



# Off with Their Heads!: Fairy Tales and the Culture of Childhood

*Maria Tatar*

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When Hansel and Gretel try to eat the witch's gingerbread house in the woods, are they indulging their "uncontrolled cravings" and "destructive desires" or are they simply responding normally to the hunger pangs they feel after being abandoned by their parents? Challenging Bruno Bettelheim and other critics who read fairy tales as enactments of children's untamed urges, Maria Tatar argues that it is time to stop casting the children as villains. In this provocative book she explores how adults mistreat children, focusing on adults not only as hostile characters in fairy tales themselves but also as real people who use frightening stories to discipline young listeners.

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