# Fairy-Tale Bodies and Embodying the Fairy Tale in Telltale Games' *The Wolf Among Us*

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## Embodiment, Fairy Tales, and Video Games

Starting from the second wave of cognitivism, researchers in cognitive studies supported the idea that embodiment, or the physical experience of having a body, plays a crucial role in the interpretation and understanding of the world that surrounds us. This perspective has been aptly called *embodied cognition*, and it has been explored extensively by scholars like Antonio Damasio, Raymond Gibbs, Mark Johnson (*Body in the Mind; Meaning of the Body*), and Vittorio Gallese. In the humanities, concepts coming from embodied cognition have found fertile ground in narratology (cf. e.g., Herman; Garratt; Zunshine), inspiring new ways to analyze how stories are told and understood. In this article, I will explore body representation and embodied cognition in the video game *The Wolf Among Us* (Telltale Games), an adaptation of Bill Willingham's *Fables* comics, to highlight the ways in which fairy-tale bodies are represented, how players behave embodying these fairy-tales characters, and what all this can tell us about the contemporary attitudes to a number of topics of social relevance.

Bodies and their metamorphoses have long been recognized as common tropes (Warner) in classic fairy tales such as Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont's "Beauty and the Beast," Charles Perrault's or the Grimm Brothers' "Little Red Riding Hood," or Perrault's "Donkeyskin" as well as in Victorian literary fairy tales such as the *Alice* books, works by George MacDonald, and Oscar Wilde. Bodily metamorphoses are also echoed and reworked in post-modern fairy tales like, among others, A. S. Byatt's "A Stone Woman," and

they are more thoroughly analyzed in other contributions to this special issue (Beltrami; Rokotnitz). It is therefore unsurprising that the relationship between bodies and fairy tales has been examined from a number of perspectives, including discussions of how bodies are represented and how fairy tales may influence our understanding of and beliefs about physical appearances (e.g., Jorgensen, Black and the White Bride, "Masculinity"; and Talairach-Vielmas). Others have examined the ways in which fairy tales may reinforce or challenge societal norms and expectations around the body, such as gender roles and body size (Sebring and Greenhill; Barounis).

Indeed, an embodied perspective can highlight the ways in which fairy tales construct and reinforce certain normative bodies and behaviors. On the one hand, many fairy tales feature slender, youthful, and conventionally attractive characters as their heroes and heroines, whereas the villains are often depicted as grotesque or monstrous. This reinforces the cultural notion that physical attractiveness is closely linked to moral worth and reinforces harmful body ideals. On the other hand, fairy tales like Hans Christian Andersen's "The Ugly Duckling" question the social construction of beauty and the ways in which individuals can challenge and resist these cultural norms. Embodiment as an analytical lens can thus provide insights into the ways in which fairy tales both reflect and shape cultural attitudes toward bodies and identities.

Significantly for my purposes, the analytical lens of embodiment holds its informational and hermeneutic potential when applied to narratives that are not (or not only) text based. Discussions of the body in interactive digital narratives, and in particular in video games, address different aspects of the topic, including the representation of women's bodies (for an overview, see Gestos et al.) and the ways in which games reflect and reinforce cultural attitudes toward bodies and identities (Cover). Alternatively, embodiment in video games can refer to the ways in which players engage with and experience their virtual bodies and, through them, the fictional environments in which they are embedded (e.g., Klevjer; Perron and Schröter on the basis of concepts put forward by Merleau-Ponty). These two views of bodies and embodiment in video games are often connected with each other, as the design and appearance of characters can define the ways in which they are able to move in and interact with the game world.

There have been many adaptations and retellings of literary fairy tales in video games. Some games, in a straightforward move, remediate individual stories in an attempt to reinterpret them through contemporary themes and sensibilities. This is the case, for instance, with *Cinders* (MoaCube), a visual novel game based on the story of Cinderella, or with *Lies of P*, a role-playing video game heavily inspired by the story of Pinocchio (Neowiz Games and Round 8 Studio). Other games draw more freely on the entire fairy-tale

apparatus, or more in general on the fairy tale in popular cultural memory (Kukkonen, *Popular Cultural Memory*). This is the case, for example, of the extremely popular series of *Kingdom Hearts* (Square et al.), which features, among others, fairy-tale characters from Disney classics, but also *American McGee's Grimm* (Spicy Horse) inspired by the Grimm Brothers' stories, and *Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo Tales* (h.a.n.d.), which revisits a series of literary fairy tales.

