

*The Perilous Realm of Faërie:*  
*an Analysis of Constructions of Gender and Society*  
*in selected Fairy Tales*



by

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*The queene thanketh the kyng with al hir myght,  
And after this thus spak she to the knyght,  
Whan that she saugh hir tyme, upon a day:  
“Thou standest yet,” quod she, “in swich array  
That of thy lyf yet hastow no suretee.  
I grant thee lyf, if thou kanst tellen me  
What thyng is it that wommen moost desiren. . . .”*

*✧ Geoffrey Chaucer ✧  
✧ The Canterbury Tales ✧  
✧ The Wife of Bath's Tale ✧  
✧ Lines 899-905 ✧*

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## *Introduction*

The question posed within the extract from “The Wife of Bath’s Tale” is still valid. The knight sets out to find the answer to this question and meets with various possible answers, but nothing that he feels will save his life:

Somme syde wommen loven best richesse,  
Somme syde honour, somme syde jolynesse,  
Somme riche array, somme syden lust abedde,  
And oftetyme to be wydwe and wedde.  
Somme syde that oure hertes been most esed  
Whan that we been yflatered and yplesed.  
He gooth ful ny the sothe, I wol nat lye.  
A man shal wyne us best with flatterye,  
And with attendance and with bisynesse

(Chaucer, 1988: 177)

Only the old woman whom he meets before his time limit elapses gives him the answer the queen is searching for: in a word, women desire “maistrie”. Thus, the answer to this question lies with women. In a sense, this dissertation also sets out to find an answer to this question, by investigating female characters within fairy tales.

Setting out on a quest through fairy tales may seem rash and unwise. As Tolkien (1980: 2) states: “Faërie is a perilous land, and in it are pitfalls for the unwary and dungeons for the overbold”. Fairy tales are something people usually associate with childhood,

because of childhood memories, and they are inclined to push such tales aside when they grow older since they feel that fairy tales do not contain relevant subject matter for “grown-up” lives. They may wander through the fairy realm again when they have children of their own. Here they fall into one of the “pitfalls” and “dungeons”, for fairy tales in fact offer subject matter that instructs<sup>1</sup> (no matter the age of the audience/reader) and sometimes challenges. Some may find the tales too horrifying and graphic, and like to keep them away from their children. This is another of the traps of Faërie. These tales may be graphic, but they teach clear lessons. Furthermore, it should be remembered that they were originally intended for adult audiences, and that the concept of “childhood” as we understand it today did not exist when these tales were originally circulated.

The emphasis in this dissertation is not on the intended audience of fairy tales, but on the gendered perspectives found within these tales. Thus, this dissertation’s methodology is rooted within feminist criticism. I will attempt to analyse the ways in which fairy tales have been shaped by political and social forces and how they provide gendered prescriptions for their audience. The focus on and glorification of feminine beauty in fairy tales may represent a way in which gender inequality (objectification, devaluation and subordination) is reproduced via cultural products. Thus, this study will use fairy tales to investigate societal values such as gender and class. It will pay special

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<sup>1</sup> These lessons may include societal norms, beliefs and/or morals.

attention to the way in which the ideal of feminine beauty – “the socially constructed notion that physical attractiveness is one of woman’s most important assets, and something all women should strive to achieve and maintain” (Baker-Sperry *et al.*, 2003: 711) – relates to power, economic privilege, class, and virtue, and how these aspects interact with one another. This goes hand-in-hand with how women were generally treated and how they reacted to their circumstances. A secondary objective of this study is to examine belief and social arrangements by investigating the way in which fairy tales structure society as well as notions of what is moral and ethical. An example of this may be found in the “Bluebeard” tale: Bluebeard is a captor, not only a physical captor but also an innate predator. “Bluebeard represents a deeply reclusive complex” (Pinkola Estés, 1998: 44) which lurks on the periphery of all human life, waiting for an opportunity to oppose and dominate human nature. In the tale Bluebeard marries the youngest of the sisters since she is naive and easily manipulated. She nevertheless becomes curious about her husband and discovers the cellar containing the remains of all his previous victims (the other curious wives he has murdered). This empowers her to take action against Bluebeard (keeping him at bay while she waits for her brothers to help her) and thus to free herself from imposed restrictions. Thus, societal ethics are, in a way, implicit in both the creation and the interpretation of fairy tales throughout the ages.

The researcher faces certain obstacles: the first is the sheer number of fairy tales in existence. Fairy tales have been told for thousands of years in many cultures, thus the



researcher is confronted with a vast corpus of material. A related problem is that many other types of tales with some of the same characteristics may also be regarded as fairy tales. The *Oxford Dictionary* (2006: 527) provides the following definition for fairy tales: “a story about magic or fairies, usually for children”. According to this definition tales concerning travellers witnessing wonders and marvels (such as *Gulliver’s Travels*), tales using the machinery of the dream to explain away the incredible (Lewis Carroll’s “Alice” stories, *The Wizard of Oz*, and others), and beast fables should also be considered fairy tales. Of these, the beast fables seem to be most similar to fairy tales since beasts and other creatures often talk like human beings in fairy tales. But, as Tolkien (1980: 6) avers, “[I]n stories in which no human being is concerned, or in which the animals are the heroes and heroines, and men and women, if they appear, are mere adjuncts; and above all those in which the animal form is only a mask upon a human face, a device of the satirist or the preacher, in these we have beast fable not fairy story”. Thus, the researcher must first clearly and credibly delimit the boundaries of the fairy tale for the purpose of this study. The final research problem lies in the fact that most Western fairy tales are derived from the geographical and linguistic areas now known as Germany, France, and Scandinavia, while I have read and studied them primarily in English translation. This, however, offers the opportunity to compare key aspects of French, German, or Italian fairy tales in the original language with the English translation. The differences revealed may well be unique to the English translation and, therefore, a reflection of English society and its views (particularly on gender) at the time of the translation.

