective so long as it is seen as alienated from the quotidian; invoking carnival’s tropes signals the viability and possibility of alternative lifestyles and mindsets. In the case of *Fables*, its use of carnivalesque reversal signals that the everyday sphere which fairytales attempt to socialise their readers into may not be such a perfect construct after all: the archetypal Prince Charming is re-imagined as a sleazy Lothario who unhesitatingly seduces every pretty girl he meets, and who earthily boasts (mid-coitus) that his ‘cocksmanship (sp) is as good as [his] swordsmanship’ (Willingham, *Legends in Exile* 22), while The Big Bad Wolf, traditionally a villainous Other, is portrayed as a devoted mate and caring father.

*Fables* also undermines entrenched notions of decorum through this use of crude humour to engender laughter; it displays the (in contemporary popular imagination) benign, genteel heroes of fairytales gleefully doing things very much beyond the social pale: in addition to its unrepentantly hyper-libidinous Prince Charming, it also features tiny talking animals holding guns and saying ‘fuck’ (Willingham 2003: 85), and has Goldilocks in an interspecies relationship ‘because Papa’s li’l Boo Bear is hung like [an enjoyably big bear]’ (Willingham, *Animal Farm* 31). These easily-understood jokes—at the expense of everyday propriety—thus

allow a communitarian and resistant laughter which ‘demolishes fear and piety before an object ...thus clearing the ground for an absolutely free investigation’ (Bakhtin 23). For example, Goldilocks’s immediate lofty protest that her choice of mate is ‘a vital and powerful political statement’ (Willingham, *Animal Farm* 31) is captured in a traditionally textually-privileged head shot where she stares out of the page to address audiences directly with intellectually polysyllabic prose. Yet, Willingham’s use of shockingly crude humour encourages audiences to distrust her rationalisations. Such an anarchic liberation from conventions is in marked contrast to what Lefebvre sees as the depressingly stratified hierarchal confines of the everyday (*Everyday and Everydayness* 10).

Another key way in which *Fables* carnivalesquely subverts the construct of everyday life is through its repeated depiction of the grotesque body. Building on Lefebvre's notion that the routines of daily life ‘are reconstructed in caricature’ (Moran 129) within post-war consumer society, Joe Moran finds that a certain embarrassment about the workings of quotidian life has resulted in the hypermarginalisation of effluvia (131). ‘Extractor fans take away kitchen smells, disposal units incinerate waste in a few seconds ...this has allowed the middle classes to embrace a comfortable version of the below-stairs life of the servants they might have employed in a previous era’ (Moran 131). Thus, Moran argues that everyday life is focused on appearances rather than intentions; it conceals not only the mundane life of the house, but also the labour that goes into maintaining it (131-32). The dominant Disney version of Snow White quite literally embodies this slant towards outward appearances and abstracted antisepticity. As ‘fairest of them all’ (Cottrell et al. 1937), she is an idealised body with ‘lips as red as the rose. Hair as black as ebony. Skin as white as snow’ (Cottrell et al. 1937); older versions of the folktale which obliquely reference the messier inner workings of the body — through comparing her to being ‘as white as snow, [and] as red as blood’ (Ashliman np) — have thus been whitewashed.

*Fables*, however, includes scenes where Snow White is the victim of a high-powered sniper rifle, and where Goldilocks shambles around with a bloody axe wedged in her head. Vast amounts of blood and brain matter feature, and these grotesque images are often given pride of place within *Fables*’s narrative. The Snow White illustration, for example, occupies an extra-large panel which spatters across two-thirds of an entire page, and also serves as a cliffhanger

visual for Willingham to end that particular issue with (Willingham, *Animal Farm* 90). In it, Snow White falls towards the audience, blood spurting copiously from her head, eyes glazed and unfocused; as her sister says later, “I was standing right next to you as half of your head was blown all over my fucking shirt” (Willingham, *Animal Farm* 108). While this particular visual is a marketing ploy on one level—by gruesomely depicting severe injury to a lead character, it would have served to drum up reader curiosity for what happens next—it also allows for a paradoxically constructive degradation. Bakhtin sees this invocation of the grotesque body, with its effluvia and its degradation of ‘all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract ...to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity’ (19), as a deeply positive subversion of the aforementioned antiseptic everyday. To degrade an object thus ‘does not imply merely hurling it into the void of non-existence ...[but] to the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and a new birth take place’ (21). Similarly, Snow White's messy near-death experience not only affords her a more positive relationship with her sister, but also the ability to contact a clairvoyant pig's head on a stake which allows her valuable insights into the future (Willingham, *Animal Farm* 91).