The focus of my study, *The Wolf Among Us*, is an episodic graphic-based and narrative-driven mystery/drama adventure game developed by Telltale Games and published between 2013 and 2014. Drawing on *Fables* by Bill Willingham, the game constitutes a prequel to the events narrated there. Just as the *Fables* comics, *The Wolf Among Us* is heavily influenced by fairy tales and folklore and can be described as "a fairy-tale pastiche—a postmodernist blending of elements from a variety of loci within fairy-tale discourse" (Zolkover 41). In the game, players control or, better, embody, the character of Bigby Wolf, the once "Big Bad Wolf" of "Little Red Riding Hood." Bigby is now the sheriff of "Fabletown," a community of characters derived from fairy tales (called "fables")[1] who have been forced to flee their homeland and live in secret among humans. The game begins with the discovery of a murdered woman in Fabletown, and Bigby is tasked with investigating the crime and bringing the perpetrator to justice. As he investigates the murder, Bigby encounters a range of other fables (like Snow White, Beauty and the Beast, the Little Mermaid, etc.), and other familiar figures (e.g., Bufkin from *The Wizard of Oz* and Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum from *Alice in Wonderland*). Each of these characters has their own unique backstory and motivations, and Bigby must navigate complex relationships and allegiances as he tries to solve the crime.

The game explores themes of identity, power, and justice through the lens of familiar fairy-tale tropes and personas, and it allows players to engage with and influence the game world through a series of actions and choices. While the *Fables* series has been studied in relation to fairy tales and political discourse (Bacchilega), as a postmodern fairy tale in relation to a cognitive approach in comics studies (Kukkonen, *Contemporary Comics Storytelling*), and considering the corporealization of fairy tales (Zolkover), *The Wolf Among Us* has received little scholarly attention so far and lends itself well to my analysis of representations of the mind-body entanglement in videoludic remediations of literary fairy tales. In what follows, I will first discuss the representation of bodies within the storyworld of the game and what this implies for its characters, that is, I will look at how designers reinterpreted the fairy tales in this videoludic storyworld. Second, I will discuss embodiment as an affordance of video games, and how the experience of embodying a fairy-tale character

shapes the players' attitudes toward the game, its characters, and its story, to ultimately expose how players interpret the fairy tales featured. As such, the article highlights what the analytical lens of embodiment applied to fairy-tale characters in *The Wolf Among Us* can tell us about contemporary culture and sensitivity.

## Bodies, *Glamours*, and Mafia

In the storyworld of *The Wolf Among Us*, just as in the *Fables* series from which it draws, fables are divided into two categories: those who have a human-like appearance and those who have not. Human appearance is sometimes innate (as in the case of human fables, such as Snow White or Bluebeard) or can be obtained through spells such as the *glamour*, an expensive (and thus very difficult to obtain) spell administered by the government of Fabletown. Anthropomorphic fables are allowed to live in a community located in Manhattan's Upper West Side, while all the others (such as the three little pigs and the Cheshire Cat) are forced to live on the "Farm," a location in upstate New York far away from everyday people and hidden by protective spells. While the Farm is said to have appropriate spaces and all necessary comforts for its inhabitants, most fables consider it a prison and would do anything to avoid being confined there. This is made clear in the game when a character and his son are forcibly sent to the Farm, among the cries of the young one.

This contrast between anthropomorphic and nonanthropomorphic fables foreshadows one of the main themes of the game: that of physical appearances and bodily shapes. Though its centrality has not been explicitly recognized as of yet, this theme is widely employed throughout the game: it provides the reason for one of the main plot twists that prompts a main narrative strand; it is origin and cause of important characters' traits, and it sometimes signals their emotions; and ultimately it is the core engine of the whole story. Following this analysis, I shall also draw some concluding remarks on the representation of the body in this game, particularly in relation to postmodern fairy tales and contemporary sensitivity.

