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Beauty is Power: Female-female aggression in fairy tales

Master's thesis in English Literature
Supervisor: Yuri Cowan
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Abstract.

This dissertation aims to explore female-female aggression in Western fairy tales, and the cause and underlying motivations behind female characters' abusive and violent acts. Looking at traditional tales by well-known authors such as Charles Perrault and the Grimm brothers, it becomes clear that the concept of beauty is ever-present in their stories, and that it is the beautiful and young heroine who becomes the victim of the jealous and aggressive villainess. Physical appearance is undoubtedly connected to many aspects regarding female aggression, rivalry and violence in the tales. Thus, the focus has been directed towards understanding the impact beauty and youth, or the lack thereof, have on female relationships, even between mothers and daughters. In order to understand how and why the characters are created the way they are, it has been of great importance to keep in mind the cultural and personal background of the tales' different narrators and adaptors. In particular the influences which cause the traditional heroines and villainesses to observe strict pattern of either being passively obedient and desirable young maidens, or the ugly and hostile stepfamily which abuses and challenges the "good girl". This dissertation has also examined the prevailing reward and punishment system for female characters, and what they must be and do in order to be awarded a "happy ending". In addition to the well-known classics by for example the Grimm brother, contemporary adaptations by authors such as Angela Carter and Neil Gaiman are used to illustrate the different cultural and ideological influences of tales such as "Cinderella", "Little Snow White" and "Briar Rose". Their feminist and postmodern perspectives challenge the traditional stories by providing new angles and insight into the villainess' point of view, exposing the disconcerting sides of patriarchal ideology found in the popular tales many have grown up with.

The brutality inflicted on female characters in early nineteenth-century tales demonstrates the influence of patriarchal ideology on the tales' morality. (Talairach-Vielmas 18)

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Last but not least, I wish to give a shout-out to the person living with me, for giving me space when I needed to concentrate and for listening to me talk about my work although you are more of an IT-guy and have no idea what I was going on about.

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Introduction.

Though the storylines of Western fairy tales can differ immensely, the plots involving female-female aggression are typically consistent with the same pattern: The beautiful and hard-working heroine must survive the envy and contempt of wicked women around her, but manages to overcome every hardship and is rewarded with a happy ending. The villainess is rightfully punished for her aggressiveness and immorality whereas the heroine's innocence and beauty has attracted a male saviour who protects her welfare in the end. It is a message which is consistently conveyed in such tales, highlighting the importance of male protection and women's need to appeal to men in order to gain their sympathy and have access to their favours. Beauty becomes the tool for power, an asset which sparks intra-gender competition and violence between female love rivals in their quest of attaining a suitable mate to secure their position in society. While various villainesses prove that beauty is not strictly attributed to the "nice girls", such as the queen in Snow White tales, it is a noticeable trend in fairy tales that physical appearance is connected to female characters' personalities and their femininity. An ordinary-looking heroine is practically non-existent, a fact criticised by feminist scholar who point out that female characters are typically portrayed as either "too passive, pretty, and domestic (if protagonists), or too wicked, ugly, and vicious (if antagonists)" (Jorgensen 37). Fairy tales fail to represent realistic and natural female figures and convey the message that it is the submissive girl which deserves to succeed, rather than the driven and more experienced woman. Through stories such as "Cinderella" and "Snow White", images of femininity are either presented in a highly idealised or vilified representation, teaching that there is only one acceptable female heroine. There are no in-betweens, the good girl may never retaliate, rebel, speak of the unfair treatment she experiences, her own jealousy and desires.

Fairy tales certainly exist for the purpose of entertainment, but it is clear that the deliberate design of the characters communicates an educational message as well. Passed on orally or in written form, generation after generation, mythical stories eventually made their way into the collective memory as "cultural artifacts" (Zipes, "What makes" 110), used to "stabilize, conserve, or challenge common beliefs, laws, values, and norms of a group" (Zipes, *The Oxford Companion* xix). Jack Zipes believes that folk and fairy tales have always "played some role in the socialization and acculturation of listeners" (xix), following the development of human communities. Through the minds of new narrators and story-tellers, the tales inevitably evolved and changed over the years and centuries, as Kurt Vonnegut, Jr, points out

in his foreword to Anne Sexton's *Transformations*. He refers to the translation process of "Cinderella" from French to English, where the word "vair was mistaken for verre so that Cinderella's fur slippers became glass" (Sexton ix). Few things are able to withstand the test of time, and several new storytellers have translated, re-translated, re-told and re-written the tales, sometimes resulting in them becoming unrecognisable in the process. But for the most part, retellings are not changed as a result of a simple translation error, but due to the narrator's own creativity as well as personal ideals and cultural values. Personal convictions or the wish to appeal to a wider or more specific audience has tempted many fairy tale narrators to change parts of the old plot (Zipes, *The Oxford Companion* xix).

This is particularly evident from the eighteenth and seventeenth century fairy tale collections by Charles Perrault and the brother Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. Perrault concealed sexual and potentially offensive topics behind symbolic objects and made necessary alterations according to his preferred style of narration (Perrault xxxvi), and the Grimm brothers who heavily edited several aspects of their tales in order to keep up with social expectations and market demands. They published a total of seven editions of their *Nursery and Household Tales* which saw significant changes in the application of sex and sexuality, in order to make it sellable on the European market of the 1800's. With every new edition, stories would be added and others removed, and many elements of the existing tales would be reviewed again. In some cases they would reduce the detailed descriptions of punishment and pain, but more often they added new features of brutality. In fact, some tales were less intense in their first edition of *Nursery and Household Tales*, while the second edition added birds pecking out the stepsisters' eyes in "Cinderella" and "Rumpelstiltskin" tearing himself in two (Tatar 5). Instead of violence, the Grimms often prioritized deleting scenarios containing immoral behaviour of women, particularly unmarried and pregnant female characters were quick to disappear from the original tales they collected. Female characters received new requirements, no longer just young and beautiful, they also needed to be good Christian women and loving mothers.

Based on such narrative motives, Zipes concludes that "the sense of wonder in the tale and the intended emotion sought by the narrator is ideological" (Zipes, *The Oxford Companion* xix) and largely influenced and appropriated by religious and patriarchal customs. He argues that the tales have become "part of an approved hegemonic canon that reinforces specific preferred values and comportment in a patriarchal culture" (Zipes, "What Makes" 110), a system which Abeda Sultana defines as "characterized by power, dominance, hierarchy, and competition" (Sultana 3). Men and women are taught "the appropriate behaviour for their sex" (8) from early childhood and attributed specific masculine and feminine characteristics which

help to persevere patriarchal order. Sultana explains that "the family, religion, the legal system, the economic system and political system, the educational institutions and the media" (8-9) all influence social relations and consolidate male dominance. According to Jeana Jorgensen, fairy tales following such an ideology "present an abstract and artistic portrait of culture" (Jorgensen 55) which fails to represent real men and women. Instead they produce gendered ideals and stereotypes, "evident in their structures, symbols, and social meanings" (55). Main female characters are created as either good or evil, beautiful and young or ugly and old, passive or aggressive. Because patriarchal ideology emphasises contrasting traits between male and female, the aggressive and power-seeking female becomes an undesirable character as these traits are associated with masculinity, whereas "to lack such power or be reluctant to use it" (Johnson 29) is associated with femininity. Allan G. Johnson explains that powerful women may be considered a threat to a system which focuses on male domination and female subordination. He refers to pre-patriarchal terms such as "crone" or "witch", which initially described wise women respected for their insight, life experience, and knowledge of herbs. However, these terms became hateful labels turning "a positive cultural image of female power, independence, and dignity to an insult or shadow of its former self" (29). Johnson further notes that the mission of the patriarchy is to indoctrinate the belief that not only are women below men, they are also dependent on them for support and protection. With this set of beliefs as the culture's backbone, the reason behind the contrasting characteristics attributed to female heroines and villains in fairy tales are clear. The ideal woman is required to be submissive, caring and tender, while the flawed woman exhibits traits of anger and rage.

As with the real world, female fairy tale characters are overly measured against patriarchal beauty standards and underlying aesthetic demands used to define a woman's femininity and place in society. To Allan D. Cooper, the doctrine of beauty typically complies with the political interests of a system, influencing social relations and individual identity (Cooper 5). He believes that it "serves to construct the very core of individual identity and is central to the evolution of patriarchal systems of power that have dominated each epoch of human history" (1). Fairy tales reinforce this ideology, highlighting beauty as a feminine virtue. This emphasis on beauty and fashion has the fate of women depending on the level of their outward attractiveness, and their ability to match male expectation becomes their advantage in "scoring a partner of high social standing and fortune" (Talairach-Vielmas 5). Laurence Talairach-Vielmas explains that female characters are made to fit the "stereotype of the Victorian angel as a domestic fairy" (3), with marriage and domestic security portrayed as the deserving heroine's ultimate happy ending (1). As the title of this dissertation suggests, beauty

may equal power; as a woman's chances to attract a wealthy and successful mate typically correlates with her physical appearance. The more male support and approval she can attract, the better her "ability to control others, events, resources, or oneself in spite of resistance" (Johnson 29), increasing her power as well as social and economic standing. Other aspects which determine the patriarchal assessment of beauty are a woman's youth and virginity, giving the pure and innocent heroine a clear advantage in the competition with more mature and experienced female characters. As Talairach-Vielmas puts it, age significantly influences a woman's image and becomes an unescapable "failure in a male-dominated world" (Talairach-Vielmas 155). Women who have enjoyed the benefits of their appearance come to experience anxiety over their inevitable aging, often resulting in them displacing their fear onto younger women whom they fear will replace them. Feelings of envy and jealousy quickly arise over one's lack and another's possession of beauty, leading to a desire of "not simply wanting what someone else has but wishing that the other person did not have it" (Kaplan & Schwartz 7). Christine Harris indicates that the fear of losing existing or potential mates to another woman fuels jealousy, "a deeply negative emotion that arises when an important relationship is threatened by a rival" (Harris 62). Countless fairy tales use this negative emotion as the villainess' motivation to insult, mentally or physically harm, and in more extreme cases even desire to kill their victim.