This dissertation will progress from the roots of the methodology through the vast forest of research already completed in this field, paying special attention to the seminal works of Vladimir Propp, Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson, and Clarissa Pinkola Estés. During the inception of folkloristic research investigators were bent on finding sources and analogues for fairy tales (to track down their origins), but this is not the purpose of this dissertation, and for that reason it will not be discussed in-depth in the literature review chapter. Before progressing to the analyses of the tales the term fairy tale must be clearly defined since it can easily be confused with myths, legends and (beast) fables. These tales all share some similarities, forming part of the same family tree, but it is their differences that are important within the context of this dissertation. Turning to the analysis of fairy tales, the researcher will first investigate the differences between diverse adaptations of a single tale. “Cinderella” lends itself best to this comparison, since the tale has sprouted many diverging branches across the world. The social and gendered aspects of fairy tales will be investigated in the final chapter, with the intention of illustrating how fairy tales can affect their readers, especially female readers. Fairy tales reflect a predominantly patriarchal society, and thus they depict female characters who behave in accordance with their subservient position in society. This chapter offers a sense of hope flowering at the tips of the dark, patriarchal branches of the tales analysed. It also investigates the reflection of society’s mores in female characters; how qualities such as beauty are represented as part of the dynamic of virtue, and how

female characters are used to teach female readers to conform . . . but also, in some cases, how to resist and attain freedom and autonomy.

## *Chapter 1: The Roots of it All*

The emphasis in this dissertation is on reading and analysing fairy tales from a gendered<sup>2</sup> perspective. Thus, this study will focus on how fairy tales represent male and female characters. We are all aware of some degree of cultural stereotyping concerning gender. Within the Western tradition one finds that colours are designated to signify the difference between children: pink for girls and blue for boys. These colours have become synonymous with the sex of the child; the colours have taken on the stereotypical characteristics of boys and girls. The colour pink suggests softness, gentility and fragility while blue implies that boys are robust and strong. The characteristics of these colours are imaginative ideas that are included in a range of social ideas about gender. Further examples may include giving boys bigger portions of food than girls, or simply giving boys and girls different types of toys to play with. Gender can also be read in sexual stereotypes, for instance, that men are better drivers than women; one may also find a gendered division of labour, where high-status jobs are usually taken up by men.<sup>3</sup> So, gender issues can be found in sexual stereotypes as well as in power relations between groups and individuals. When studying how these types of phenomena are found in fairy tales, one has to take into account the symbolic

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<sup>2</sup> “Gender refers to ways of seeing and representing people and situations based on sex differences. By contrast, ‘sex’ is a biological category: male or female. The term ‘sexuality’ refers to the realm of sexual experience and desire – sometimes it refers to a person’s sexual orientation (as heterosexual, bisexual or homosexual). ‘Gender’ is a social or cultural category, influenced by stereotypes about ‘female’ and ‘male’ behavior that exist in our attitudes and beliefs. Such beliefs are often said to be ‘culturally produced’ or ‘constructed’.” (Goodman, 1996: vii).

<sup>3</sup> These are general stereotypes about men and women found in Western societies the world over. Their validity has not been verified.

ideas attached to sex differences (male and female). If one reads with a focus on identifying gender assumptions and stereotypes within the text one will learn how a society is viewed as well as how that society forms literature. This study's interests lie in the gender dynamics to be gleaned from the study of fairy tales in context. It will attempt to analyse the ways in which fairy tales have been shaped by political and social forces and how they provide gendered prescriptions for children. The focus on and glorification of feminine beauty in fairy tales may represent a way in which gender inequality (objectification, devaluation and subordination) is reproduced via cultural products. A secondary objective of this study is to examine belief and social arrangements. Therefore the study will also investigate the way in which fairy tales structure the society we live in as well as what we believe to be moral and ethical. To achieve these objectives the study will make use of qualitative methods<sup>4</sup> throughout.

Before progressing further, it is necessary to draw a distinction between feminism and the gendered approach that will be used in this study. Feminism is a political stance, whose adherents its members recognise the historical, cultural, and economic subordination of women, and a resolve to obtain equality for women. Feminist thought

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<sup>4</sup> When this study was first embarked upon, it was decided to make use of quantitative methods as well; basing the model of the study on Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz (2003). However, as the study progressed it became apparent that this approach is not feasible when using a smaller research sample. This method relies on a computer programme, WordSmith Tools, which includes features such as WordList, KeyWords, and Concord. The WordList function allows a researcher to compile a list of the most frequently used words, while the KeyWords function searches for specific words in the text. The Concord function allows a researcher to quickly access word clusters. The identification of these clusters would be particularly useful; since it would enable the researcher to establish the context in which certain words that may carry ideological weight (for example, regarding the ideal of feminine beauty) were used.

has developed since the Suffrage Era, when women rallied for their right to vote. The battle for the vote was fought in all types of public arenas – in the theatre, on political platforms and in the streets. In North America, the Representation of the People Act was passed in 1918, granting the vote to women over the age of 30 who owned houses. In 1928, this was extended to all women over 21 (Phillips, 2004). The Suffragists are often referred to as first-wave feminism (although the term was only coined after the term second-wave feminism had been used to describe a newer feminist movement beginning in the 1960s, the “women’s movement”). The feminist activist and author Carol Hanisch coined the slogan “the Personal is Political”, which became synonymous with the second wave (Hanisch: 2006). Second-wave feminists saw women's cultural and political inequalities as inextricably linked and encouraged women to understand aspects of their personal lives as deeply politicised and as reflecting sexist power structures. Third-wave feminism began in the early 1990s, arising as a response to some of the backlash against second-wave movements and initiatives. The overwhelming feeling in this new wave of feminism was that their predecessors had placed too much emphasis on the experience of white, upper-middle class women, disregarding other minority groups and paying almost no attention to race-related issues or to how they influence and marginalise black and coloured women. Within third-wave feminism one also finds the debate on gender roles where some hold that such roles are the result of social conditioning<sup>5</sup> while others claim that there are important differences between men and women, and that they therefore fulfil different roles.

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<sup>5</sup> Social conditioning refers to the process of inheriting traditions, morals, beliefs and points of view from

The institution of gender relies heavily on gender roles and images. Lorber (1994, 30-1) refers to this occurrence as “the cultural representations of gender and embodiment of gender in symbolic language and artistic productions that reproduce and legitimate gender statuses”. Fairy tales emphasise such things as the passivity and beauty of female characters, and these gendered scripts serve and support the dominant gender systems in societies. Beauty, which is represented as an ideal state of being in fairy tales, is a socially constructed notion indicating that the physical appearance of women is their most important quality, and that they should therefore strive to achieve it. The ideal of feminine beauty is “viewed largely as an oppressive, patriarchal practice that objectifies, devalues, and subordinates women” (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003: 711); however, some women willingly strive towards obtaining beauty since this is seen as a way for women to empower themselves. Thus, one finds a paradoxical view that the ideal of feminine beauty both empowers and oppresses women. In fairy tales women who strive towards becoming or are naturally beautiful (the likes of Sleeping Beauty and Cinderella) within a patriarchal system are often more dependent on men’s resources and actions than an unattractive woman like a hag or a witch. Studying the significance of beauty in fairy tales can provide an insight into the dynamics that exist between power, culture and gender; and their significance (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003: 711 – 712). Fox (1977) states that the ideal of feminine beauty can be seen as a