Proceeding from the most specific to the most general of the thematic aspects listed, I will start with physical appearances as plot twist. At the very end of the first episode of the game, Bigby is dragging his prime suspect for the first murder to the Fabletown administration office, when he suddenly discovers the severed head of Snow White. The episode ends with the disbelief and horror of Bigby, which parallel the players' surprise. In the beginning of the second episode, however, Snow White herself shows up at the interrogation of Bigby's suspect, in one piece (see figure 1).[2] After having inspected the by-then-retrieved beheaded corpse, Bigby and Snow White discover that the deceased

is a troll prostitute disguised (and made into a Snow-White-look-alike) by a nonauthorized *glamour*. It will be later discovered that this *glamour* was regularly employed to indulge the sexual desires of Snow White's own superior and Deputy Mayor of Fabletown, who then becomes the new prime suspect for the murders. This finding highlights two considerations regarding the representation of characters' bodies: firstly, that the troll *had* to reshape her appearance to be appealing to her clients, and secondly, that Snow White's body has been objectified for a long time by her everyday coworker and superior, while her abilities and skills were disregarded and silenced.



Fig. 1. Snow White—Screenshot from the game *The Wolf Among Us* (Telltale Games 2013/14).

Through the troll's episode, the topic of prostitution is brought into view, highlighting the objectifications of the bodies of other women. Among them are Faith, the princess of Perrault's fairy tale "Donkeyskin," whose incomparable beauty lies behind evident signs of beating, and Nerissa, a.k.a. the Little Mermaid, who, according to the description provided in the game, "dances at the [strip club], but each step she takes feels like walking on shards of glass," ever since she gave up her tail for a pair of legs (Telltale Games, description found in "The Book of Fables" section). These two princesses, just as Snow White, are thus in a way *paying for their beauty*. In the case of the former two, in addition to the quasi-dantesque *contrapassi* they are obliged to endure, they are also forcibly put to silence with a spell, which practically renders them no more than mere bodies for sale.

As mentioned, physical traits are also connected to characters' psychology. Players discover late in the game that Bigby's true form is indeed that of a big

(bad?) wolf. Notwithstanding the law according to which crimes and transgressions committed in the Homelands have been cancelled for all fables,[3] and despite his new identity and role as sheriff of Fabletown, Bigby's presence still worries many, especially due to his feral history. This largely shared prejudice prevents him from actually detaching himself from his past (and appearance) of merciless beast. While the ability to revert to his true form (even just partially) turns out to be useful on some occasions, in everyday life it prevents him from obtaining a true redemption—at least during the three hundred years passed between the fables' migration from the Homelands to the end of the story of the game. While he plays the role of the ruthless detective, this attributed general vision or even prejudice surfaces at multiple moments as a heavy burden he carries—starting from the very first scene of the game and on to the last one, when part of it is eventually lifted. Even just the memory of one's appearance is therefore a major source of distress, even for those who, like Bigby, do not need a *glamour*.

Beast, too, is anthropomorphic without the aid of a *glamour*. In the *Fables* universe, the spell he was cursed with in the traditional fairy tale binds his human appearance to Beauty's love: when it wavers, his beastly appearance resurfaces. This awareness sheds light on the couple's behavior in the game. Just as most of fables, Beauty and Beast find themselves in straitened circumstances, which pushes Beast to work double shifts to provide for his wife, and Beauty to work secretly at a sleazy hourly hotel with the risk of getting him mad for it—this while they stubbornly strive to keep up appearance by living in an expensive-looking house. While the reason for this curious behavior is quickly dismissed by the two with the excuse they are accustomed to "certain standards," it seems far more likely that Beast's curse (the possibility to return to his beastly appearance) is actually coercing him strongly: if Beauty ceases to love him, he will be confined to the Farm as he would not have a human form anymore. However, in Beast's mind, Beauty was originally attracted by the pageantry of his palace, and thus "keeping the standards" is, for him, a matter of keeping her happy in order to maintain his own freedom, and it is thus ultimately a form of self-imposed slavery. At the same time, Beauty, too, is heavily impacted by the curse: she tries to raise money to help free Beast from the cage she thinks she is the cause of—but she has to do it in secret, as he believes she would stop loving him if she had to work, thus dooming him to the Farm. While a marriage counselor might conclude that in dialogue lies the solution, technically speaking the cause of this distressful situation is undeniably the curse on Beast's appearance.