Although a partner's infidelity seems to be equally scorned by both men and women, evolutionary theorists assume that the ancestral woman considers a love rival to be particularly threatening because they would assume "that men expend resources on the women they love" (Harris 64). The more polyamorous her partner, the fewer resources she can expect for herself and her children, endangering their survival. As such, women are instinctively suspicious of more attractive women in terms of youth, beauty and fertility. Harris further explains that the delusional conviction that their partner may cheat on them makes "morbidly jealous people attempt to prevent infidelity in an aggressive fashion" and that "women were twice as likely to murder out of jealousy as were men" (67). Even just the assumption that their mate or other men may be more attracted to another woman can trigger female jealousy to extreme actions, which are often the cause for power struggles between the beautiful and young heroine and the more mature and jealous villainess.

In most fairy tales, female characters will avoid confronting men about infidelity issues, and instead resort to expressing their negative emotions by targeting the subject of male desire herself. Even if the reason is not jealousy based on physical appearance, the female aggressor rarely confront her provocateur should he be male. This is evident in the tale of "Sleeping

Beauty" or "Briar Rose". Ecstatic over the birth of his long-awaited child, a king throws his newborn daughter a grand feast, inviting all but one of the kingdom's fairies. Infuriated, the thirteenth fairy shows up uninvited to the celebration and curses the princess: "I say to you that when your daughter turns fifteen, she will prick herself with a spindle and fall down dead!" (Grimm et al. 163) Instead of lashing out on the king who offended her, she curses the innocent child instead. There are of course many exemptions, such as the tale of "Hansel and Gretel" in which the witch chooses her target based on who is the plumpest of the siblings and not because of their gender. One of the main reasons for female reluctance to face men in situations of conflict may be due to patriarchal culture "which upholds women's dependence on, and subordination to, man in all spheres of life" (Sultana 6-7). Retaliation against the more powerful sex could lead to potential repercussions concerning women's livelihood, security and place in society. Marcus-Newhall et al. mention various reasons which lead somebody displacing their fear or aggression onto an innocent third party, such as the villainess attacking the innocent heroine instead of the male character who provoked her. They explain that aggression can be "redirected toward or displaced onto less powerful or more available targets" (Marcus-Newhall et al. 670), should the provoking agent either be unavailable or in a superior position of power. For example, mothers who experienced abuse from their husbands "may transfer anger or stress to their children" (Namy et al. 46) because they for various reasons cannot directly face their male partners. Women who end up attacking people who rank lower than them withing the social hierarchy feel the need to "violently express their powerlessness – or attempt to consolidate their own power" (47). An empirical study by Robert A. Baron and Paul A. Bell further notes that it is irrelevant whether the target of displaced aggression provided the aggressor with a second triggering provocation or not (qtd. in Marcus-Newhall et al. 670-671). On the contrary, the aggressor's victim is likely to be a nicer person compared to the initial provocateur, which Marcus-Newhall et al. refer to as a "contrast effect" (673). Reviewing these theories, the fairy tale heroine emerges as the perfect target for female aggression, as they appear kind and helpless and are generally the weaker link in the power hierarchy.

Chapter 1. Stepmothers: Wicked Characters?

Cinderella.

Countless myths and fairy tales have used the concept of jealousy as a motivator for female-female violence, and while there are no restrictions on the type of relationship between the villainess and her victim, the stepmother archetype is one of the most popular characters. Her domesticity makes her a particularly convincing villain as she effectively replaces the character of the loving mother with a strict and cold parent figure, threatening her stepchildren directly in their own home which is supposed to offer safety and protection. The image of 'the evil stepmother' has become a cultural symbol which comes attached with a universal stereotype of being cruel and grudge-bearing towards her stepchildren. This stigma has consistently followed stepmothers for centuries of human cultures, evident by the Ancient Roman epithet "saevae novercae" meaning "the poisoning stepmother" (Watson 2). It symbolised hostility and the word 'stepmother' can be found in several languages used metaphorically to describe situations or relations signifying bad luck, malignity and hatred. For example, 'noverca' is used as a military description meaning "any place thought risky for pitching camp" (4), and in Norwegian, the phrase 'å behandle noen stemoderlig' (English: 'treating somebody stepmotherly') is analogous to the meaning of unfair treatment. According to Maria Tatar, it is rarely the stepson which is abused, "but their stepdaughters, who consequently take on the role of innocent martyrs and patient sufferers" (Tatar 141). The heroine in "Cinderella" is among the best examples of the patient victim, as the heroine represents the role of a dutiful and yielding stepdaughter. Growing up as the beloved and protected daughter, all of her privileges are lost the moment her widowed father remarries. The new wife brings with her one or two biological daughters who are the complete opposite of the heroine. Patricia Watson remarks that while "the moral innocence of the stepdaughter is often given physical manifestation in the fact that she is very beautiful" (Watson 259), the stepmother's biological daughters' appearance reflects their bad personality. Together with their mother they abuse and harass the beautiful girl, but despite the stepmother's obvious disdain for Cinderella, her hatred towards her never reaches any physical abuse other than tasking her with strenuous work.

A study on boys' and girls' aggressive tendencies by Björkqvist et al. showed that both genders seem just as motivated to inflict pain on their target, but found that female aggressors tend to refrain from physical violence. Instead of physical violence which was more common among the male participants, they preferred tactics which applied indirect aggression "such as

backbiting and manipulation of the social structure of the class, in order to inflict mental pain on their enemies" (Björkqvist et al. 118). The results also proved that girls were more likely to react to aggression by withdrawing from the situation altogether, or finding indirect strategies of counteraggression such as befriending someone else as a form of revenge (122). This form of aggression helps the perpetrator to remain unidentified because it makes "it seem as though there has been no intention to hurt at all" (118), thus avoiding her target's counteraggression. Anne Campbell adds that many female aggressors turn to gossip in order to damage their rival's social standing, attacking their "appearance, popularity, and preservation of a "good" sexual representation" (Campbell 16). In order to preserve their own reputation, women will regulate their contact with other girls who have been disgraced, leading to the victim's ostracization (21). Cinderella's stepmother seems to exercise a form of indirect aggression which is supposed to diminish the heroine's self-worth by criticising her, calling her a "useless thing" (Grimm et al. 69). She creates a barrier between her stepdaughter and her own family, purposefully dressing her in soot-covered clothing and spitefully calling her "Cinderella". She forbids her from attending social functions and gives her domestic tasks which keep her confined to the house, separating the girl from society. Campbell interprets women's unwillingness to exert physical violence as a result of "women's direct aggression [being] seen as an aberration from the female stereotype", leading them to seek "alternative means of expressing competition that are more acceptable" (Campbell 19). Keeping the abuse within the domestic border helps the stepmother ensure that outsiders are kept unaware of the stepdaughter's situation, which may help her protect her own image in the public eye.

The stepmother herself may not harbour any feelings of jealousy towards Cinderella, but she is certainly aware that her beautiful stepdaughter is a potential love rival for her own ugly daughters. According to Campbell, a mother's success is based off on how well her children do in life. She may also hope to depend on her children's generosity in the future, especially since she is a widow in a society where female security largely depends on her marital prospects. As such it becomes even more important to subdue her daughters' competitors, and she wastes no effort on unrelated offspring from her second husband. Her maternal instinct to ensure her daughters' futures is so strong, that she goes so far as to advise her daughters to cut off part of their feet so they will fit into the tiny glass slipper which belongs to the prince's bride. In the 1812/15 Grimms' version of "Cinderella", she defends her gruesome instruction saying "It will hurt a bit. But what does that matter? It will soon pass, and one of you will become queen." (Grimm et al. 75)

The Russian tale of "Vasilisa the Beautiful" is similar to "Cinderella" in many aspects. The heroine also loses her mother at an early age and is left in the care of a stepmother only to endure abuse and harassment from her and her stepsisters. As with Cinderella, Vasilisa too does nothing to purposefully provoke her stepfamily, but they are still clearly uncomfortable and threatened by her mere existence. She arouses their jealousy as she is the most beautiful girl in the village and "wooed by all the young men in the village, but no one would even look at the stepmother's daughters" (Afanasyev 103). The trio responds by "giving her all kinds of work to do, hoping that she would grow thin from toil and tanned from exposure to the wind and sun" (101-102). The aggression Vasilisa experiences from her stepfamily may be related to displaced fear, as she appears to be a victim of more than simple jealousy. The stepsisters' anxiety over losing out on marriage proposals because all potential mates are distracted by Vasilisa could be the cause of their abusive behaviour. Clarissa Pinkola Estés provides a plausible explanation of why hostility in female steprelationships is so common in fairy tales. She believes that "The stepmother and stepsisters can be understood as creatures set into a woman's psyche by the culture to which a woman belongs" (Estés 85), and that these characters represent the mean elements of this culture. In this case, Vasilisa's stepfamily embodies the limitations women experience in a patriarchal system. At first she is unable to escape these constraints, appearing as "unredeemed hags who taunt, 'You can't do it. You're not good enough. […] You're stupid, insipid, vacant. […] You're only good for simple things. You're only allowed to do this much and no more. Give up while you're ahead.'" (86)

This negative influence teaches women to stay put and not stray from societal expectations or rebel against the given restrictions. Both Cinderella and Vasilisa comply to these societal demands, they are hard-working, do not complain and remain patient even through hardship. But as Estés explains, "the reward for being nice in oppressive circumstances is to be mistreated more" (86). No matter how submissive and dutiful, the good girl does herself a disfavour by heightening the expectations of those around her, causing "more pressure and conflict between the two oppositional natures, one too-good and one two-demanding" (87). Vasilisa does manage to free herself from this naïve mindset of the good girl, entering the first stages of an initiation process which helps her escape these "unredeemed hags", or cultural restrictions. However, her decision to marry the czar at the end of the tale, who wants her for her beauty and domestic skill, leaves her, as Estés puts it, "sort of hanging half in and half out of the hoop" (86). Although feminist theorists may not find the ending entirely satisfactory, Vasilisa shows more determination to take her life back than the feeble Cinderella who simply relies on her magical assistants to help her through life.