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previous generations. Thus an individual is taught to follow certain social patterns if he/she wants to be accepted by society, and in return teaches these constructs to new generations.

normative means used to restrict women's lives through the internalisation of values and norms, thus creating a form of social control. In this way women adopt certain behaviours: "Because women are aware that beauty counts heavily with men ... they therefore work hard to achieve it." (Freedman, 1986: 11). The social importance of this ideal lies in its ability to sustain and reinforce gender inequality, because complying with it guarantees beautiful women safe passage through the world, whereas those who do not comply are somehow punished for their failure. According to Schudson (1989), cultural products embody societal norms and values, thus providing a means to observe them. Children's literature is especially useful for studying value constructs since "the intended clarity and moral certainty with which adults provide children with tales of their world offer fortuitous opportunity to examine social relations and belief systems" (Pescosolido *et al*, 1997: 444).

In the sphere of literature feminist thought has been very influential. It has pointed out the silence of women in older literature, as well as the silence of women in general, inspiring women to write their own literature, to give voice to their point of view. Women writers appeared to step into this void and to give voice to the injustices they felt were being or had been committed against other women. This group of women includes noteworthy authors such as Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Alice Walker, Jamaica Kincaid and Toni Morrison. Feminist authors incorporate their own political agendas in their writings. Thus there is a distinction between literature that can be read and interpreted as feminist texts (wherein the author's political intentions are easily found),



and literature that may have a feminist impact, but was not written with feminism in mind. This brings one to feminist literary criticism, which is “an academic approach to the study of literature which applies feminist thought to the analysis of [any] literary text and the contexts of their production and reception” (Goodman, 1996: xi). This definition is closely related to my project in this dissertation; the key difference is that this study will not only focus on the status of women in fairy tales, but also on the status of men. However, it must be stated that the focus will be specifically placed on female characters, while the examination of lesser male characters (in tales like “The Juniper Tree”) will be of secondary concern. Thus, this study is interested in the gender dynamics of the texts, the state of gender relations among various characters in the texts, and the patriarchal attitudes limiting (particularly female) characters to a certain sphere of existence. Thus, the norm of being accepted – along with other societal norms – plays an important role.

Gender can be seen as a socially constructed pattern, which influences our<sup>6</sup> views on life. When reading the texts one does so as a gendered individual, subconsciously referring back to stereotypes about men and women, and the values assigned to them. These stereotypes about gender are usually misplaced since stereotypes in general are very simplistic in nature and do not allow for multi-faceted characters. The preconception a reader may have about gender will influence his or her perception and

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<sup>6</sup> This ‘our’ is meant to be all-inclusive. It includes all people from all walks of life. In the context of the tales it is also meant to include the characters and how socially constructed patterns influence their lives.

interpretation of texts. What is important here is that any text, even one as accessible as a fairy tale, can take on a variety of different meanings depending on the lens<sup>7</sup> through which it is studied. All forms of literature – as well as other forms of cultural representation such as the media and the visual arts – frequently depict gender relations. Literary texts can reinforce certain gender stereotypes, or they can break free of these to create new representations of gender. This, however, does not necessarily mean that the newly created representation will offer a more positive point of view on that specific gender group. The predominant gender stereotype concerning women in the early nineteenth century is found in the romantic novels of that era. The social needs of these women involved behaving as genteelly as possible, in order that they might catch the eye of a suitor who would marry them and take care of them, since women were discouraged from working and earning their own living.

[T]he Women's Liberation Movement has helped us all to 'raise consciousness' about the limitations of such ways of seeing gender ... so too has the growth of feminist literary criticism helped us to study gender as it is represented in literature and other art forms. (Goodman, 1996: 2)

Many of the same structures that suppress or "socialise" women are prevalent in fairy tales. Thus, feminist critique lends itself towards "such matters as conditioning and socialisation, and the influence of images and representations of femininity in literature

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<sup>7</sup> The knowledge which the reader or interpreter brings to the text will be individual, thus different patterns will emerge when various issues are at the forefront of the reader's or the interpreter's mind.

and culture” (Barry, 1995: 133). A feminist approach can even be extended towards beast fables<sup>8</sup> since the characters in such tales are often imbued with gendered characteristics.

In conclusion, this dissertation will investigate the representation of men and women in fairy tales, expressly focusing on whether these characters are represented in ways that make them appear inferior or superior. If a predominant power relation suppresses one of these groups, the researcher will investigate that hierarchy to establish how the characters are marginalised and how that may influence the readers. This dissertation will also focus on the glorification of feminine beauty in fairy tales. Beauty will be investigated in relation to the following aspects: goodness/morality; industriousness, class, economic privilege, and danger. The beliefs and social arrangements of fairy tale societies will also be examined to establish the relationships and power dynamics between society and gender.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> In 1989 the Forliz study of children's literature was conducted using children's books from the period 1900 – 1984 to investigate the gendering of non-human characters. The findings of this study may be perused in Grauerholz, E. & Pescosolido, B. 1989. 'Gender representation in children's literature.' *Gender and Society*. pp. 113-15.

<sup>9</sup> The researcher suggests that a future study should be conducted to establish the relationship between culture and gender by investigating selected fairy tales from different cultures to ascertain whether women and men are depicted differently in contexts which appear similar.

## *Chapter 2: The Forest of Lore*

Fairy tales reach back into a dateless time and speak with serene assurance of the wishes and fears of ancient societies since such tales are considered to be a sub-genre of folktales. Comparative folklorists, after painstaking research, have managed to uncover characters, motifs, and events that appear in many folktales across the Eurasian continent. Each society gave these stories unique twists and emphases to suit its needs, as well as creating unique tales. Sale states: "The stories we know derive from a relatively late period just before they began to be written down and collected, but are descendants of versions that go back into the mists of time, through centuries we can only sum up with the term 'oral tradition'." (1979: 24). Thus, the following question arises: what is the difference between folktales (including fairy tales) and other literature? This chapter will investigate this question. It is also imperative to investigate established theories and models concerning the field of fairy tale research. Thus, this chapter will provide an overview of three important approaches: the Aarne-Thompson (-Uther) model, Vladimir Propp's Morphology, and Clarissa Pinkola Estés's Jungian analysis.