Most fables, not just Bigby or Beast, do not have stable anthropomorphic traits (figure 2). However, if in order to live in the city fables must have human appearance, forcing them to obtain a human aspect is a strong imposition,

Fig. 2.   Bigby and Beast fighting. The partly feral appearance of the two is visible—Screenshot form the game *The Wolf Among Us* (Telltale Games 2013/14).

and an expensive one. In addition, the sloppy governance of Fabletown, led by an egoistic puppet Deputy Mayor, causes poor living conditions for most fables, which in turn makes it impossible for them to afford *glamours* legally, ultimately leading to general discontent. All of these premises prompt the development of an organization that bears striking similarities with the Italo-American mafia and the systemic culture connected with it: the code of silence or *omertà* of all the involved, corruption at all levels of power, zero accountability, and a community supporting the very same criminals who are responsible for its oppression and who blackmail it by providing the minimal, financial help, which official authorities cannot guarantee. Indeed, among the main "services" provided by the mafia boss in this storyworld is the distribution of cheap (though low-quality) *glamours*, which allow a number of fables to escape the prison of the Farm and stay in the city.

Thus, in the mundane world of 1980s Manhattan, the body of almost each and every character turns out to bring oppression and suffering to them: bodies are causes of humiliation and objectification, they cause physical and psychological suffering, they cast heavy burdens difficult to dispel, they bind lovers in conflicted relationships, they provide ground for criminal organizations to grow and support an already corrupted world, and they condemn to exile and confinement those not able to look "normal." By doing so, *The Wolf Among Us* marks a decisive turn away from traditional representations of bodies in fairy tales, in which physical appearance generally contributes to the happy resolution for the protagonists, in which beauty is a value (and a salvific one), and in which physical beauty and moral integrity are often coupled

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(see Mitchell and Snyder). Conversely, in this game a princess's beauty does not attract a prince to the rescue and enable happily ever after—it rather brings a depraved and corrupt superior controlled by a criminal organization, objectification, and pain. Generally speaking, beauty is a curse, rather than a blessing. In contrast, the feral appearance of the Big Bad Wolf is here connected with the hero of the story, in a very postmodern vein (Kukkonen, *Contemporary Comics Storytelling*). However, the characters themselves are not particularly persuaded by postmodernist thinking, as Bigby still suffers from the classical ideology of harmonious mind and body, according to which one having such a ferocious body *has* to be evil.

In fact, it is worth remarking that the subversion of fairy-tale traditions is not a systematic agenda for the designers of the game, particularly as far as the relationship between beautiful bodies and beautiful minds is concerned. Indeed, (1) most of the villains can still be considered overall uglier than the heroes, and in many cases characters have different forms depending on their attitude toward the protagonists (anthropomorphic when benevolent or neutral, horrific when oppositive or aggressive); (2) the most beloved characters within their social group are those with prettier appearances, as in the case of Snow White and her battered superior; (3) nonnormative bodies must be hidden from sight, either by confining fable characters to the Farm, or by masking them with magic. This latter consideration, while being a significant constraint imposed on many, is however justified in the storyworld: fables must live in disguise in order not to be identified and endangered by humans, and therefore everyone whose body does not comply with those that would be normally found in the city must be hidden, for their own safety and for the peace of the entire fables' society: "a verisimilitude that allows them to pass unquestioned into human society," as Zolkover observes (42).

Even though such sensibilities were still in embryonic form in the period 2011–13 (when the game was being developed), the way of treating bodily appearances that we find in *The Wolf Among Us* can be seen at least in part as a means to raise awareness of the discrimination of nonnormative bodies, anticipating a major critical strand that would soon animate public discourse. On the one hand, the game problematizes the standardizing and idealized view of the body, which finds its apotheosis in fairy-tale characters' perfect physical appearances, particularly in their Hollywoodian versions. However, on the other hand, it does not go so far in representing an alternative or contrasting view to the normative perspective. Rather, what comes out of physical representations in *The Wolf Among Us* is an all-encompassing pessimistic view regarding bodily shapes: no matter what one looks like, one's body will always be a source of discontent, in one way or another.

In this sense, the representations offered in the game could be seen as taking a step beyond postmodernism into what appears to be contemporary hopelessness over the awareness of an omnipresent discomfort regarding one's body.

Furthermore, the game's setting of Fabletown as a community of fairy-tale characters living in secret among humans can be seen as a metaphor for the ways in which postmodernism—as argued, among others, by McHale in his highly influential *Postmodernist Fiction*—destabilizes and subverts traditional cultural narratives and identities. The characters in the game must confront and negotiate their own identities and allegiances in a world where the traditional narratives of their origins have been disrupted and displaced: "the roles of the various characters are complicated and reversed, with villains becoming heroes, victimizers being victimized" (Zolkover 48). This also clearly emerges from a recurring sentence of the game, which reads "Our stories used to be so simple. We had a beginning, a middle and an end. But ever since we moved to this awful city, everything's gotten so confused" (Telltale Games).