Snow White.

Compared to the previously mentioned villainesses, the female aggressor in the tale of Snow White turns to measures far more physical and cruel than mental and verbal violence. In the Walt Disney Productions' animation *Snow White and the seven dwarfs* from 1937, the queen is at first satisfied with having her stepdaughter slave away like Cinderella, cleaning the castle and wearing worn-out clothes. As soon as she catches the eye of a handsome young man, however, the queen becomes deeply enraged, ordering a huntsman to kill her and bring her heart. In most versions, she only notices her stepdaughter's beauty when consulting with her magical mirror. In the 1856 version of the Brother Grimms' "Little Snow White", the queen is described as very beautiful but so "proud and haughty […] she could not bear that anyone else should surpass her in beauty" (Grimm & Grimm 249). She "turned yellow and green with envy" (250) the day her magical looking-glass tells her that she is no longer the most beautiful. From this day, every time she looked at the girl "her heart heaved in her breast" (250) from hatred which only grew more intense. Knowing that "beauty declines with age, [the queen] is jealous of the girl's youth and beauty" (Zipes, *The Oxford Companion* 479), and her only wish is to be of rid her. It becomes so unbearable that she tasks a huntsman to take the child into the forest, and out of her sight. It is however not enough to simply remove her, she also orders him to "Kill her, and bring me back her lung and liver as a token" (Grimm & Grimm 250).

One possible explanation to the queen's violent acts is provided by Brad Bushman and Roy Baumeister's study on narcissism and its connection to aggression. They found that "the highest levels of aggression were found among people who have emotional and motivational investment in extremely favorable, grandiose self-images" (221). The villainess must be aware that her beauty has ensured her the title of queen, leading to an understanding that her physical appearance is her strongest asset. Although she is already in a comfortable position of power where she controls an entire country, she still cannot tolerate any woman who is more beautiful. Narcissists are dependent on social opinion "to validate their grandiose self-image" (220) and are most aggressive towards someone "who had given them a bad evaluation" (227). This may explain the queen's obsession with her mirror, and her despair when it no longer gave her the answers she was looking for. Its judgement of her decreasing beauty puts her into a turmoil of rage and anxiety, determined to kill the princess in order "to restore her primacy" (Zipes, *The Oxford Companion* 479). Narcissists maintain their sense of superiority "by conquering or intimidating other individuals" (Bushman & Baumeister 221), leading them to attack others although there is no direct threat.

Bushman and Baumeister point out that particularly individuals with unstable self-esteem are triggered more intensely at the possibility of ego-threats or criticism:

> High, stable self-esteem may be indifferent or even impervious to ego threat, because one's self-love remains the same no matter what happens, and so hostility is minimal. In contrast, high but unstable self-esteem would produce heightened sensitivity to ego threats, because the individual has much to lose and is vulnerable to the miserable feeling of a brief drop in self-esteem, and so his or her sensitivity may lead to maximal hostility. (Bushman & Baumeister 219)

Knowing that she may only be respected because of her beauty, the princess' arrival leaves the queen fearing that she may lose the only thing which keeps her in a powerful position, explaining her despair over her failed attempts to eliminate Snow White, with her declaration that "Snow-white shall die […] even if it costs me my life!" (Grimm & Grimm 255). This statement proves just how vital physical appearance is to the queen, and that losing to another woman in terms of physical appearance is equal to her downfall, as she is willing to even risk her life to protect her status and resort to murder. According to Marcus-Newhall et al., aggression can depend on a considerable build-up of frustration, or "increased interference with goal attainment" (Marcus-Newhall et al. 670). The interference with goal attainment seems to be one big common issue in fairytales with female-female aggressions, such as Snow White hindering her stepmother desire of being the most beautiful female or Vasilisa preventing her stepsisters from marrying potential suitors from their village. Christine R. Harris refers to emotion theory which "suggest[s] that jealousy is particularly likely to arise over perceptions that a potential rival poses a threat to what one perceives to be valuable in oneself and in an important relationship" (Harris 69-70). If other women around her start gaining the upper hand, the queen may not be able to garner enough attention and help from a man if the need should arise in the future. As such, her morbid jealousy seems to be connected to the need for preventing any love rivals and competitors for mates. The queen is essentially guarding her possibility to attract future mates by removing any potential rivals, in this case her stepdaughter.

Indeed, although Snow White's beauty makes her the queen's enemy, it proves useful several times due to male protection. Not only is she miraculously revived by the prince towards the end of the story, her beauty also saves her from execution by the hand of the queen's huntsman, because "she was so beautiful the huntsman had pity on her" (Grimm & Grimm

250). It can be assumed that had Snow White been less beautiful or even considered ugly, she would probably have died by his hands. The fact that she survives shows that the huntsman's loyalty belongs to the beautiful girl instead of the powerful queen, proving that beauty not only trumps status but that beauty is the source of power itself. These female characters portray the power struggle between young and old, with the younger competitor being the obvious winner because she has the protection of the male characters. The huntsman spares her life and the prince from a neighbouring country overthrows the queen in favour for Snow White. The male presence can also be felt from the mirror, which greatly influences the way the female character interact with each other, women who had previously lived seemingly unbothered by each other. Laurence Talairach-Vielmas views the fairy-tale mirror as a tool which "fixes female beauty and frames femininity […] to enforce patriarchy's sentence" (Talairach-Vielmas 155) and the queen's aggressive action are simply re-enactments of the male-controlled scripts. Jack Zipes refers to other versions of the Snow White tale which do not include any mirror or object responsible for this female objectification, but is built on social opinion: "…[the stepmother/queen] overhears passers-by remarking on the stepdaughter's beauty; a visiting nobleman prefers her daughter; guests declare the girl more beautiful than she" (Zipes, *The Oxford Companion* 479). Similar to the mirror, the glass slipper in "Cinderella" also represents an aesthetic demand for female characters. But Cinderella's stepsisters do not fit any of the patriarchal ideals of femininity, they are neither kind, nor beautiful and delicate enough to pass the test of fitting into the tiny glass slipper. It is exactly these patriarchal symbols in "fantasy's dark underworlds, inhabited by goblins and witches", which "imprison women as angelic or monstrous extremes" (Talairach-Vielmas 155). Female main characters who belong to this genre will never be able to be anything but polar opposites, dark or white, good or evil, beautiful or ugly. The mirror becomes the queen's trap, "hinting at her inevitable failure in a male-dominated world" (155), it manipulates her to only value herself through patriarchal standards and fuels her obsession with beauty. Even when she believes the princess to be dead, she does not seize to consult the mirror, potentially on the look-out for the next threat.

Her rage is so deep that she even resorts to eating what she believes to be Snow White organs as proof of her rivals death. Cannibalism is likely the most aggressive method by the queen, but it is old news to fairy tales, with characters ranging from man-eating ogres, predatory wolves, to witches who live in gingerbread houses. The topic of food is generally present in folk and fairy tales, likely because it has posed as an item of importance and concern in all of human history. Food assures survival, which must be one major factor of why it influences the plot of many fairytales. However, the queen's oral greed cannot be explained as a form of

"gastronomic cannibalism" (Goldberg 108) where the victim is simply seen as a delicious food source. Jack Zipes believes that she is "determined to consume her rival's essence" (Zipes, *The Oxford Companion* 479), as a sort of "ritual or magical cannibalism" (Goldberg 108), in which the cannibalistic act allows the consumer to absorb the essence of the victim. To the queen, her stepdaughter's beauty has become her main enemy and her jealousy has created a hatred towards Snow White that is so deep, she resolves to commit what Harriet Goldberg calls the "ultimate aggressive act against her young rival" (111). The queen hates the princess to the point where eating her would signify the girl's death with no return.

The vilification of the stepmother.

All of these theories show how patriarchal oppression and the control on female bodies and behaviour influence the way women choose to express their feelings. Pent up emotions are directed at targets who are likely unable to counteract, protecting the female aggressor by giving her a female alternative to attack instead of the more powerful male provocateurs. However, readers should not forget that these tales are fictitious, and exist as a result of their narrators' ideological convictions. When comparing the Grimms' traditional version of Snow White to those of more postmodern writers such as Angela Carter, Anne Sexton and Neil Gaiman, many issues such as patriarchal representation and female oppression come to light. Gaiman in particular turns the tale on its head by creating a version which tells the story from the perspective of the queen, giving the wicked stepmother a chance to redeem herself and explain why she tried to kill her stepdaughter. She demystifies many assumptions created by the traditional version, claiming that "some say (but it is her lie, not mine) that I was given the heart and that I ate it" (Gaiman & Doran 15) renouncing the cannibalism of the original tale. Although she cultivates and appreciates her own beauty, jealousy is never a topic for Gaiman, the one red thread which connects most versions of Snow White, also in modern adaptations. Instead, she is terrified of the vampiristic creature with pale skin, coal-black eyes and hair, and sharp yellow teeth. With this comic book, Gaiman has effectively switched the roles of the heroine and villainess, evil stepmother and innocent stepchild, a relationship which has been developed over millennia of human culture.

At her first encounter with the six year old princess, she offers the hungry child a dried apple. At the sight of her enjoying the food, the queen admits "I had always been scared of the little princess, but at that moment I warmed to her" (Gaiman & Doran 8) and even displays her affection by wanting to stroke her cheek. At that point, the girl whom she just opened up to, bites her ferociously and drinks her blood. Despite being in pain, the queen is unable to defend

herself and is only freed once the princess has finished. At first she does not act against the child, other than locking her own chambers. But when her husband the king dies, with bitemark-like scars scattered over her body and slowly succumbing to his death, she becomes so afraid that she decides to rid herself and the Kingdom of the danger the princess poses. In the end, the Queen efforts to protect not only herself but the kingdom from a monster backfire. The princess meets a powerful ally who helps her overthrow the queen, and win the support of the people. It is the stepdaughter's word against hers, and the stepmother inevitably loses, despite having exhibited genuine efforts to build a healthy and loving relationship with her stepdaughter in the beginning.