Folklore studies, like any other branch of study, can be seen as an ideological discipline. Its methods and aims are determined by and reflect the perceptions of a certain period. When a point of view disappears or becomes outdated, the scholarly approach that goes with it disappears too. Early in the twentieth century the German

folklorist Johan Meier proposed the following premises and principles for folklore studies in his book *Deutsche Volkskunde* (1926):

- The culture of only one stratum of the population is studied, namely, that of the peasantry;
- the subject of scholarship is both material and spiritual culture;
- the subject of scholarship is the peasantry of only one nation, and in most cases it is the researcher's nation.

Most of these premises no longer hold sway today. A single folktale cannot be said to be purely representative of one nation, since these tales were part of the oral tradition. They were told and retold by a vast variety of people who changed some of the details or the ending of the tale to suit their specific needs. It would be impossible to claim that all of the story tellers who could have changed the tales might have been of the same nationality, since it has already been shown that tales found all across Europe and Asia share central events and characters. It is also unlikely that only one section of the *populus* (the peasantry) could be represented by these tales. At the end of the seventeenth century fairy tales were in vogue in the French courts and the tellers "were given to making the tales wittier, more aristocratic, and sometimes more heart-piercing than they found them, and they often combined, within one story, elements they derived from their native oral tradition with others that had been part of a tradition of written tales almost as old" (Sale, 1979: 25). Thus the tales cannot have been representative of a single stratum of any culture because they have changed hands between the upper and

lower classes numerous times. And since they cannot be confined to a single culture either – for example, the tale of Bluebeard is considered to be of German descent, but was retold by Charles Perrault, a Frenchman – one cannot claim that they are representative of a certain culture's material and spiritual status. Folklore is an international phenomenon, and cannot be confined to a single nation, culture, or class.

## **Folklore and Literature**

Folklore is the product of the oral tradition that has died out almost completely in Western cultures. The Western tradition of storytelling is now rooted in the written word. It must be understood that literature as we know it today evolved from the oral tradition; literature was born from folklore. But they are not the same: literature is the product of another form of consciousness. The author of literature is representative of his or her environment and people, and offers his or her own unique points of view, while folktales have no authors and cannot be said to be representative even of a single generation. However, this does not mean that literature's connection with the verbal arts has been completely severed. According to Propp (1984, 5-6) a close connection still exists between folklore and literature:

Literature and folklore overlap partially in their poetic genres. There are genres specific to literature (for example, the novel) and to folklore (for example, the charm), but both folklore and literature can be classified by genres, and this is a

fact of poetics.<sup>10</sup> Hence there is a certain similarity in some of their tasks and methods.

However, one does find key differences between these two genres. Folklore uses specific devices such as parallelisms and repetitions, and employs the usual devices of poetic language such as metaphors and similes in ways different from those of literature. Folklore and literature may thus share some characteristics, but other aspects set them apart. One of the most important differences between the two comes down to authorship. Literary works always have a specific author (even if his/her identity may now be unknown), while folklore never has a specific author since the tales have been passed on via so many tellers who changed minor aspects of the tales as they saw fit. If a literary historian is interested in the history of a certain piece of work he or she need only look up the author and what is known about the author's life and circumstances to see how these influenced the novel, poem or play. A folklorist, on the other hand, can only discover the conditions that brought forth certain aspects of the plot through broad comparative studies and looking for conditions that could have influenced the changes in the history of a broad region. It is also helpful to look at tales that reveal some similarity in plot, development or characters, since universal similarities help to narrow down the vast scope with which one must begin. According to Propp (1984: 7) "[s]imilarity indicates a regular process; the similarity of works of folklore is a particular

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<sup>10</sup> This term has two closely related meanings. It denotes (1) an aesthetic theory in literary criticism about the essence of Poetry or (2) rules prescribing the proper methods, content, style, or diction of poetry. The term poetics may also refer to theories about literature in general, not just poetry.

case of the historical law by which identical forms of production in material culture give rise to identical or similar social institutions, to similar tools, and, in ideology, to the similarity of forms and categories of thought, religion, rituals, languages, and folklore”.

The distinction between the genres of folklore and literature is not only confined to their origins; the forms they take on should also be taken into consideration. It is general knowledge that literature is transmitted through the written word while folklore is dependent on oral traditions. This distinction does not refer only to the technical aspect of these genres; it also captures the different functions of literature and folklore. A literary work, once it has been fully conceptualised and published, cannot change. In another author’s hands it becomes another work – perhaps updated to suit the opinions of a new age – while the reader cannot change its elements or outcome – reward a hero, punish a villain, or update – since the medium does not allow for this. Folklore is dependent on a teller rather than an author. The teller’s work is not created by him or her personally; the tale told is something heard from someone else. The teller cannot be likened to a poet reciting his own work, or to someone reciting the work of others, because he or she does not repeat the tale word for word as in the case of poets or play actors. The tellers of folktales introduce changes to the tales, even if these changes appear insignificant or may be unconscious. They are not made by accident; aspects of a tale that might be seen as out of date are replaced by aspects that reflect currently-accepted attitudes, norms and ideologies. Folktales are constantly in flux while literature offers stability. The changeability of the folktale is one of its most important characteristics (Propp, 1984: 7-9).



It is obviously well-nigh impossible to unearth the roots of folktales because of the complexities involved in discerning where each tale came from and who told it first. New formations occur in history as the people telling the tales develop. Thus, one can say that folktales are inherited from previous generations, and when these tales (now the property of a new generation) come into conflict with the social system that created them, they may change. They undergo a metamorphosis in which the new generation transforms the images of the old system into more accepted images or gives them a negative colouring (making the images hostile). But sometimes the old tales are preserved without any noticeable changes, and at other times the old and the new images and ideologies can create a hybrid formation – for example, the dragon is a hybrid of a snake, a bird, and various other animals. Fusion does not only occur in the imagery of the tales; new plots and characters can also arise. This formation is not isolated or accidental; it is the nature of folklore. “Folklore formations arise not as a direct reflection of life (this is a comparatively rare case), but out of the clash of two ages or of two systems and their ideologies” (Propp, 1984: 11). The changes that folklore undergoes are gradual and old forms can be preserved for a long period under new social structures and ideologies before any changes are made to them.

Even though folklore is not a direct reflection of life, this does not mean that it is void of all traces of reality. The animals (cats, dogs, foxes, doves and so on) and the human beings (wealthy landowners, priests, farmhands, step-mothers, soldiers, and kings) that are present in folktales are taken from the immediate environment. Folktales also reflect

the morals and systems of social relations (such as feudalism) in which the tellers lived. But the folktale does not consist entirely of elements of reality. It is fiction. It never passes itself off as reality. Folktales offer enjoyment through their unusual elements<sup>11</sup> – such as dragons or hags – an aspect which makes their lack of correspondence with reality even more delightful. The unusual does also occur in literature; however, when unusual elements (such as ghosts) are present their existence is depicted as something possible. In folktales the unusual acquires characteristics and powers that are impossible in life. Even in folktales about ordinary people – without any supernatural creatures to violate the laws of nature – unusual elements are still present in the form of series of improbable events that could not occur in reality (Propp, 1984: 16-19).