Blurring the situation even more deeply, Kukkonen also notes how these disruptions are counterbalanced by an adhesion to the stated narrative frame, thus creating a complex dialogue between postmodernism, classic fairy tales, and, I would add, contemporary societies—or almost contemporary, given the now tenth anniversary of the game. As Zolkover asserts about *Fables, The Wolf Among Us*, too, "is capable of existing at once as parody, biting commentary, and a fairy tale in its own right" (Zolkover 49).

Given all these considerations, *The Wolf Among Us* seems therefore to align well with the general trend of the comic book series *Fables*, as described by Kukkonen: postmodern fairy tales have subverted the conventions of the genre, and "*Fables* presents similarly inverted value hierarchies" (*Contemporary Comics Storytelling* 9; see also Bacchilega on *Fables*' reshaping of fairy-tale tropes and their meaning with respect to political propaganda). These considerations still hold for the video game where they extend, at least to some extent, to the trope of standardized individual beauty. Indeed, the game subverts fairy-tale conventions by depicting more diverse and less idealized physical appearances for its characters, rather than adhering to traditional archetypes of the genre. This can be seen as an attempt of the designers at embracing a more diverse and relativistic approach to identity and representation.

However, the exact development of Bigby's personality is not set in stone—nor is it on paper, as *The Wolf Among Us* is an interactive digital narrative in the form of a narrative-driven video game. This allows for a further reflection on embodiment in this game, where players are no longer mere spectators, but repositioned directly in the shoes of the Big Bad Wolf.

### In the Shoes of the Wolf

Kukkonen's *Contemporary Comics Storytelling* introduced a cognitivist reading of the meaning-making mechanisms of comics, discussing some of the shortcomings of semiotic theories traditionally employed to explain how we understand this medium, a connubium between images and texts. She posits that to properly understand a comic we need to employ a number of embodied metaphors[4] (Johnson; Gibbs), and therefore to retrieve bodily experiences that the metaphors draw on—all of this while still not *practically* involving their readers in a physical sense.

In contrast to print comics and due to their participatory nature, video games and interactive digital narratives in general afford and require interaction to instantiate one of their narratives among the multiple ones contained in their protostories (Koenitz). As I discussed elsewhere (Bellini), these interactions imply a double bodily involvement: the mediated, embodied presence of the player in the fictional world represented, whose understanding is also based on an embodied experience of the player as a human being, and the actual physical participation given by interactivity, ranging from the movement of a finger to the involvement of the entire body, which translates to an in-game physical movement with a much wider range and scope. These aspects are strongly integrated in the narrative understanding of the video game, and they are necessary for its story to exist in the mind of the player, with very rare exceptions. This is intended in an enactive sense (Varela et al.), that is, generating the story through their (mediated) bodies and action, in a loop of mutually shaping and being shaped by the environment. In short, "video games are about players' bodies and their embodied agency in the game world" (Perron and Schröter 20).

Video games have different ways of framing this participation, including movement in space (the spatial capacity of digital media, as defined by Janet H. Murray), dialogue choices, and combat. Though the designers' decisions on afforded freedom and pre-determinacy of the story determine the extent of this, player's choices do often influence the relationships between characters and affect the outcome of their actions, ultimately shaping the narrative. Dramatic agency (Murray) is the term coined to describe exactly the afforded capacity for players to have an impact over a story. *The Wolf Among Us* qualifies as a game with medium-high dramatic agency: while the basic story remains the same for all players (i.e., the main events are prescripted and will happen in all scenarios), players have several choices that significantly affect the relations between characters, their interactions, their decisions, the outcomes of their actions, and, in more general terms, the unfolding of the story. The game even offers several possible endings. Needless to say, this vast number of

choices allows and causes the construction of overall different outlooks of both characters and narrated events for each player at each run.