To show that the stepmother has always been met with doubt and criticism as to her intentions towards her nonbiological children, Patricia Watson draws up an example from the Senecan *Controversiae 4.6*; For a long time a husband has hidden his two sons from his second wife and refuses to tell her which of them is her own child, because he assumes that she will automatically favour one and discriminate against the other (Watson 5). This instinctive doubt of the intentions and behaviours of women towards their stepchildren is shared throughout many cultures which assumes "that malevolence on the part of the stepmother towards her stepchildren was a necessary consequence of the steprelationship" (3). Because stepmothers carry this negative stigma, few will take the opposite stance and assume that stepchildren will be the initiators of a malfunctioning relationship. Indeed, the child is unlikely to be suspected to carry any of the blame for the hostility of the stepmother, as it is automatically assumed that "the stepchild is essentially an innocent victim" (9). Stories of steprelationships are also typically told from the perspective of the child. If the stepchild retaliates against its stepmother, people will assume that she did something horrid and that the child's actions are justified. To Watson, a stepmother's vilification is inevitable unless she is able to prove her innocence, but even if extraordinary efforts are put in she may not be able to escape becoming the victim of others' perceptions. Watson mentions the paradox of this stigma, using the example that a stepchild would fall ill: "if she fails to feed him she will be called cruel, if she gives him food, on the other hand, it will be assumed to be poisoned" (10). Even if the stepmother acted in the same way as any biological mother would, such as setting boundaries or reprimanding disobedient behaviour, she will likely face negative backlash. Even today, in the 21st century, stepmothers struggle to rid themselves of the negative stereotype surrounding their identity. It will take considerable effort and openly showcasing her goodwill towards her stepchildren for people to view her in an amicable light instead of immediately labelling her a 'saevae novercae'.

Chapter 2. An Unlikely Villain: The Biological Mother.

The biological mother is the villain.

The character of the stepmother is not alone at being stigmatised for the message of the fairy tale, also the mother figure has become idealised and glorified. Maria Tatar comments on the fact that biological mothers in fairy tales repeatedly appear to be absent or remain unmentioned, and have often already passed away (Tatar 73). She explains this occurrence as a measure taking by narrators such as Charles Perrault and the Grimm brothers, who adapted the fairy tales from adult to children's literature, and found it necessary to make fateful changes in order to "preserve the sanctity of motherhood" (234). Several tales have been changed in this manner to preserve the figure of the good mother, with new narrators rejecting characters who mistreat and abandon their own children, "turning the monstrously unnatural cannibals and enchantresses of these tales into stepmothers, cooks, witches, or mother-in-laws" (234). Examples to this artificial development are popular tales such as "Hansel and Gretel" and "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs", which are commonly known for the stepmother villains but were in fact first published using biological mother figures. Jack Zipes describes that in the case of "Hansel and Gretel", the Grimm brothers "persistently lengthened and altered the tale from the early terse manuscript version (1810), adding names for the children and Christian motifs in 1812, transforming the mother to a stepmother in 1819, and further rationalizing the abandonment of the children in 1843 and 1857." (Zipes, *The Oxford Companion* 225) In the earliest 1812/15 version of the siblings' tale, it is the biological mother who abandons her children, telling her husband to leave them in the forest saying "We can no longer feed them" (Grimm et al. 44).

The same goes with the tale of Snow White, which also was subjected to several rounds of the Grimms' editing habits. The 1812/15 version tells the story of a queen who dearly longs for her own child, wishing it would be "as white as snow, as red as blood, and as black as the wood of the window frame!" (Grimm et al. 170). Her wish is fulfilled and a daughter is born, which the queen calls 'Little Snow White', a name with a sentimental feeling which implies that the Queen cherishes her. Compared to later versions however, the queen does not die and become substituted by Snow White's stepmother. As soon as Little Snow White turns seven and the mirror announces that the daughter has surpassed her mother in beauty, the queen's jealousy blinds any feelings of fondness she previously felt and tasks a huntsman to kill the girl and bring back her lungs and liver as proof. The tale of Snow White is far from singular, as exemplified with the Celtic tale of "Gold-Tree and Silver-Tree", introducing yet another mother

and daughter duo whose relationship is seemingly harmonious until a third party interrupts the peace and triggers jealousy. Similar to the mirror in "Little Snow White" whose biased wisdom severely damages the maternal bond, it is a trout which calls the daughter the most beautiful at the mother's question "Troutie, bonny little fellow, am not I the most beautiful queen in the world?" (Jacobs 71) Deeply enraged, the mother vows that she will not be at peace until she has eaten Gold-Tree's heart and liver, cannibalistic behaviour which Harriet Goldberg describes as "the ultimate hostile act that one human creature can inflict on another, it is clearly an act outside the usual limits of human behavior" (Goldberg 109). Goldberg raises the interesting point that eating and aggression are connected, as satisfying hunger is among human's most material needs, not restricted to survival but also used in order to create total control between eater and eaten through "the literal consumption […] of the latter by the former" (109). In the case of "Little Snow White" and "Silver-Tree and Gold-Tree", the mothers no longer sees the girls as their daughters, or even as humans. As Goldberg puts it, "those who practise cannibalism are treating other beings as objects, bereft of humanity" (108). In her rage, the mother character dehumanises and objectifies her daughter by wanting to consume her, and possibly hoping to absorb the younger woman's essence (108).

Traditional fairy tale collectors such as the Grimm brothers were uncomfortable with the evil and cannibalistic mother and put in efforts to remove or subdue this sinister character by either removing her from the story altogether, or by changing her into a stepmother who is not expected to be a loving parent. Paolo Santagostino recognises that a mother's love is essential to a young child's wellbeing, but reminds us that the image of the good mother is an unrealistic idealisation: "children face the severity of the mother who forbids them to do certain things, who punishes them so as to teach them a lesson or who scolds them" (qtd. in Radulescu 1087). Mothers who possess both good and bad traits are rejected and separated into two images, creating a "duality of the maternal figure" (1087) such as the good mother and the stepmother. Fairy tales tend to avoid the representation of biological parents as their child's oppressors altogether and rather present them as "impostors who have somehow usurped the position of the real parents" (Tatar 75). A stepmother is able to fill the role of the heartless parent better, as she is not by blood required to love her child. She stands in stark contrast to a biological mother, who is often presented as kind and protecting. The answer to why the step-relationships in fairytales and other stories are so repeatedly used, may lie in Freud's study of "family romances" (74). Maria Tatar refers to a study which found that children starting to liberate themselves from parental authority may grow discontented with their parents in this process. The reason may be connected to parental abuse or neglect, but could also correlate to

a child's wish to replace them with parents of higher social standing or other attractive qualities. In the child's dissatisfaction with a parent, "seek[ing] relief in the idea that he must be a stepchild or an adopted child" (75) becomes the solution. A fairytale turns this family romance theory upside down and the child becomes the victim of parents' dissatisfaction with their children, with fathers "forever banishing their sons, and stepmothers habitually [excluding] their daughters from the family circle" (75).

Another issue which seems noteworthy in the case of the cruel mother figure, is the lack of disdain towards the neglective father figure. In "Hansel and Gretel", the mother is not the sole perpetrator in abandoning the children. Although the father is reluctant at first, thinking of the wild beasts, he eventually agrees to his wife's logic that they may all starve to death. The tale presents the children with yet another wicked female character. Having lost their way, the children stumble upon "a little house made of bread with cake for a roof and pure sugar for windows" (46), meeting a witch who at first appears like a caring grandmother. It is however only a façade to lure in innocent children, and she plans on feasting on them. When the children return from their ordeal after having defeated the witch, they return home to an overjoyed father with their pockets full of jewels, making him a rich man. The mother, meanwhile, has died, likely the tale's punishment for a heartless mother. The stark contrast of how the mother and father are depicted is unmistakably in favour of the male parent, despite having been a part of the scheme of abandoning their children all along. It is reminiscent of the story of Adam and Eve, in which Eve becomes humanity's first sinner by persuading Adam to eat the forbidden fruit. Although both Adam and Eve and both parents of Hansel and Gretel 'sin', the women receive the harshest punishment.

The Absent Mother.

While the cruel mother in fairy tales is punished for her neglect and the stepmother becomes the artificial substitute, it appears that the good mother is not necessarily the better option for fairy tale daughters. It seems that only the presence of the bad mother enables the heroine to achieve happiness at the end of the story, while the good mother must stay behind and root for her daughter from afar. Clarissa Pinkola Estés concludes that the loving mother is indeed of great importance and that it is beneficial for a young girl to have caring parents around her, who teach her the dangers of the world and how to protect herself. "Without parents' loving guidance she will certainly be prey early on" (Estés 48), but the heroine also needs to be separated from them at some point for her to assume responsibility for her own life. Estés sees it as a necessary initiation process when the daughter leaves behind her mother's protection and

the comfort and safety of "the nest": "She must be willing to feel anxious sometimes, otherwise she might as well have stayed in the nest" (84). This is visible in the tales "Cinderella" and "Vasilisa the Beautiful" where the ugly stepsisters, much protected and preferred by the stepmother, still end up unsuccessful and unhappy. Receiving challenge after challenge, the heroines who grew up with loving mothers but must deal with their absence from childhood on, eventually triumph. Cinderella's mother bestows her daughter with valuable wisdom on how to behave and lead a good life, before leaving her daughter to her own devices. In the Grimms' tales, even after her demise she is ever-present in the form of assistant pigeons and a magical tree planted on her grave. Vasilisa also depends on her mother's protective spirit as she lives under her mean stepfamily, which is manifested in a doll which in exchange for food would "perform all the chores for Vasilisa, who rested in the shade and picked flowers while the flower beds were weeded, the cabbage sprayed, the water brought in, and the stove fired" (Afanasyev 103). This doll serves as the absent mother's "maternal blessing" (101), and gives her owner advice and wisdom whenever needed.