This view of carnival as utopian and progressive, though, is problematised by Anna Krugovoy Silver's findings that carnival has in fact a sinister side, in which ‘fantasy serves as a vehicle for moral lessons’ (728). In this, carnival is ‘a learning process whereby we all learn how to behave in certain situations and [internalise] the [already-dominant] expectations which go with a given role or status in society’ (McQuail 494). It puts forth a particular socially-sanctioned model of behaviour, and through its narrative providing symbolic reward for this model, supports the formations of in-groups and out-groups in everyday life; following this ethical code affords an individual with membership in the in-group and its attendant benefits of loyalty and respect from other in-group members, while disregarding these rules of proper conduct relegates one to an out-group where negative discrimination against its members is socially justified (McQuail 494).

An awareness of this revolution-dampening effect of carnival is indispensable when considering *Fables's* Arabian Nights and Days storyline. In it, the leader of the Arabian Fables, Sinbad the Sailor, seeks aid from the American-based Fables against the Adversary's invasion of

Baghdad (Willingham, *Arabian Nights* 21). However, when negotiations fail, an archetypally treacherous Grand Vizier releases a genie—here explicitly labelled as a ‘Weapon of Magical Destruction’ (Willingham, *Arabian Nights* back cover)—to kill Sinbad and the Fabletown dignitaries so as to install himself as ‘the highest-ranking minister among the refugees’ (Willingham, *Arabian Nights* 51). Eventually, however, this crisis is averted, and with the help of King Cole and Prince Charming, the Arabian Fables set up Fabletown East, which ‘adopt[s] many of the vital provisions of [the main] Fabletown compact’ (Willingham, *Arabian Nights* 89).

It is arguable that *Arabian Nights and Days* is liberating insofar as it provides a carnivalesque glimpse of utopia. It restages the motives and outcomes of the real-life Iraq war in gloriously utopian tones: the Fabletown heroes suffer no casualties, the Grand Vizier becomes the victim of his own hubris, Sinbad willingly learns English to better co-operate with the main Fabletown outpost, and the motivations of the American Fables for helping the Arabs are born mainly from (meta)human decency as opposed to the former party understanding that Baghdad affords its governors both a tactical military advantage and a wellspring of magical resources. *Fables*, in this zealously Lefebvrian reading, thus supports change in the status quo—after all, this fleeting vision of a much better world highlights weak points in America's current military efforts, casting the dreariness of quotidian news stories stating that ‘[the war’s] toll would include tens of thousands of Iraqi civilians killed, as well nearly 4,000 American troops; [and] that America’s financial costs, by some recent estimates, would rise above \$650 billion by 2008’ (Burns np) into sharp relief.

However, as a storyline which justifies the changing of an old regime for a new, and which, with the Grand Vizier as a Saddam Hussein analogue, similarly localises the threat to everyday order in the person of a sole deranged individual—a common theme in newspaper headlines regarding the Iraq war invokes ‘Hussein [as a] symbol of autocracy [and] cruelty in Iraq’ (CNN.com np)—*Arabian Nights and Days* is undoubtedly laden with jingoistic ideas of manifest destiny and the superiority of the neo-conservative American way of life. It is a ponderously pro-war creation with a diadectly Disney tone, borrowing elements of the carnival not in a playful subversion of the dominant political hierarchy but in order to maintain it’ (Silver

728), and to dramatise the social benefits of the Bush administration's real-life hardline support of the war on terror. Carnival, in the Arabian Nights and Days arc, can consequently bring subservience rather than subversion, and is therefore insufficient in itself as an argument that *Fables* problematises the construct of everyday life.