Therefore, through their double embodied involvement, players can interact with and have influence on the game world in ways that are difficult to achieve in text-based fairy tales. Indeed, players have significant freedom of choice over Bigby's actions, being allowed to choose their own way (among the ones provided) of addressing situations and problems. This makes it difficult to draw a precise outline of characters' traits, as they largely depend on players' interpretation of the characters, of the story, and the consequent decisions they choose to make—both regarding Bigby, the player-controlled character, and the other characters, which become known through their interactions with Bigby himself. The sheriff of Fabletown can therefore turn out to be either a kind, cooperative, and generous character, mistakenly seen as dangerous and aggressive due to his past, or a vengeful, lonesome, and ruthless one who is trying to shake off a label that actually suits him. The figure of sheriff Bigby Wolf in *Fables* is that of "a monster and a brute, but a reformed one, now on the side of the angels" (*Who's Who in Fabletown*, in Willingham 6), but Bacchilega adds that his "masculinity and heroism are just as much related to werewolf legends as to a range of 'mythic' narratives, including that of the underdog, the cowboy outlaw, the World War II American soldier, and the Bogart-like detective" (Bacchilega 157). While this is also generally true in the apparent overall intentions of the narrative designers of the game, as I have shown, the actual realization of the characters' traits (thus, the degree to which he is "reformed") is variable for each run of the game, and largely dependent on players' behavior. This grants players the possibility of putting themselves in the shoes of Bigby Wolf, thus affording a less-mediated experience of living this contemporary reinterpretation of literary fairy-tale characters. For reasons I am going to investigate, this also allows light to be shed on players' personal and shared sensitivity toward a number of socially relevant issues.

Indeed, interestingly, since the game provides statistics on the most influential moments of choice of all players that ever played the game, it is also possible to have an overview of how players behaved, once put in the shoes of Wolf. This tool gives us unprecedented insights on actual embodied interactions with a reinterpretation of fairy tales.

The analysis conducted in the previous section investigated decisions regarding the design of the storyworld of the game and, through it, discussed the relation of *The Wolf Among Us* with classic fairy tales, postmodernism, and contemporary society, using design choices made in the game as a sort of proxy for contemporary sensitivity. With the statistics on players' choices, instead, it is possible to have a glimpse of *actual* contemporary sensitivity,

and of how design choices affect players' behavior. The exact source pool of these data is unknown but, given an estimate of four million sold copies of the game, the statistics are likely to be based on several hundred thousands of plays—statistically a quite reliable sample.

Unfortunately, not all choices presented to players are tracked by the system, but the ones accounted for are enough to trace some interesting trends:[5]

• When choices have an empathic aspect attached to them, the majority of players choose to empathize. This can be clearly seen from the first main decision, when 84.6% of players decide to help a troubled stranger. Similarly, most players decide to comfort an annoying character in mourning, not to go heavy-handed on a suspect during an interview, not to beat an obnoxious pimp, not to react violently to the blows of an angry friend, to respect the time for eulogies at a funeral, etc.

• When choices deal with the empowerment of a woman, specifically Snow White, most players decide to go along with it, and to follow her decisions and resolutions. However, when her pronouncements go against an empathic decision, the majority of players chooses the latter.

• When options involve choosing between a lawful behavior and a more effective one (e.g., self-justice even when affecting a dangerous and proven-guilty murderer), most players chose to behave lawfully.

• When choices involve decisions regarding the investigative path to follow, most players opt for what is framed as the most logical route given the situation (e.g., the majority of them decide to visit the house of the prime suspect first).

We can see this last category as a validation of the fact that players do choose on the basis of what they would have done if actually being in Bigby's shoes. Therefore, these insights tell us that players do envision Bigby as a redeemed-villain figure when embodying him, or at least they want such a figure for themselves-as-Bigby. This is not a given. Players are theoretically free to behave differently: they can punch friends, murder people, tear limbs from bodies, be disrespectful and anarchic; yet they choose not to do so. This in turn highlights a number of aspects of contemporary sensitivity, which translates into the different ways to read traditional fairy-tale tropes discussed above, as shown by the fact that the empowerment of traditionally passive princesses is clearly perceived as normal, and as such supported by the majority of players.