Contrary to the absent mother who protects her daughter even from death, stands the mother in the story of Little Red Riding Hood. The Grimms' 1812/15 version "Little Red Cap" presents a mother who is alive and well, but seemingly emotionally disconnected from her child. Her advice to her daughter is less about the heroine's well-being, and more about instructions on how to behave orderly:

> "Come, Little Red Cap, take this piece of cake and bottle of wine and bring them to your grandmother. She's sick and weak, and this will strengthen her. Be nice and good and greet her from me. Go directly there and don't stray from the path, otherwise you'll fall and break the glass, and your grandmother will get nothing." (Grimm et al. 85)

Based on this indifferent behaviour, Peter Arnds even questions "whether she is the real mother or the stepmother" (Arnds 176). He comments on the part of the tale where the girl is described to be loved by all, and that it is the grandmother which treasures her the most, rather than the mother. Her advice includes no hint of motherly concern for her daughter's safety, only a lesson of discipline on dawdling and not straying from the path so she won't accidentally break the bottle. Arnds mentions a German version, in which additional warnings are given not to snoop around the house, a behaviour which makes him believe that the mother may be harbouring negative feelings towards Little Red Riding Hood, scolding her even before she has

had a chance to misbehave. He is alarmed by her failure to warn Little Red Riding Hood from the dangers of the wolf, "her child neglect as it were" (178). It is no wonder that the heroine's first meeting with the wolf turns out to be a rather relaxed encounter: "Little Red Cap didn't know what a wicked sort of an animal he was and was not afraid of him" (Grimm et al. 85). Compared to Cinderella and Vasilisa who heed their mothers' guidance, Little Red Riding Hood blatantly ignores her mother's advice, a decision which only brings her trouble. It may be possible that Little Red Riding Hood is able to sense her mother's hostility and has chosen not to listen to her, because she cannot be sure whether the advice will protect or hinder her. In that case it may be better to find out for herself and develop her maturity exploring the unknown outside of her nest, as Estés has pointed out. The mother's strict rules hinder her daughter from developing independence and do nothing to free Little Red Riding Hood from childish naïveté. It is only when she encounters real danger that she learns to protect herself.

Arnds himself concludes that mother figures who assert their destructive nature onto their daughters, whether biological or not, help the heroines to progress in life (Arnds 176). Laurence Talairach-Vielmas sees the irony in the relationship between young and older females in fairy tales, and refers to Snow White's stepmother's "anxiety over her own loss of physical attractiveness [which] is displaced onto Snow White, her mirror image" (Talairach-Vielmas 155). In her opinion, the queen's murder plot reflects "Snow White's 'training' in femininity before marriage" (155). Jack Zipes concludes that facing female jealousy allows characters like Snow White to understand that they cannot escape danger and forces them to learn how to deal with such violence (Zipes, *The Oxford Companion* 479). He adds that the domestic elements such as sweeping the house, washing dishes and preparing meals for the dwarfs represent Snow White's "first assumption of responsibility" (479). Looking at these arguments, the concept of the good mother may not be as beneficial to the heroine's personal growth as compared to the "tough love" or abuse from the bad mother. Maternal absence or abandonment may facilitate independence, and a strict mother who does not spoil her daughter may play a beneficial role in preparing the girl for a tough existence with the patriarchal system. After all, there is a difference between being naïve and knowing how to act naïvely, understanding the right methods in succeeding in "a man's world".

Chapter 3. Internalised Misogyny.

The continuing cycle of female violence.

Peter Arnds' analysis of the characters in Little Red Riding Hood also leads him to mention the heroine's characteristic red hood, a symbol which several rewritings and critical reading have connected to "her blossoming sexuality, and thus possibly to the mother's jealousy" (178). It is again jealousy which seems to drive a wedge between women, even mother and daughter, which in "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" even turns the mother into a cannibalistic witch who preys on her own child. Yvonne Verdier uses the theory of intergenerational conflict to explain the mother's behaviour, believing that "Red Cap's mother is struggling with the fact that her daughter is now of an age in which she will soon replace her as child bearer" (qtd. in Arnds 178). This rivalry goes so far that the older woman oftentimes resorts to the physical elimination of the younger woman, due to their fear of their own elimination in the process of "female biological transformation by which the young eliminate the old in their own lifetime" (178). Verdier refers to daughters replacing their mothers, and the circle being repeated "with the arrival of their children's children" (178). This natural female cycle of elimination raises the argument that female-female violence is inevitable, and that the story of the female villain must repeat itself. While fairy tales tend to end the story with the heroine's successfully avoiding moral downfall and generally weds a suitable groom, the heroine's life from that point on is rarely elaborated on, as well as the fact that she too must age.

Anne Sexton's poem "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" presents an ending befitting Verdier's argument of the effects of the female biological transformation process. As with most versions, Snow White is described as white and unsoiled, a porcelain-like body which shows no cracks, signifying the untouched membrane of her virginity. For this reason, her aging stepmother wants her eradicated, deeply fearful of becoming insignificant in a world which places female beauty on a pedestal. The old stepmother who once was the most beautiful woman is punished and effectively eliminated, with Snow White taking her place:

> And so she danced until she was dead,
> a subterranean figure,
> her tongue flicking in and out
> like a gas jet.
> Meanwhile Snow White held court,

rolling her china-blue doll eyes open and shut

        and sometimes referring to her mirror

        as women do. (Sexton 9)

The poem's last words "as women do" highlight the inescapable social structure which leads to this event reoccurring over and over again. These last verses signify the end of the old and the beginning of the new female life, with Snow White promptly assuming the role previously occupied by her older rival and starting the destructive and jealousy-inducing cycle of consulting with the mirror anew. It is a behavioural pattern deeply rooted in a system of female oppression, where women need to constantly prove their worth in the male eye.

According to Gwen Hunnicutt, "race, class, age, appearance, and reproductive status" (Hunnicutt 565) factor into the evaluation of female value, characteristics which decide how well a woman will be received in society. Fairy tales are great examples to showcase the importance the right combination of characteristics has, elevating the female character with the most desirable traits into positions of power. As Hunnicutt states, "women's power may come from their association with men" (565), acquired through appealing to them with desirable traits such as the preferred appearance and age. We see this in Neil Gaiman's tale *Snow, Glass, Apples*, where Snow White's stepmother uses a ploy to seduce the king in order to become queen, or with Cinderella's stepmother who covets the prince as groom for her daughters to elevate their status and power. However, power acquired using assets which are destined to fade in desirability with time, are followed by a constant uncertainty and fear that they will eventually lose male interest and support. Hunnicutt also points out that power through male support also presents women with significant disadvantages. While the most common characteristic of patriarchal culture is the protection of women, rather than forceful domination, the problem lies within the fact that this protection is not extended to all women. Secondly, the resulting female dependency on men can develop a form of repression and powerlessness which makes women subject to potential male aggression. Hunnicutt calls this the "paradox of protection", an arrangement of chivalry which "renders women powerless because accepting protection implies neediness and vulnerability" (565), although it is supposed to free the victim. She further explains this paradox by referencing the cultural practices in some certain Muslim and Hindu groups, which classify women as a protected group but also deny them of the rights to participate freely in society, by setting "restrictions on women's dress and mobility" (566). Women who violate the normative standards of female behavior may no longer benefit from the privilege of male protection. This creates an asymmetrical relationship between genders

which renders women vulnerable, and vilifies women who rebel against popular belief. This system is evidently present in fairy tales, where the submissive heroine is rewarded and the female character which portrays a strong will and determination is withheld any male support and is punished as the villainess. This ultimately leads to a competition between the aggressive and the passive woman, with the prize being male favours.

Internalised misogyny.

The fact that women seem to be determined to overthrow one another in order to gain power, creating opponents rather than allies, may seem ironic, as they are all victimised by patriarchal ideals and beauty standards for which they feel the need to compete. By attacking each other, they are effectively hurting themselves by contributing to the oppression of their own gender. Audrianna Dehlin relates this behaviour as a consequence of patriarchal systems teaching women "passive acceptance of gender roles" and "self-objectification" (Dehlin 4), which drives women to exhibit sexism towards their own gender. She points out that it is not men alone who facilitate for female oppression, but that female misogyny is partly responsible as well. She refers to term internalised misogyny, a form of oppression which oftentimes goes unnoticed, and a study which found that women "conveyed dialectic practices of internalized sexism on average 11 times per 10-minute increment of conversation" (4). It shows that not only have women learned to live with sexist attitudes, they have also adopted the ideology that men are natural leaders of society. Anne Campbell even argues that women are the stronger enforcers of patriarchal double standards, especially concerning female sexual conduct and reputation. She mentions research which suggests that women impose beauty trends and "also care more about other women's opinion of attractiveness than those of men" (Campbell 16). By willingly using tools such as bras, corsets, and even resorting to drastic measures such as plastic surgery, women enforce and normalise beauty standards, for example by "exaggerate[ing] the apparent narrowness of the waist" (20). She believes that women's beauty concerns "might result from the internalisation of patriarchal values or from mate competition" (16), saying that women compete against each other in the quest of attaining characteristics they believe men will value, "such as looking sexy" (16). A consequence of this competition is that women will distance themselves from other women, and even employ self-hatred.

Allan G. Johnson too clarifies that gendered oppression is not created because men are villains and women easy targets, nor that men do not oppose and women never contribute to female oppression. He believes that the patriarchy is just like any other system where common values and ideas are shaped around "an arrangement of shared understandings and relationships

that connect people to one another and something larger than themselves" and cannot be "reduced to the people who participate in it" (Johnson 26). Any individual growing up and participating in any system will naturally be shaped by and identify with its culture and ideology. While participation "gives us the opportunity to be part of changing or perpetuating [the system]" (26), Johnson admits that most people will follow the path of least resistance and go along with the status quo. It is not the oppressors which promote oppression, it is the oppressive system which establishes oppressive acts as appropriate. But "as the saying goes, what evil requires is simply that ordinary people do nothing" (26), and Johnson points to the fact that individuals alone rarely try to change the system.