The viewpoint of Michel de Certeau, focused as it is on the concepts of active audiences and tactical poaching must thus be called upon to provide a fuller account as to how *Fables* ruptures the quotidian. While also concerned with everyday life as an ensemble of practices, de Certeau disagrees with Lefebvre's Marxist position that everyday life alienates the condition of its subjects, and that only carnival provides brief, shining moments of freedom from it. By contrast, he sees its subjects as actively 'subvert[ing] the fatality of an established order' (de Certeau 17), and focuses his gaze on the ways in which these users operate; he discusses the pedestrian who, while crossing the cityscape, confronts its structured order via taking pointless shortcuts or pointless detours (de Certeau xiv). He further sees this subversion of order as tactical in nature, where 'the weak must constantly turn to their own ends forces alien to them' (de Certeau xix) and that these tactics are guerrilla-like: they are 'always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized "on the wing"' (de Certeau xix), and must stealthily 'insinuate [themselves] into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance' (de Certeau xix).

For de Certeau, then, resistance and subversion in everyday life are both non-synonymous with being "oppositional" or "progressive". Rather, the tactics of resistance intimate a different and pluralised form of power which simultaneously preserves the existing order, yet creates something new as a by-product (Highmore 153). As John Fiske notes, these tactics are deployed under the aegis of self-interested empowerment; by 'enlarg[ing] the space of action for the subordinate; they effect shifts, however minute in social power relations' (125), and 'in making do within and against the system ...they are concerned with improving the lot of the subordinate rather than with changing the system that subordinates them' (125). Everyday life for de Certeau, thus, 'invents itself in countless ways by poaching in countless ways on the property of others' (de Certeau xii). In this light, the very existence of *Fables* is a sustained exercise in textual poaching: it is an intertext which megalomaniacally consumes tropes and

archetypes from a well-established literary genre, reconfigures them for its own purposes, yet—since it arguably draws most of its narrative affect through subverting audience expectations of “proper” fairytale behaviour—does not seek to replace the Disney version.

De Certeau's idea of active and constant poaching consequently allows for the visualisation of *Fables* as a representative text in a larger popular culture that problematises the abovementioned alienating conceptualisation of everyday life. This popular culture is ‘made from within and below, not imposed from above as mass cultural theorists would have it’ (Fiske 119); it is produced by subordinated and disempowered people as they consume dominant culture and mixes ‘the ideology of the ideologically and economically dominant ...[with] resources embedded in dominant culture which ordinary people use in everyday life to erode, subvert, or refashion hegemonic culture to their own needs’ (Fiske 118). *Fables* is thus simultaneously a site where these rakish textual poachers practice ‘the art of making do’ (Fiske 120) with whatever materials they can procure from Disney’s strategically authoritative texts, and a site of struggle where the ability to create meaning is recognised as a significant form of power (Fiske 121).

This idea of necessary co-existence is significant considering that Walt Disney’s widely released, well-attended, and endlessly recirculated animated movies have made his didactic tone synonymous with popular perceptions of fairytales (Stone 43, Zipes 193); *Beauty and the Beast* alone has grossed \$377.5 million US dollars (Boxofficemojo.com np) since its 1991 release. While these fairytales originated from a bawdy and popular oral storytelling tradition that was created and cultivated for both adults and children, ‘Disney began insisting on taming if not instrumentalising the imagination to serve the forces of law and order’ (Zipes 200), and thus pressed fairytales into service as instructive tools for ‘maintain[ing particular] social norms rather than for anarchical, revolutionary, or socially progressive ends... [and] tuck[ed] moral lessons within the entertaining context of fantasy’ (Silver 737). *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (Cottrell et al. 1937), for example, has its heroine taught to be kind and catatonically patient since someday her prince will come seeking such a bride, and even *Beauty and the Beast*’s (Trousdale and Wise 1991) much more independent Belle eventually joins the other Disney heroines in the gowns and trappings of morally-edifying princesshood and does not

share her Austrian counterpart's prowess in decapitating evil old men (Ashliman np). In a de Certeau reading, then, fairytales—through the unstinting efforts of Disney—are now a strategy through which powerful producers attempt to justify the status quo in society—with particular regards to female subordination—through replicating and rewarding these idealised models of conduct within their narratives; the conformist Disney princesses are invariably rewarded with handsome princes and happily-ever-afters. *Fables* cannot hope to achieve such a Disney-esque domination. In marked contrast to the sales figures above, sales of a typical issue of *Fables* are limited to around 25,000 US \$2.50 units across the board (Frisch np). However, through this tactical co-existence with Disney products, *Fables* further inflects upon the construction of identities and ideals in everyday life, most notably by allowing audiences to positively identify with characters whose actions fall beyond the Disney pale. Its Snow White saves the day by ordering her dragon to torch the headquarters of her gun-toting captors, and to additionally ‘burn the town, everyone in it, and everyone who tries to escape’ (Willingham, *Animal Farm* 85) should anything bad happen to her. The fact that these captors are cute, waistcoated talking animals only serves to highlight her unsentimental practicality to audiences.