One could argue that this may be partly due to what Marie Louise Meier defines as "nudging," that is, supporting and encouraging certain players'

behaviors while discouraging others, through specific design choices. This is certainly true. There are, however, two related factors that should be considered: one, design choices support or discourage options on the basis of expected behaviors given a shared sensitivity, as meaning-making itself is necessarily based on largely shared cultural and social background (Schank and Abelson), and therefore, two, by behaving in line with such nudges of designers, players demonstrate that they *do* share the values on which these work and thus reinforce them. In contrast, exposing players with a different cultural and/or social background to this game is likely to invalidate the power of the nudges. This is to say that, while the game design choices have a significant role in shaping players' behavior when embodying Bigby, it does not follow that the statistical outcomes of this embodiment would support the reading of *The Wolf Among Us* as a remediation of literary fairy tales based on contemporary sensitivities. Through the analysis of game statistics, and thus through the analysis of players' understanding of and behavior in the representation, we can conclude that the game actually *does present itself as a contemporary take on literary fairy tales*.

What I discussed so far shows that in this videoludic retelling of fairy tales, the notion of embodiment becomes relevant in an additional way compared to print texts, whether they included images or not, that is, as a basis for the enaction, or participative and active embodiment of the protagonists of such fairy tales, which gives players the possibility of behaving as if they were part of the remediation, to shape its direction and overall sense, to change the characters' psychological traits, their relationships, and their beliefs. Since players embody the protagonist of the story and choose for him, his exact representation is more difficult to define in relation to the tradition of fairy tales and their postmodern retellings. This notwithstanding, the narrative design of the game clearly tends toward the same representation of Bigby as the reformed hero, but to a varied degree depending on players' choices.

## Conclusion

Throughout this article, I have analyzed the embodied dimension of the video game *The Wolf Among Us* in two different capacities: the representation of characters' bodies and the player's possibility of embodying one of them in the first person.

Within this storyworld, on the one hand, most of the characters' bodies are a source of oppression and suffering: if showing a nonhuman body results in imprisonment in the Farm, even those who do exhibit an anthropomorphic figure end up struggling because of it, as it leads them to being objectified, debased, or simply having to toil to maintain it. Beautiful bodies are therefore

no longer a blessing, as in traditional fairy tales, but a curse, in a postmodern fashion—or even in a more contemporary pessimist vein. On the other hand, the equation between beautiful minds and beautiful bodies is questioned (e.g., with the employment of the feral Big Bad Wolf as the hero), but in a nonsystematic way.

In playing the game, through the interaction required and afforded by the game, players are allowed to embody the protagonist of the story, acting in his shoes. This arguably prevents an abstract analysis of the character's psychological traits and, therefore, of his view over his struggles regarding his own body: such an analysis would require a case-by-case discussion—one per each of the over forty billion possible combinations of the story choices. However, the game provides a summary of the most narratively relevant choices, showing the percentage of what actual players chose. By analyzing these data, it is possible to conclude that players tend to align with the view of Bigby Wolf as a reformed monster, now a hero, struggling to fight prejudices and heavy burdens dictated by his old appearance. This information, together with considerations regarding the immutable aspects of the game (i.e., those that all players will always encounter), justifies and confirms the analysis of the characters I provided in the first part of the article.

This double perspective allowed for both a reflection over the design of the game and of its storyworld and a discussion of players' behaviors and reasons. This, in turn, permitted to cast light on contemporary perceptions of the body, and most prominently the fundamentally pessimistic perception of one's body that seems to characterize today's society.

### Notes

1. Throughout the article, I will refer to characters derived from fairy tales as "fables," with a lowercase F. When referring to the comic book series *Fables*, I will capitalize and italicize the word.
2. Images provided are screenshots taken from the game *The Wolf Among Us*. My use of them lies within the "Fair Use" doctrine, and as such should not require further reproduction rights, according to the Section 107 of the Copyright Act of the United States—more specifically, it configurates as a "transformative" use of the images. Under European Union law, according to the Copyright and Information Society Directive of 2001 (2001/29), my use of the images lies within the copyright exceptions provided in art. 5.3 (a): "use for the sole purpose of illustration for teaching or scientific research, as long as the source . . . is indicated."
3. The law is called "Fabletown Compact" and was established when fables moved to the mundane world, according to the comic book series.
4. For instance, Kukkonen argues that speed lines in comics can be considered embodied metaphors, being based on the SOURCE-PATH-GOAL image schema, which in turn draws on bodily experience.

5.  The statistics here reported were last checked on January 9, 2023, directly in the game and as such they should constitute a fairly up-to-date reference at the time of publication. Readers might also find some of these statistics in the following webpage: https://fables.fandom.com/wiki/Player_Choices. Some statistics reported on this page differ from the ones discussed here, sometimes by a substantial amount. However, when I compared the data, the page had been last updated in 2016.

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