The hostility between women and the reluctance to confront male members of society is well depicted in Angela Carter's "The Snow Child", a short story based on the tale of Snow White. It is about a wife witnessing her husband's sexual infidelity and exploitation of the female body, but choosing to remain silent about it. Instead of confronting her husband, she demonstrates acts of displaced aggression towards the subject of her husband's desire. Soman Chainani points out an important question about the Countess, and whether she can be seen as evil because she tries to hurt the Count's mistress, of if she is simply "wicked because she fails to see the alternative to patriarchy and thus comes to serve it" (Chainani 213-214). The story begins with the Count daydreaming of his ideal woman, exclaiming "I wish I had a girl as white as snow", "as red as blood" and "as black as that bird's feather" (Carter 91). Magically the girl befitting all his criteria appears before them, beautiful and naked, "and the Countess hated her" (92). Through multiple attempts to get rid of her, the Countess only meets resistance from her husband. Her gloves, furs and boots leave her body one after the other and onto the naked woman, leaving the Countess "bare as a bone and the girl furred" (92). Showing signs of pity, the Count at least agrees to his wife's request that the girl pick her a rose, saying "I can't deny you that" (92), a sad reminder of his past affection. As the girl picks her a rose, she pricks herself and bleeds, then falls dead to the ground. The Countess simply "watched him narrowly" (92) as the Count desperately "unfastened his breeches and thrust his virile member into the dead girl" (92), using the girl's last moments to exploit her body before she melts into the snow.

Cristina Bacchilega explains that the rose represents "the "eternal" symbol of femininity in both its sexual and its mystically sacrificial connotations" (Bacchilega 37). The scene where the girl plucks the flower and bleeds signifies her coming of age, now ready to serve the Count's desires as a passive object and effectively fading away as she fulfils her purpose. Carter ends her story with a Countess, now wearing all her clothes again, and a Count who presents her with the rose she wanted previously, which she vehemently refuses, saying "It bites!" (Carter

92). It is a tale which relates well to Gwen Hunnicutt's assessment that female power which depends on male affection is unpredictable. The Countess understands early on that she needs to remove Snow Child from her husband's reach, and her fears are realised when all her clothes are stolen and given to the mistress. This scene depicts the transfer of power between the clothed Countess and the naked girl, and the loss of her clothes signifies the Countess' loss of her husband's affection. She is only able to regain that protection when the other woman is eliminated, creating the understanding that "the only relationship possible between women is one that re-produces itself as rivalry, as struggle to survive at the other woman's expense" (Bacchilega 38). It is a psychological battle, which puts women in the depressing position of either killing or being killed. Chainani sees this as the resolution that "to avoid suffering in a man's world, she *causes* suffering", explaining that when "Snow Child and the Countess are forced into battle for the same male […] one of the paired mirrors will shatter" (Chainani 226). To him, Carter's tale empowers neither the Countess nor the Mistress, but brings to light "the power imbalance of the patriarchal status quo" (219).

The story of *Snow, Glass, Apples* also serves to prove that jealousy is not an unwarranted emotion, but an instinctive reaction to the threat of women's survival, both in the real and fictitious world. Gaiman's queen is yet another female character which has accepted her submissive role in a male-dominated society, and faces the harsh reality of male rejection in favour for the younger woman. She is, as Dehlin describes it, a woman who is "observant of traditional gender roles" (4) and subjects herself to male expectations concerning her body. When meeting the king for the first time, she surrenders her body to him, saying "a king's right, it was" (Gaiman & Doran 3). Her description of married life as queen is summarised as "When he wanted me he would send for me, and I would go to him, and pleasure him" (5), calling him "My husband, my love, my king" (10). Marie-Louise von Franz explains that women learn early on how to behave in order to get the men in their lives to view them in a favourable light, by adapting to the ideal female image, or anima, a man has: "Even small girls find out that if they play the part of the father's anima, put their arms round his neck […] they can get a lot out of father" (Von Franz 2). The man's anima projections continue to influence a woman's behaviour throughout her life and at some point she will have learnt how to use it. Von Franz calls this an "anima woman", who plays "the role intimated to them by the man in whom they are at the moment interested" (2). Anima women comport themselves by adjusting to men's reactions, and are highly susceptible to their opinions: "Their lover will tell them they are wonderful, but if there's no man around, they feel as if they were nobody" (Von Franz 2). Developing an identity which is based off male's opinions, seeking positive feedback to feed their self-worth,

can have detrimental effect on women. Von Franz gives the example of a woman she knew whose husband preferred her to wear high heels despite having weak feet. Even doctors' advice could not change her habit, because she would rather torture herself and be in pain than lose her husband's affection. She concludes that "if he only likes her as an anima figure, she is forced to play the role of the anima" (2).

Gaiman's queen understands that her status as widowed woman is a significant flaw in a culture which values virginity, and she admits that "I am no innocent, although my late husband, who was once my king, was truly my first lover, no matter what they say" (38). Despite possessing a great amount of power and ruling an entire kingdom, she is hopeful to win the neighbouring prince's heart so that they may forge an even more powerful alliance between their two kingdoms. However, the prince has very specific demands she must fulfil, and makes her "stand in front of the opened window, far from the fire, until my skin was chilled stone-cold", "lie upon my back, with my hands folded across my breasts" (Gaiman & Doran 39). He does not want her to move nor say anything during intercourse, but the queen cannot help but enjoy and thrust along with him. Unable to project herself into the prince's ideal anima woman, he loses his virility and abandons her. When he finds the ice-cold corpse of the princess, lying naked in her glass cairn, his excitement re-emerges. Compared to the queen, the princess is the necrophiliac's perfect impersonation of his anima, motionless and passive, compliant, young and beautiful, and in her unconsciousness pliable to his desires.

According to Talairach-Vielmas, the heroines who depend on men are subsequently forced into an "economic subservience to the male market" (Talairach-Vielmas 28) where she must use her beauty and body in return for male services. While Snow White finds a way to take advantage of the prince's desires in most of the tale's many versions, the forceful crysalis or state of being trapped in one's own body is not a pleasurable experience. In Perrault and the Grimms', the curse of forced sleep by the evil fairy can be seen as the main harmful act, but to Anne Sexton it is the state of complete helplessness during the princess' unconsciousness which contains the real violence though crysalis as female slavery. In her poem "Briar Rose", Sexton turns the classic plot into the horrible situation of a comatose woman, who is neither asleep nor entirely unconscious, but trapped in a lifeless body she has no control over: "I was forced backward. I was forced forward. I was passed hand to hand like a bowl of fruit. Each night I am nailed into place and I forget who I am." (Sexton 112) It is a state of slow identity loss, "a form of amnesia that effectively takes a victim's life, "nailing her in place," imprisoning her, stripping her of will and agency" (Salvio 22). As with earlier versions of the Sleeping Beauty tales, where her discoverer rapes her and she only awakens when giving birth (Zipes, *The*

Oxford Companion 476), Sexton's heroine too experiences the alarming bodily assault, but this time she is awake and cannot move. The author explores sexual abuse, but not by a stranger as with old tales. Sexton employs scenes of an incestuous father, "drunkenly bent over my bed, circling the abyss like a shark, my father thick upon me, like some sleeping jellyfish." (Sexton 112) Through her own experiences manifested in her book *Transformations*, Sexton raises the topic of women trapped in the patriarchal system, who may be oblivious to the fact that their rights are being violated because they are used to being manipulated and made to believe that this is the natural way of things. Like Sexton's "Little doll child" (107), women lose their identity by conforming to patriarchal order. Allan D. Cooper states that "political governance is always about control over bodies; with patriarchal structures of power, such control over bodies assumes a vital and strategic mechanism for the achievement of social power." (Cooper 2) As power governs stability of life, it becomes the ultimate goal to achieve a certain amount of control over others. In male-dominated societies, this control exercises the oppression of women, and women look for male partners who elevate them to a status which presents wealth and security.

This forced submission has been reworked by Sexton in both her poems "Briar Rose" and "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs". Her work *Transformations* highlights several topics of female oppression, addressing issues such as "sexual abuse, abandonment, incest, commodification, alienation, and sexual identity" (Zipes, *The Oxford Companion* 461). Her poems uncover the reality for women under patriarchal influence by revealing the truth behind the so-called happy endings, such as the wedded prince and heroine living happily ever after and "never bothered by diapers or dust" with "their darling smiles pasted on for eternity" (461). She prefers to show her audience the depressing ways in which female characters are objictified in classic tales such as the Grimms' fairy tale collection. For example, Sexton's Snow White is described as this fragile figure, a white and unsoiled virgin., whom the dwarves believe will bring them luck as a "good omen" (6). In return for the dwarfs' protection, she is exploited for her domestic abilities, essentially locked in place with no chance to progress. Although she has no use of beautifying herself further, her vanity and need to become even more desirable are her downfall in the face of her stepmother's fatal schemes. In the face of her enemy she becomes a "dumb bunny" (8) trapped in her vanity as she buys a poisoned comb, and lets her disguised stepmother tie her bodice to tight. Both times she faints and is found lying on the floor like a "plucked daisy" (7) or "gold piece" (8), still beautiful but utterly lifeless.