Also, the idea of the active audience intimates that they will specifically cross-compare the Disney version of characters against the *Fables* one. Willingham thus deliberately provides “access points” for them to do so. Its Beauty takes a page from *Beauty and the Beast*'s uniquely bibliophilic Belle by working at Nod's Books, yet bluntly mentions that Prince Charming ‘exudes a dress-hiking, panty-dropping musk that would make us all rich if we could bottle it’ (Willingham, *Arabian Nights* 31). Its Rose Red references her absence in Disney's genre-defining *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* to make the case that she is all but forgotten in popular memory:

The [humans] adore you by the millions. By the hundreds of millions! They keep making their godawful animated movies about you... But who remembers me? Not one in a million of them! It used to be Snow White and Rose Red. Now it's just Snow White, period. (Willingham, *Animal Farm* 109)

By actively positioning itself within this larger intertextual nexus, *Fables* plays on the extratextual knowledge of audiences—that, for example, Disney movies lack both Rose Red and sexually scarlet prose—to colour the way in which they approach the comic. Their

preconditioned perspective on fairytale characters both adds to and is affected by the narrative; Beauty is no longer simply a sheltered young girl who believes that ‘there must be more than this petty, provincial town’ (Trousdale and Wise 1991), but is also a shrewd new Deputy Mayor able to allocate jobs for Arabian immigrants. Disney’s contemporary dominant depiction of Beauty as an asexual bookworm is thus subverted in the minds of both the audiences and her Fabletown social circle by her frank discussion of Prince Charming’s aphrodisiac effects and by her capable governance. More than this, the new and improved Rose Red eventually appropriates the mannerisms and *modus operandi* of an archetypal comic book character. And while audiences can appreciate her story without knowing that the trope of the wondrously Amazonian avenger recurs and recurs again in the medium, knowing this only brightens the *Fables* reading experience.

The subversive potential of *Fables*, thus, is better understood in such a dialogically postmodern referential context; it further places its fairytale characters in storylines ranging from the ham-fisted political allegory mentioned above to a pulp-style murder mystery, to a World War II-era battlefield flashback, to an updated version of Romeo and Juliet. In fact, the closest that *Fables*'s narratives ever come to resemble fairytales is when Boy Blue, armed with magic sword and cloak of invisibility, slashes his way across the fairy tale Homelands—and even this is more in the vein of a *Lord of the Rings*-esque heroic fantasy epic rather than fairytale. Yet, Willingham treats these gross genre juxtapositions as all viable additions to the sphere of action of fairytale characters; this sustained dialogue between genres, fairytales, and the audience’s preconceived expectations encourages audiences to reinterpret the hegemonic Disney narratives, and the parameters it sets for everyday behaviour. Any subsequent viewing of the Beauty and the Beast tale, for example, would thus be coloured not only by a Disney pastel, but also by the abovementioned frank admission of *Fables*’s Beauty. Through selectively poaching materials from the everyday Disney culture, and reassembling these materials in a coherent and appealing narratives, *Fables* thus paves a path for the viability of whatever non-hegemonically-aligned materials may follow it.

The idea of dialogue, however, resurfaces in the “Burning Questions” issue of *Fables*, where DC Comics sanctioned Willingham to spend its entirety providing answers to questions

posed by his readers. Eduardo of Argentina, for example, gets to find out if 'Hakim ever manage[d] to get a regular job' (Willingham, *Sons of Empire* 181), while Angela from Philadelphia uncovers the naked truth as to the number of romantic conquests that Prince Charming has had (Willingham, *Sons of Empire*: 181). The issue does not necessarily obliterate the desire of users to potentially poach the text for their own purposes, and Willingham remains as gatekeeper over the answers that appear in the issue; the questions were 'strictly limited to enquiries about past events in the fifty-plus issues of *Fables* published to date' (Willingham, *Sons of Empire* 180). Still, this willingness of producers to engage in a dialogue—however mediated—with their audiences does problematise de Certeau's abovementioned intimation of everyday life as involving a binary opposition between producers and users: in these examples, users have had an opportunity to inflect upon official iterations of the *Fables* text, and have further seen their concerns answered by the author himself. When coupled with the fact that Willingham maintains a *Fables*-centric message board at [www.clockworkstorybook.net](http://www.clockworkstorybook.net), and personally participates in discussions there, everyday life can now include the possibility of a mutually-productive meeting between de Certeau's heretofore disparate twain.