In folklore the narrative is not based on normal characters or normal actions in a normal situation; just the opposite: folktales choose things strikingly unusual . . .

One of the characteristics of the folktale is that events that did not occur and could never have occurred are recounted with certain intonations and gestures as though they did actually take place, although neither the teller nor the listener believes the tales. (Propp, 1984: 19-20)

The discrepancy between what happens in a folktale and what would have happened in real life determines the humour of the tale. A tale concerning evil or bad deeds<sup>12</sup> may be

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<sup>11</sup> Few things are ever fully explained in the way one would expect from a novel or another piece of realistic literature.

<sup>12</sup> These tales are not necessarily about villainous characters; rather, they involve cheating wives, dubious priests, or clever thieves.

humorous instead of moralising, simply because it is funny that everybody else in the tale is too inept to catch the perpetrators. “When the hero of the tale is a ‘fool’, this means not only that he is foolish, but also that he (and consequently the narrative) is not bound by the listener’s norms of conduct and behavior” (Propp, 1984: 26). Wonder tales<sup>13</sup> and animal tales<sup>14</sup> rely on good-natured humour which stems from the feeling that everything that has transpired in the tale is simply that – part of a tale, not reality. In spite of the folktale’s distortion of reality, however, it is still an ancestor of written realistic literature. During the European Renaissance, when secular narrative prose appeared, it drew its plots from folktales. The key differences between the two are that the prose transferred the action of the tales to a definite time and place, with distinct characters. Thus, the new genre of prose moved the stories from the realm of folklore into that of literature – the actions and the characters might be unusual, but such events could indeed happen in reality and such characters could really exist. Another distinction between folklore and literature is that folklore is indifferent to the landscape<sup>15</sup> in which the action takes place, as well as to the appearance of the characters,<sup>16</sup> while literature pays considerable attention to the setting and to characters and how they develop. Propp (1984: 22) states that “[i]n folklore the story is told only for the sake of

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<sup>13</sup> Wonder tales (so termed in the original translation) are a sub-genre of folktales involving magical, fantastic or wonderful episodes, characters, events, or symbols. These tales inspire wonder and astonishment in their audience and therefore cannot easily be separated from fairy tales. For more information regarding the wonder tale, see chapter three.

<sup>14</sup> Animal tales will be discussed in chapter three.

<sup>15</sup> The narrator mentions where the story takes place (a forest or town), but specific details about the setting are not normally given.

<sup>16</sup> On rare occasions the characters’ appearances are described, but in general we do not know what they look like in any real sense, only that they are beautiful, handsome, ugly or monstrous.

the events". The result of this dynamic is that only characters that figure in the development of the action will appear in the folktale. Folktales do not introduce characters to give the audience a feeling for the milieu. Every character is assigned a role in the narrative; all will have a hand in the development of the plot. For this reason folktales tend to have a single protagonist, on whom all the action centres – other characters will either oppose or help him or her; they have no other function. In literature the reverse is almost always true. Novels may have more than one protagonist, and in novels where only one protagonist is present the other characters do not only exist to help or oppose that central character (Propp, 1984: 19-22). The space in which folklore operates also presents certain peculiarities. Folklore focuses only on the space in which the action takes place. There are never two spaces in which actions occur simultaneously, since the protagonist cannot be in two places at the same time. The folktale is not a complex composition. "Action is performed in accordance with the movement of the hero, and what lies outside this movement lies outside the narrative" (Propp, 1984: 22). In the wonder tale, however, one does find more than one protagonist acting in more than one locale. But they do not act simultaneously; while one hero is active the other is inactive (for example, asleep). Like space, time in folklore cannot permit interruptions. Pauses do not exist. Once the action has begun it will rapidly develop to its conclusion. No general concept of time<sup>17</sup> exists in folklore; time is always relative to the action of the tale.

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<sup>17</sup> The passage of time is not measured in hours, days, weeks or years, but in how long it takes the protagonist to complete the action.

Nor do folktales exhibit any logical motivation for the action that takes place. The action itself, and not the reason for that action, is the important factor. Logical motivations for the actions of characters are introduced later in literary history, with the development of literature, where it is imperative that the actions of the characters are well motivated. Because of this the characters in literature are unique individuals that typify their social standing and beliefs – in short, they represent the period in which the action takes place while still remaining individual characters. They have their own names, unique personalities, and specific ambitions, while folktale characters are broad types which can be found in numerous tales. Folktale characters can be transferred from one tale to another while literary characters belong to a specific plot and for that reason cannot be transferred to other works. Thus, one finds that there are some similarities between folktales and literature, since literature evolved from folklore, but that the dissimilarities are more striking. This will prove a useful distinction in the latter chapters of this dissertation when the fairy tales are subjected to close scrutiny.

## **Classifying folktales**

Since folktales are very diverse – and it is impossible to study everything at once – it would be wise to classify them, narrowing the field of study down to a manageable size.<sup>18</sup> The most common division of folktales involves three categories: fantastic tales (wonder tales), animal tales (beast fables) and tales of everyday life. This system is

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<sup>18</sup> Chapter Three: A Tree of Tales will investigate the classifications of the fairy tales that will be investigated in this study.

essentially correct, but it does not allow for tales that could easily belong in more than one category.<sup>19</sup> Wundt, in *The Psychology of Peoples* (in Propp, 1968: 6), proposes the following divisions:

- Mythological tale-fable (*mythologische fabelmärchen*);
- Pure fairy tales (*reine zaubermärchen*);
- Biological tales and fables (*biologische märchen, fabeln*);
- Pure animal fables (*reine tierfabeln*);
- Genealogical tales (*abstammungsmärchen*);
- Joke tales and fables (*scherzmärchen, scherzfabeln*) and
- Moral fables (*moralische fabeln*).

This classification offers the user a broader variety of classes; however, it does create some confusion since Wundt uses the word “fable” in five of the seven classifications. It is unclear exactly what he meant by the word, or how he drew a distinction between moral fables, pure animal fables and biological tales and fables. Users may therefore define “fable” in different ways, each thus classifying a corpus of tales differently. No consistency can be attained. In the early 1900s Antti Aarne’s classification index, which classified tales according to themes, thus rendered the study of folklore an enormous service.