Laurence Talairach-Vielmas notes that "Fairy tales foreground the idea that femininity is closely linked to aestheticization, and that beauty is a feminine virtue which needs to be

cultivated" (Talairach-Vielmas 5). To women, "beauty is their wealth" (5), but in Snow White's case it is also part of her suffering. Still, she cannot stop improving and cultivating her physical appearance and falls for the queen's comment about her being "so sloppily laced up!" (Grimm et al. 174). As Talairach-Vielmas states, the heroine is effectively being "murdered by her own aestheticization" (Talairach-Vielmas 155). The tale has always punished Snow White for her obsession with beauty, lured by the laces and combs offered to her by the stepmother disguised as a peddler. With Christian values being deeply embedded in patriarchal ideology, the fairy tale's moral code seems to punish Snow White for her vanity and wish to become even more desirable, as vainglory poses as one of the seven deadly sins. The female audience is effectively taught that physical appearance is important, but flaunting one's beauty is unwelcome and punishable, a paradox in itself. The fact that Snow White even in her death remains a public commodity which must be preserved and displayed in a glass coffin, demonstrates the control others have of her body. In Sexton's poem, she is placed "upon the seventh mountain so that all who passed by could peek upon her beauty" (Sexton 8), as if it were wasteful to simply bury her and her outstanding beauty underground. She has become crystalised, a glass doll, owned by the world and gifted to the highest bidder. The prince who obtains her, charmed by the lifeless body's pale and beautiful appearance, wishes to "keep her in his far-off castle" (9) where she can lie in her beautiful and unchanging form, trapped in a state in which she will never age. Neither will she ever talk back or act in any way the prince could disapprove of. With this, the heroine's objectification is complete. Even once she is miraculously revived she remains lifeless and automatically assumes the role of the prince's bride, "rolling her china-blue doll eyes open and shut" (9) as if she were a robot.

The fairy tale as the communicator of patriarchal ideology.

Marie-Louise von Franz reminds us again that these fairy tale characters are not representative of ordinary women, but "correspond to what Levy-Bruhl calls *représentives collectives*", "figures of the unconscious" (Von Franz 6). Through the migration and changes fairy tales undergo over time, characters lose their connection to the present and become part of the national collective consciousness in which with fairy tale characters become "archetypal figures lacking human amplification" far from possessing human individuality (15). Von Franz argues that the representation of women in fairy tales is dependent on "the sex of the last person who wrote down the story (3), explaining female underrepresentation in cultures influenced by Christian and patriarchal values. Comparing the classic and traditional fairy tales with their more contemporary and modern adaptations, major differences can be found in the approaches

of 17th and 18th century narrators such as Charles Perrault and the Grimm brothers apply, and modern writers like Anne Sexton, Angela Carter and Neil Gaiman. Von Franz refers to the traditional "Sleeping Beauty" as no more than "a feminine abstract", a female archetype with no subjective life of her own: "She has been born miraculously, has fallen asleep, has woken up, and has married" (15). With the lack of women's subjective experience of the world, fairy tales are unable to represent the real female experience under patriarchy and only reinforce an artistic feminine image which teaches women how to behave. Jack Zipes confirms that we have come to depend on fairy tales as if they had a grip on us (Zipes, *The Oxford Companion* xv), explaining that "the narratives were intended to acquaint people with learning experiences so that they would know how to comport themselves" (xix). He introduces feminist criticism on fairy tales, who denounce them for "acculturate[ing] girls to believe that passivity, placidity, and morbidity, and with physical beauty, will make them the 'best' kind of girl to be" (Zipes, *The Oxford Companion* 159). Karen Rowe "maintained that fairy tales prescribe restrictive social roles for women and perpetuate 'alluring fantasies' of punishment and reward" (qtd. in Zipes, *The Oxford Companion* 159). Passivity, beauty and helplessness are rewarded with marriage, wealth and status, while the aggressive and powerful woman is punished by ostracization or death, such as the Grimms' queen in "Little Snow White" who is forced to wear iron slippers heated over a fire until "her feet were miserably burned, but she had to keep dancing in them until she danced herself to death" (Grimm et al. 178).

Compared to their male counterparts, female villains often receive the most extreme of punishments. Many of the Grimms' tales lead their readers to believe that the women are the most violent towards the heroine, a belief which Maria Tatar sees as incoherent with fairy tale plots. The fairy tale tyrant is "just as likely to be a father as a mother, a king as a queen" (Tatar A 75), as there is certainly no shortage of male villainy. Agnieszka Sienkiewicz-Charlish writes that the right application of narration techniques can influence how readers perceive fictitious characters, to the point where sympathy can be retrieved even for protagonists which should really be classified as villains (Sienkiewicz-Charlish 121) and create circumstances which seem to justify their evil actions (126). There are many instances in fairy tales where neglectful fathers and greedy kings are let off the hook, such as the king and father of Sleeping Beauty who is excused from his offense of not inviting the thirteenth fairy as there were only 12 golden plates for the fairies to dine from. The father figure in "Hansel and Gretel" is presented as a loving parent, but his failure to protect his children from his cruel wife and his contribution to abandoning his own children in a forest of wild beasts is never addressed. The tale "Rumpelstiltskin", while there is no villainess, presents at least three male characters pressuring

the innocent heroine: the father who's lie endangers his daughter, then the king who takes advantage of her and orders her to accomplish the impossible based on the father's boasting, and then Rumpelstiltskin himself, who uses the girl's desperation to trick her into an unfavourable agreement. In the end, the father is portrayed as a senseless peasant, the king is generous for marrying the daughter, and Rumpelstiltskin receives his punishment by being fooled by the new queen. Male villains tend to be forgotten and stand in the shadow of queens who request their beautiful stepdaughters' hearts for dinner, women who abandon their children to avoid starvation themselves, or stepmothers who only favour their biological children. Male violent actions in fairytales are likely presented as justified reactions to unmoral or criminal behaviour.

Religious beliefs add to the vilification of the defiant females, contributing to the impression of the villainess' immorality. Biblical influences on the perception of virtue and sin are clearly visible in several of Perrault's and the Grimms' tales, as well as certain parallels on morality. The traditional catholic model of the seven deadly sins "pride, envy, anger, lust, gluttony, greed and sloth" (Kaplan & Schwartz 2) are easily recognisable with the traits assigned to fairy tale villainesses. The heroine represents the antidote to the villainess' sins, by displaying traits such as humility, patience and diligence. Female characters are challenged to prove their worth by either overcoming minor characteristics of a "sinful" nature or to be consistent in demonstrating positive virtues. Even minor deviations get heroines into trouble, such as Snow White's inability to resist the temptation for feminine and beautifying objects, or Little Red Riding Hood's ignorance to her mother's instructions which leads to her ill-fated encounter with the predatory wolf. Talairach-Vielmas mentions that Victorian fairy tale writers were intrigued by the plot of heroines "fighting against their own bestial greed" (Talairach-Vielmas 20), teaching girls to suppress their instincts and to be obedient. However, as Kalman J. Kaplan and Matthew B. Schwartz claim, these supposedly "good traits" of the heroine are "equally imbalanced in the opposite direction, and no healthier than the sins that they are combating" (2). They refute notions such as self-love being contradictory to love of others, just as not being beautiful does not signify that one is ugly, nor should the lack of strength mean that one is inherently weak. These one-sided characteristics define and restrict female character development in traditional fairy tales, where there can only be one possible outcome. Additionally, Kaplan and Schwartz point to the detrimental effects of the deadly sins' contrasting attributes: "humility has often been equated with worthlessness and a sense of inferiority that elevates the other at the expense of the self" and "kindness or mercy can be erroneously interpreted as acceptance of a submissive role or status" (7). The heroine does

herself and her own health a disfavour by abstaining from voicing any discontent to her abuse or oppression, and in a sense oppresses herself by confining herself to being "the good girl". The same issue is present with the quality of patience, "for it may be synonymous with passivity and can involve accepting an unjust situation, thus diminishing the self" (8). Looking at these assertions, the life of the villainess suddenly appears to be the healthier option, and the classic heroine abiding by the patriarchal ideal seems to lead a pitiful existence. Not only do the actions of a woman who seems to be led by internalised misogyny hurt her self-worth, but the many constraints also take away her rights to her own bodily desires, as the incentive of chastity not only refers to "sexual modesty, but to a turning away and negating of the physical" (8), ignoring her needs of the body and self.

Feminists too disapprove of the ideology which renders the industrious, self-aware and resourceful woman as undesirable, and conclude that fairy tales are lacking "'positive' female characters" (Zipes, *The Oxford Companion* 20). Before the appropriation of tales such as "Little Red Riding Hood" by Charles Perrault and the Grimm brothers, the heroine proved that "she can fend for herself" (302), she tricks the wolf and escapes. In Perrault, she becomes a spoiled and naïve girl, who dawdles on her way to her grandmother, gets into bed with the wolf and is helplessly devoured. Her red cap is supposed to symbolise her "sinful nature" and the moral of the story indicates that "girls who invite strange men into their parlours deserve what they get" (302). The Grimms added a male saviour to the story, the hunter or "Jäger", in order to save the girl who has learned her lesson. Changes like these teach women that only the innocent and delicate female is deserving of rescue, and only they will be rewarded with a satisfactory mate. Cinderella does everything right according to this conservative understanding of the ideal woman: she is awarded magical helpers for being kind and hard-working and allowed to meet the prince because she sticks to the rules that tell her to leave the ball by midnight and then return her beautiful clothes. The moral of this tale is that good things come to those who wait, an unrealistic and dangerous conclusion for impressionable female readers. It teaches girls and women never to test the limits, or else punishment will befall them. Female characters who display unsatisfactory behaviour or appear immoral by engaging in acts of infidelity, curiosity, deceit or even sexual relations are vilified and their wrongdoings exaggerated.

This cultivation of appropriate female behaviour requires women to give up the right to their own bodies in order to achieve this happiness. Snow White's and Sleeping Beauty's fates of being trapped in crysalis, or doll-like state, can only be resolved through male rescue. The paradox is that it is exactly this passive and doll-like state which entices the male characters. The heroines' crysalis is at once both a curse and a blessing. Cinderella is one such heroine who

achieves the ascent from low to high status through marriage, through compliancy and patience, but few have bothered to elaborate on what they believe happens to her after marriage. Two poems by Miroslav Holub and Nicky Rice present entirely new and perhaps more realistic plots of the Cinderella story, showcasing the heroine's different choices and experiences in a patriarchal society. Holub's poem "Cinderella" tells the story of a girl who does not cheat her way out of a difficult situation, like the Grimms' heroine does by letting the pigeons do her chores so she can attend the prince's ball:

> Cinderella is sorting her peas:
> bad ones those, good ones these,
> yes and no, no and yes.
> No cheating. No untruthfulness. (Holub lines 1-4)

She is orderly and hard-working, she does her task meticulously without stopping, although she can hear "Coaches drive to the palace door" (line 15) and "From somewhere the sound of dancing" (line 5). She refuses to be distracted by the events taking place around her, trapped in her domestic bubble. There is no sign of protest, despite her pitiful life; She has "no prince that charms" (line 24) nor a mother to hold her, and it seems she puts all her hope in sorting her peas. "No helpful pigeons; she's alone. And yet the peas, they *will* be sorted out." (lines 39-40) Although the passive woman is applauded in the traditional fairy tales and promised a good life if she continues to behave, Holub's poem shows that there is no guarantee that "the good girl" will achieve her dreams.