Further, while *Fables* does not enjoy the level of mass market saturation of Disney's fairytales, it ultimately remains a commercial product produced by the DC Comics company; it borrows and problematises elements from both Disney and public domain fairytale texts for not only its own financial profit, but the entertainment of audiences as well. Its existence, thus, also speaks of a hierarchy among media producers, and is an example of tactical textual poaching not being confined to a 'subordinated and disempowered people' (de Certeau 118) outside this hierarchy of official media production.

Lastly, feminist theorist Rita Felski synthesises the work of Lefebvre and de Certeau to argue that everyday life is a tripartite construct—grounded in 'time, space, and modality' (18) — through which the zeitgeist is adopted and naturalised; it is 'a way of experiencing the world [as opposed to] a circumscribed set of activities within the world' (31). She builds on ideas of repetition and home as structuring 'an essential feature of everyday life: its familiarity' (Felski 26), and sees this familiarity as the result of—and concurrently encouraging—habits. As much attitudes as they are actions, habits and their associated performance 'in a semi-automatic,

distracted, or involuntary manner' (Felski 26) help construct the identity of their performer (Felski 27). As the sphere of these naturalised habits, everyday life is thus 'for the most part automatic, conducted with a constant, but semi-conscious vigilance' (Felski 27). Felski stresses, however, that habits are not necessarily a bad thing; she feels that while they ambivalently 'emphasise the comfort and boredom of the ordinary' (Felski 26), they also 'constitute an essential part of our embeddedness in everyday life and our existence as social beings' (28). She points out that to be deprived of personal routines—such as for residents of old-age homes, hospital patients, and jail prisoners—'can be a source of profound disorientation or distress' (Felski 28).

Felski's notion of comfortable repetition supports the most blatant way in which *Fables* defamiliarises everyday life—culture shock. Red Riding Hood, for example, has seen her grandmother eaten, and warlocks perform 'the foulest sort of magic' (Willingham, *Arabian Nights* 185). Yet, as a newcomer to Fabletown, she waxes rhapsodic over a bag of store-bought candies ("Oh, these are most delicious! No one's ever bought me such delicacies before, Ambrose!") while her friend quizzically responds that they're 'nothing much ...nice things are common in this world' (Willingham, *Arabian Nights* 95). Elsewhere, the artificiality of the modern everyday life is stressed even more when two wooden soldiers from the fairytale Empire are sent incognito to New York as elite spies: their training includes learning what motorcars are, an immersion course in colloquial English, and converting the American dollar into dimes and pennies (Willingham, *Arabian Nights* 138). Thus, as refugees from a (formerly) utopian quasi-medieval milieu for whom 'the rhythm of [their] personal routines' (Felski 28) has been sharply disrupted, certain Fables find New York a stranger and more magical place than the kingdoms they've left behind, and acclimatising to the quotidian a chore; as one of the wooden soldiers notes, 'we work hard at being ordinary' (Willingham, *Arabian Nights* 140).

As seen above, *Fables*'s juxtaposition of extraordinary elements into quotidian spaces has helped show that there is nothing ordinary about the everyday. Rather, the everyday is a sphere where even texts as seemingly benign as Disney animated movies can be read and harnessed as strategies for social control: girls should behave like princesses, wolves should be hunted because they are big and bad, and Prince Charming is just so. Yet, the fact that *Fables*

has become popular by liberally poaching tropes from both Disney and the public domain (and then gleefully inverting them) does not just open up a dialogue between these texts; it also helps audiences visualise both Lefebvre's utopianly egalitarian carnival and de Certeau's idea of the possibility of sustained resistance against the status quo. *Fables* is thus a magic mirror which underscores that the everyday is an ideologically-charged construct normalised by its subjects, and also a frame around which various discourses of resistance to this construct can accumulate.

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### **Filmography**

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