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<sup>19</sup> For instance, a tale concerning animals may also exhibit elements of the fantastic (such as magical objects).

## **The Folktale Type Index**

The constructs that folklorists call “tale type” and “motif” have always played an important role in their enquiries into folktales. Thus numerous catalogues have sprung up which arrange folktales according to numbers, titles and summaries of their content. One such catalogue is Antti Aarne’s<sup>20</sup> *Verzeichnis der Märchentypen* which first appeared in 1910 and in which tale types were grouped together according to their similarities. Aarne’s system was devised to organise and index Scandinavian collections. This system was translated and enlarged by the American folklorist Stith Thompson in 1928, and revised in 1961. The motifs included in the Aarne-Thompson index are mainly from tales of European descent. This index helps to group different variants of the same tale together, thus also assisting researchers in identifying tale types and isolating motifs. If there is a variant of a certain tale that includes motifs not found in the others, those motif numbers are provided so that the researcher can cross-reference them (Kinnes, 2009). Before progressing further it would be wise to establish what exactly Thompson classified as a motif:

Certain items in narratives keep on being used by storytellers; they are the stuff out of which tales are made. It makes no difference exactly what they are like; if they are actually useful in the construction of tales, they are considered to be motifs. (Thompson 1955: 7)

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<sup>20</sup> Antti Aarne was a Finnish folklorist.

While the term motif is used very loosely to include any of the elements going into a traditional tale, it must be remembered that in order to become a real part of tradition an element must have something about it that will make people remember and repeat it. It must be more than commonplace. A mother as such is not a motif. A cruel mother becomes one because she is at least thought to be unusual. The ordinary processes of life are not motifs. To say that "John dressed and walked to town" is not to give a single motif worth remembering; but to say that the hero put on his cap of invisibility, mounted his magic carpet, and went to the land east of the sun and west of the moon is to include four motifs – the cap, the carpet, the magic air journey, and the marvellous land. Each of these motifs lives on because it has been found satisfying by generations of tale-tellers. (Thompson, 1950a: 753)

A motif may be an action, a recurrent event, an item, a setting, a character, or even a direct quotation from a tale, as long as it can be classified as unusual. Whatever a motif may be, it has been identified by Aarne and Thompson as an important characteristic of at least one tale. All the motifs found in all of the tales that they investigated were compared to establish whether any of the tales exhibited the same motifs. All the tales with similarities were grouped together and given an Aarne-Thompson number (Kinnes, 2009). Thompson admits that the classification system used in the *Motif-Index* "is not based on any philosophical principles . . . but mainly on practical experience, trial and error. Material that seems to belong together was placed together, and many changes were made before the final arrangement was settled" (1955: 7). Folklorists such as Propp and Dundes are outspoken critics of this index. Dundes insists that the motif "is



open to criticism” because “it is not a standard of one kind of quantity” (1962: 96-7); instead it uses diverse phenomena. Dundes states that some tale types consist of single motifs, thus blurring the distinction made between the two by the Aarne-Thompson Index, and deducing that no clear division between types actually exists. Thompson addressed the confusion this might cause by stating: “[T]here are always borderline cases where there seems to be confusion between tale-type or where a narrative has only a slight resemblance to a particular type” (1950b: 1137). In general he feels that the similarities between tales are more important than the differences. He also acknowledges that “[a] motif may also be essentially a short and simple story in itself, an occurrence that is sufficiently striking or amusing to appeal to an audience of listeners” (1950a: 753). But he finds no problem with this overlap, since the main purpose of the index is to supply researchers with references to help them navigate through the vast store of folklore (Georges, 1997: 204-205).

Hans-Jörg Uther, a Professor of German Literature at the University of Duisburg-Essen, edited *The Types of International Folktales* (ATU, for Aarne-Thompson-Uther), based on the system of Aarne and Thompson. In ATU, the types of folktales are reorganised and expanded considerably. Uther writes in the introduction to the three-volume set that his catalogue of international tale types constitutes a fundamentally new edition with extensive additions and innovations. It specifically attempts to meet the objections of previous critics of the Aarne-Thompson catalogue (Uther, 2004: 7). Thus it permits researchers to locate international tale types with more ease; the descriptions of the tale types have also been completely rewritten and made more precise based on Uther’s

research until 2003. “Each ‘tale type’ presented by ATU consists of a number, title, and a description of its contents; it must be understood to be flexible, adaptable, and part of a greater dynamic, where it can be integrated into new thematic compositions and media” (Kinnes, 2009). More than 250 new types were added throughout the different sections of the Aarne-Thompson index in order to create a more complete representation of folktale motifs. Because of the need for compatibility Uther did not discard Aarne and Thompson’s type numbers; however, some types were noted more than once in the Aarne-Thompson index, which Uther saw as unnecessary duplications and thus discarded. It was also necessary to assign some types different numbers (AT 1587 became ATU 927D, for example). The titles of the tale types were also revised, and the descriptions rewritten and expanded. For reference purposes Uther also decided to include the former titles. Uther improved the categories of the Aarne-Thompson catalogue as follows:

Aarne-Thompson Index	Aarne-Thompson-Uther Index
<u>Animal Tales</u> (1-299)	<u>Animal Tales</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Wild animals 1-99</li><li>➤ The clever fox (other animal) 1-69</li><li>➤ Other wild animals 70-99</li><li>➤ Wild animals and domestic animals 100-149</li><li>➤ Wild animals and humans 150-199</li><li>➤ Domestic animals 200-219</li><li>➤ Other animals and objects 220-299</li></ul>

Ordinary Folktales (300-1199)

- Tales of magic
- Religious tales
- Aetiological tales
- Novelle (romantic tales)
- Tales of the stupid ogre

Tales of Magic

- Supernatural adversaries 300-399
- Supernatural or enchanted spouse or relative 400-459
  - Wife 400-424
  - Husband 425-449
  - Brother or sister 450-459
- Supernatural tasks 460-499
- Supernatural helpers 500-559
- Magic objects 560-649
- Supernatural power or knowledge 650-699
- Other tales of the supernatural 700-749

Religious Tales

- God rewards and punishes 750-779
- The truth comes to light 780-791)
- Heaven 800-809
- The devil 810-826
- Other religious tales 827-849

Realistic Tales (Novelle)

- The man marries the princess 850-869
- The woman marries the prince 870-879
- Proofs of fidelity and innocence 880-899
- The obstinate wife learns to obey 900-909
- Good precepts 910-919
- Clever acts and words 920-929