Nicky Rice's poem "Cinderella" illustrates the possibly devastating reality of those dreams once they have been achieved, showing Cinderella's reality thirty years after marriage. He features a mature and experienced Cinderella, now trapped in an unhappy relationship with her annoying prince after years of trying to please him. She calls him a foot fetishist, for whom she forced herself to cram her feet "into those ridiculous slippers until they simply splintered under her" (Rice lines 8-10), resulting in her going to the chiropodist once a week for her "bunions". She resents the prince who fetishizes the girl in rags whom "they dragged […] in from the kitchen" (line 14). Additionally, it is now her who envies her stepsisters, because although they were unsuccessful in finding a mate, they have found freedom in being spinsters and only wore comfortable shoes. Rice presents a story with reversed principles than in the traditional "Cinderella", where freedom and comfort can be found outside patriarchal promises. This older Cinderella tells of a shattered patriarchal dream, and proves that not all which she

envisioned as wonderful when she was young turned out to be what she wanted later on. Zipes also mentions that while the stepsisters in "Cinderella" generally suffer a punishment of sorts at the end of the story, one version talks about the heroine who "in her new-found wealth and power, arranges advantageous marriages for them both" (Zipes, *The Oxford* Companion 97), instead of watching them lead miserable lives.

Conclusion.

Before the nineteenth century, folk and fairy tales were mostly circulated through female storytellers, "from old women of low status to little girls, from nurses to children" (Talairach-Vielmas 17). Laurence Talairach-Vielmas claims that male writers and collectors, such as Perrault and the Grimm brothers, colonised female territory by removing the female perspective and instilling "dominant (male) standards so as to educate and police children" (18). Their tales often present the very extremes of idealisation and vilification of female figures, discouraging women from expressing their true nature and desires and creating unhealthy role models which teach children from a young age that women need to be submissive and beautiful in order to deserve a happy ending. Any deviation from this promoted ideal diminishes the female character's chances at attracting a male suitor, which is presented as essential to her survival and success in society. Due to the culture and time at which some of the more traditional tales were published, economic, political and social power is typically under male possession, leading women to count on men's support and affection because they hope this will elevate their own power. While power can mean many things to different people, it is generally understood as the ability to assert physical or economical control over others, enabling its owners to position themselves in a place of free will and autonomy over their own lives. Fairy tales advertise the idea that beauty is the key to power, emphasising the importance of women cultivating their physical appearance and conforming to patriarchal ideals of female behaviour, personality and morality. This is clearly visible in most Snow White tales, which present the aging queen's distress over her fading beauty and her instinctive apprehension towards the arrival of the next female generation. In the end, the young princess is able to overthrow the queen via her male admirer, proving the effect of male protection.

However, women understand that power attained through physical appearance provides little certainty for the future, and so the quest for wealth, status, freedom and control of others never ceases. Additionally, female characters who put their trust in male protection grow dependent and vulnerable to their mate's inclinations and whims. Should a woman experience male provocation of some sort, such as infidelity or betrayal, she will find it difficult to retaliate given her subservient position. Her fears and anger is often displaced onto less powerful females, particularly potential love rivals. Instead of grouping together against patriarchal constraints, women let their jealousy and fears affect their female-female relationships, creating hostility even between mother and daughters. Many fairy tales touch on the sensitive subject of intergenerational conflict, concerning the more experienced and mature woman and her fear of

being replaced by the next generation of young women such as her own daughter. It is not an unwarranted fear: older women are typically either irrelevant for the tale or become demoted to side characters such as fairy godmothers or vilified as witches or evil stepmothers.

Anne Sexton's *Transformations* showcases these unequal representations of women based on their appearance and age, describing the young heroine Snow White as a fair and innocent virgin, while the aggressive thirteenth fairy in "Briar Rose" has "fingers long and thin as straws, her eyes burnt by cigarettes, her uterus an empty teacup" (Sexton 108). It has been the author's intent to expose the unrealistic expectations female fairy tale characters are obliged to follow, and at the same time highlight the parts in for example the Grimms' tales which reinforce female oppression. Her version of Sleeping Beauty removes any romanticised notions about the heroine's slumber and miraculous awakening thanks to the brave prince's kiss, instead pointing out the young girl's vulnerability and defencelessness in the face of male dominance. Angela Carter has a different approach to her fairy tale adaptations, as she features the classic villainess and brings attention to her true motive for harming or even killing the innocent and beautiful girl. While envy and jealousy over physical appearance are plausible results of a character's vanity and narcissistic desire to become or remain the most beautiful among women, the contemporary tale of "The Snow Child" focuses on the emotion of jealousy and the fear of male abandonment. As seen by the various examples of fairy tales in this thesis, the beautiful heroine is successful not because she is particularly wealthy or in a high social position, but because she possesses the ideal physical appearance which attracts men who are, wealthy and of high status. Although many of the heroines are born rather privileged, being king's daughters for example, their birth status does not suffice to offer them enough security. Rather, their close proximity to other royal characters puts them at risk of drawing the attention of potential enemies.

While fairy tales present fears and scenarios that are possible among real-life women outside the fairy tale plot, Jeana Jorgensen clarifies that the fictitious stories are only abstractions of real human behaviour and relationships. Traditional fairy tales have created unnatural female characters who are either unreasonably evil and violent, or extremely good and obedient. Typically, if a person is confronted with strong criticism or "derogatory comments based on her/his task performance" (Marcus-Newhall et al. 672), at least some form of defiance or retaliation should be provoked. This is never the case with the passive and obedient heroines such as Cinderella or Snow White, who never rebel, never stand up against their abusers or try to actively change their miserable lives until they are found by princes or kings. But as Kaplan and Schwartz have argued, traits of passivity, patience and kindness may

in reality do more harm than good, considering that the inability or reluctance to stand up for oneself and demand respect further motivates enemies to harass and abuse, and diminishes the victim's self-worth. By subjecting oneself to restrictive idealisations, such as Marie-Louise von Franz's anima woman does, female characters are effectively in danger of self-harm in their quest to satisfy the male standard. While traditional fairy tales do offer the helpless girl a happy ending, she in turn must not threaten the idealised definitions of masculinity and femininity by appearing too demanding and pro-active, or else she will lose any power gained through the benevolence of her male patrons.

Each example of both traditional and contemporary fairy tales in this dissertation illustrates that every narrator's own cultural, social and personal ideology is reflected in their work. The Grimm brothers for instance sought to create stories which conformed to their own preferences on female characters' behaviours, especially in relation to modesty and docility, whilst narrators such as Neil Gaiman challenge the stereotype of the wicked stepmother and the innocent stepchild. He also draws attention to the fact that both men and women have bodily needs and desires, but that female sexuality is suppressed and made inappropriate. To succeed in patriarchal systems, women are seen to adopt sexist and misogynist behaviours, suppressing other women in order to establish superiority and reinforcing harmful beauty ideals for women. Allan D. Cooper explains that "Beauty ideals operate ideologically when they are internalized, rationalized, and socially legitimized", leading women to adopt behaviours because they are "oblivious to the fundamental prescription inherent in these causal ideologies" (Cooper 3).

It is unlikely that they are aware that internalised misogyny further solidifies male supremacy and domination over women, effectively countering any improvement to her own gender's rights and social position. Fairy tales of any origin or ideology may lead us to a better understanding of the underlying causes of female-female aggression, why some characters seem so obsessed with their physical appearance and express extreme feelings of jealousy towards other women, and why some characters such as Cinderella's ugly stepsisters were willing to physically harm themselves by cutting off parts of their body, just so they could fit the heroine's tiny glass slipper.

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Appendix: Relevance for teaching.

Literature plays a large role in our acquisition of knowledge and cultural understanding, but we must also understand that no history book, no lifestyle guides and certainly no religious scriptures are able to present us with the entire truth, or show a neutral and objective perspective. According to the values of the Norwegian curriculum on critical thinking and ethical awareness, pupils should be taught to approach and reflect on different sources and theories with an open mind. This involves the careful examination of ideas and opinions presented as facts by using their own experiences, knowledge and understanding of the world. I believe that the topic of this master's thesis presents an optimal opportunity for people of any age to reconsider and question what they know of fairy tales and investigate how these stories affect us personally. Because folk and fairy tales are typically endorsed as children's literature, and the fact that children and adolescents are so impressionable, I believe that this genre is particularly valuable in the classroom.

From what I have gathered through the process of writing about fairy tales and studying the behaviour of female characters, is that not everybody is aware that the popular collections by Perrault and the Grimm brothers have been appropriated over many decades in order to fit dominating social and cultural criteria. The same seems to be true for the underlying patriarchal and religious ideologies which are embedded in Western fairy tales. Children grow up with stories that teach girls and boys that women are not supposed to show aggressive tendencies, that the topic of sex and sexuality is improper, and that the heroine needs her Prince Charming to save the day, instead of taking control over her own happiness. At the same time, male characters are reduced to their social status and physical strength and wealth, which is just as unhealthy. The strong emphasis on physical appearance is yet another topic which is especially relevant in today's globalised world, where pupils are bombarded with beauty expectations and unhealthy role models everywhere. I believe that the values of democracy and equality can be promoted by addressing issues of idealisation and stigmatisation of both male and female characters in fairy tales. Pupils need to understand that the messages of morality and righteousness carried by a story can be biased and at times even wrong, even if it is found in their school's history book.