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**Three Drops of Blood:  
Fairy Tales and Their Significance for Constructed Families**

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## Abstract

In an outback town, Esther Hayes looks out of a schoolhouse window and sees three children struck by lightning; one of them is her son, Michael. Silenced by grief, Esther leaves her young daughter, Aurora, to fend for herself; against a backdrop of an absent father and maternal neglect, the child takes comfort wherever she can, but the fierce attachments she forms never seem to last until, as an adult, she travels to her father's native Ireland. *If You Were Mine* employs elements of well-known fairy tales and explores themes of maternal abandonment and loss, as well as the consequences of adoption, in a narrative that laments the perilous nature of children's lives. Through the telling of various tales of abandonment and loss, the novel asks how one lives with a history of abandonment.

The exegetical essay analyses popular fairy tales in the context of adoption, locating the tales as a genre within adoption literature. While feminist fairy tale scholarship has illuminated the roles of women in fairy tales, particularly in those popularised by the Brothers Grimm, different versions of the tales published over extended time periods provide insight into the ways in which society has perceived and, perhaps, still perceives the roles of biological and non-biological/adoptive mothers. However, during the period of my research I did not encounter any critical studies in which the tales had been read and interpreted from an adoptive point of view.

In *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, psychologist Bruno Bettelheim asserts that 'giving comfort is one of the purposes of fairy tale' (62). This essay argues that the message subtly transmitted in many of the best-known fairy tales is of the almost supernatural power of maternal blood. Further, when read from the position of an adoptive mother, with an eye to the ways in which these old dark tales might affect an

adopted child, or one who is not being cared for by its biological mother, fairy tales appear as disquieting narratives, narratives concerned with questions of blood and genetics, while the acts of extreme violence they often include definitely lack the element of ‘comfort’ proposed by Bruno Bettelheim. Through writing *If You Were Mine* and this essay, I have been able to examine selected fairy tale narratives both imaginatively and critically in the context of adoption and their meaning for constructed families.

## Statement of Originality

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where reference has been made in the text.

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Carol Ann Lefevre.....

26th June, 2009.