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Tales of fate 930-949</li><li>➤ Robbers and murderers 950-969</li><li>➤ Other realistic tales 970-999</li></ul>
	<p><u>Tales of the Stupid Giant (Ogre, Devil)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Labour contract 1000-1029</li><li>➤ Partnership between man and ogre 1030-1059</li><li>➤ Contest between man and ogre 1060-1114</li><li>➤ Man kills (injures) ogre 1115-1144</li><li>➤ Ogre frightened by man 1145-1154</li><li>➤ Man outwits the devil 1155-1169</li><li>➤ Souls saved from the devil 1170-1199</li></ul>
<p><u>Jokes and Anecdotes</u> (1200-1999)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Numbskull stories</li><li>➤ Stories about married couples</li><li>➤ Stories about a woman (girl)</li><li>➤ Stories about a clever/stupid lucky/unlucky man (boy)</li><li>➤ Jokes about parsons and religious orders</li><li>➤ Tales of lying</li></ul>	<p><u>Jokes and Anecdotes</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Stories about a fool 1200-1349</li><li>➤ Stories about married couples 1350-1439</li><li>➤ The foolish wife and her husband 1380-1404</li><li>➤ The foolish husband and his wife 1405-1429</li><li>➤ The foolish couple 1430-1439</li><li>➤ Stories about a woman 1440-1524</li><li>➤ Looking for a wife 1450-1474</li><li>➤ Jokes about old maids 1475-1499</li><li>➤ Other stories about women 1500-1524</li><li>➤ Stories about a man 1525-1724</li><li>➤ The clever man 1525-1639</li><li>➤ Lucky accidents 1640-1674</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ The stupid man 1675-1724</li><li>➤ Jokes about clergymen and religious figures 1725-1849</li><li>➤ The clergyman is tricked 1725-1774</li><li>➤ Clergyman and sexton 1775-1799</li><li>➤ Other jokes about religious figures 1800-1849</li><li>➤ Anecdotes about other groups of people 1850-1874</li><li>➤ Tall tales 1875-1999</li></ul>
<u>Formula Tales</u> (2000-2399) <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Cumulative tales</li><li>➤ Catch tales</li></ul>	<u>Formula Tales</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Cumulative tales 2000-2100</li><li>➤ Chains based on numbers, objects, animals or names 2000-2020</li><li>➤ Chains involving death 2021-2024</li><li>➤ Chains involving eating 2025-2028</li><li>➤ Chains involving other events 2029-2075</li><li>➤ Catch tales 2200-2299</li><li>➤ Other formula tales 2300-2399</li></ul>
<u>Unclassified Tales</u> ( <i>Narrationes Lubricae</i> ) (2400-2499)	

(Kinnes, 2009)

## Vladimir Propp's Morphology<sup>21</sup>

Vladimir Jákovlevič Propp was born on April 17, 1895 in St. Petersburg to a German family. He attended the University of St. Petersburg during 1913-1918, where he majored in German and Russian philology.<sup>22</sup> After completing his studies he became a secondary school language teacher, and then a college instructor of German. In 1932 he joined the faculty of Leningrad University and worked there until his death in 1970. After 1938 Propp focused all his efforts on folklore and never returned his attention to language pedagogy. He chaired the Folklore Department until it was incorporated into the Department of Russian Literature; he also had close ties with the Academy of Sciences of the USSR (Levin, 1967). However, before this shift took place he had published three textbooks for Russian students and one article concerning German grammar. His book *Morphology of the Folktale* was first published in 1928 in Russian and went generally unnoticed in the West until it was translated into English during the 1950s. Later in his life Propp commented on the title of this book, which had caused some confusion among his readers:

I called it *Morphology of the Wondertale*. To make the book more attractive, the editor replaced the word *wondertale* [Propp's italics] and in this way led

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<sup>21</sup> "Morphology" means the study of forms. Thus Propp investigates the component parts of tales and their relationships with one another.

<sup>22</sup> According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, philology can be described as "1: the study of literature and of disciplines relevant to literature or to language as used in literature; 2a: LINGUISTICS; *especially*: historical and comparative linguistics; b: the study of human speech *especially* as the vehicle of literature and as a field of study that sheds light on cultural history."

everybody (including Lévi-Strauss) to believe that the book would concern itself with the general laws of the folktale. . . . But my intention was not to study all the various and complex types of the folktale; I only studied one strikingly distinctive type, viz., the folk wondertale.<sup>23</sup> (Propp, 1984: 70)

Propp's work is dedicated to the study of fairy tales; this refers to the tales classified under numbers 300 to 749 of Aarne's model.<sup>24</sup> Propp admits that this demarcation is artificial; he uses it merely as a point of departure. He undertakes to compare tales by examining their themes. Thus, the component parts of the fairy tales would be evaluated to create a morphology. The question arises: how would accurate descriptions of tales be achieved? Propp (1968, 19-20) offered the following examples to elucidate his method:

- A tsar gives an eagle to a hero. The eagle carries the hero away to another kingdom.
- An old man gives Súčenko a horse. The horse carries Súčenko away to another kingdom.
- A sorcerer gives Iván a little boat. The boat takes Iván to another kingdom.
- A princess gives Iván a ring. Young men appearing from out of the ring carry Iván away into another kingdom . . .

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<sup>23</sup> The Russian word "*skázki*" has also been translated as "fairy tale", or simply "tale".

<sup>24</sup> The numbering for this specific group of tales has gone without change throughout this model's revisions and alterations.

Both constants (the hero receiving a present and his consequent departure from the land) and variables (the type of present the hero receives as well as its attributes) are present in the abovementioned instances. The names of the *dramatis personae* also change, but their actions and functions remain the same. From this Propp deduces that different personages can perform identical actions. "This makes possible the study of the tale *according to the functions of its dramatis personae*" [Propp's italics] (Propp, 1968: 20). Thus, what the *dramatis personae* do is integral to Propp's study, not who they are or how it is done, since the functions of personages can be transferred from one tale to another. This definition does not rely on the person who carries out the functions. Propp hypothesises that only a limited number of functions can be performed in fairy tales, and that for this reason identical acts can have different meanings. Thus, the course the action takes is significant. Was the gift the hero received meant as a reward, a punishment, or a test of character? Depending on the answer to this question the tales will move on to different functions (taking the heroes on different routes). The functions serve as stable elements of a tale that remains constant. Tales that exhibit the same functions can then be grouped together to form a type, instead of grouping tales together according to motifs or elements. In other words: the functions can be delineated. But this poses the following conundrum: if functions never change, they must be independent and therefore able to appear in any sequence, making Propp's study an almost impossible task. Propp counters this by stating that the sequence of events in fairy tales (and any other plot in literature) has to adhere to sequential laws – the hero cannot be carried away to another kingdom if he has not first received the means to do so (the gift). Propp admits that some freedom is to be found within the



sequence, but it is so small that it will not play a significant role in the tales he examines. This allows him to hypothesise that the functions will always appear in an identical sequence. This does not mean that every function will appear in every single tale, only that the order of the functions will always stay the same and that the absence of one function will not influence the rest of the sequence (Propp, 1968: 19-23):

For example: the tale starts with function “A”, progressing to functions “B” and “C” – functions “D” through to “H” are absent from this tale – followed by functions “I”, “J” and “K”. The absence of functions “D” to “H” does not influence the sequence of the rest of the tale: function “K” does not suddenly appear before function “I”.

This leads Propp (1968: 23) to state: “All fairy tales are of one type in regard to their structure.”

After the initial situation of a tale has been related to the audience (the introduction of the protagonist and his or her situation) it is immediately followed by a series of functions. Propp identifies 31 functions that can occur within the sequence the tale follows. This study will not identify and discuss all 31 of these functions,<sup>25</sup> but will rather use one fairy tale, “Cinderella”,<sup>26</sup> to elucidate Propp’s functions.

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<sup>25</sup> For more information regarding Propp’s functions of *dramatis personae*, pages 25-65 of his book *Morphology of the Folktale* (1968) may be consulted.

<sup>26</sup> The version of “Cinderella” used for this analysis can be found in the Brothers Grimm: *The Complete Fairy Tales*, translated by Jack Zipes (2007, 106-114).

After the initial situation of the tale is introduced Cinderella's mother dies, representing an intensified form of absentation (function I).<sup>27</sup> After her mother's death her father marries a new wife with two beautiful daughters. They decide that Cinderella is not beautiful enough to be their sister and state that she has to earn her keep, thus tricking (VI) her to become their maid. Cinderella complies (VII) with this outrageous act since her mother instructed her before her death to be good and pious. Their villainy (VIII) is set forth when they throw lentils in the ashes of the fire for her to pick out and when they hide her bed, forcing her to sleep in the ashes next to the fire. Later in the tale her father states that he will be going to town and will buy them anything they want. The two step-daughters want jewels and beautiful dresses, but Cinderella only desires a twig to plant on her mother's grave (Function VIIIa, lack). Cinderella plants the twig on her mother's grave and it grows into a tree. Sitting under this tree she wishes that she could also attend the prince's feast, then two white doves bring her beautiful clothes that she may attend. The doves act as magical agents (XIV) that appear whenever she sits under the tree and wishes for something. Unrecognised by her step-sisters she dances with the prince the entire evening, and when the time comes for her to leave, the prince pursues (XXI) her. She manages to evade him, arriving unrecognised at home (XXIII). The same actions are set in place on the second and the third night. However, on the third night of the festival Cinderella loses her shoe, which the prince uses to find her. After he returns the slipper to her she is recognised (XXVII) as the "princess" with whom the prince danced on the previous three nights. The two step-sisters are punished (XXX) for their ill

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<sup>27</sup> The number of each of the functions present in the tale will be indicated by Roman numerals in brackets after the key word of the function.

deeds when the two doves – who gave Cinderella her clothes – peck out their eyes. And the story ends with Cinderella and the prince's wedding (XXXI).

Propp states that there are several actions protagonists might take that do not conform to this structure; however, they are very rare. He further states that the reason for this abnormal structure is that the tales descend from other genres (myths and legends) and not from folktales. The use of Propp's analysis, as illustrated above, reveals that fairy tales do share several basic plot similarities. However, when multiple tales are analysed according to Propp's method, "his claim of a uniform plot progression does not hold" (Seifret, 2001). According to Propp a cohesive story can be produced by connecting a sequential series of his 31 functions. This fails to recognise that other elements also play a role in the construction of a tale, and that the presence of a narrator who wishes to convey a certain message may introduce a function anywhere that he or she sees fit.

### **The Psychological Approach**

Other than the Folktale Index and Propp's Morphology, the psychological significance of fairy tales has been one of the most persistent topics in the history of folklore. There are many different theories concerning the fairy tale's psychological meaning and value, but most start with the premise that the stories are symbolic expressions of the human mind and emotional experience. According to this view, fairy tale plots and motifs are representations of each individual's inner experience which provide insight into human behaviour. The psychological approach to fairy tales is usually associated with Sigmund

Freud's<sup>28</sup> use of fairy tale symbols (similar to the symbols found in dreams) to illustrate the inner workings of the mind. "Consequently, the psychological approach to fairy tales involves symbolic interpretation, both for psychoanalysts, who use fairy tales diagnostically to illustrate psychological theories, and for folklorists and literary critics, who use psychological theories to illuminate fairy tales" (<http://www.answers.com/topic/psychology-and-fairy-tales>).

Clarissa Pinkola Estés (1943- ) is an American psychoanalyst and writer. She considers that traditional psychological theory often treats issues that are important to women too sparsely, and claims that her own work goes beyond these limitations by investigating: "the archetypal, the intuitive, the sexual and cyclical, the ages of women, a woman's way, a woman's knowing, her creative fire" (1998: 4). In her book *Women who Run with the Wolves* (first published in 1992), Estés uses Jungian psychology to analyse folklore and fairy tales and to explore the intuitive and creative drives that constitute the Wild Woman<sup>29,30</sup> archetype.<sup>31</sup> According to Estés, wolves and women share a psychic bond in their fierceness, grace and devotion to their mate and their community. This comparison defines the archetype of the Wild Woman, a female in touch with her

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<sup>28</sup> For the most part, the Freudian approach to fairy tales has been abandoned. "Not only are many of Freud's notions about psychic development and conflict questionable when applied to tales, but the analysis itself tends to rationalize rather than disclose them" (Zipes, 1995: 223).

<sup>29</sup> An inner force filled with passion and creativity which will help women to reclaim their natural power and re-enliven the barren wasteland to which their psyches have been reduced.

<sup>30</sup> Estés uses the word "wild" here to mean "to live a natural life" (1998: 6) and not in the modern pejorative sense.

<sup>31</sup> In various other psychological approaches the Wild Woman archetype can also be called the id or the Self.

primitive side and able to rely on instincts to make choices. Estés gives another reason for her comparison between women and wolves:

[B]oth have been hounded, harassed, and falsely imputed to be devouring and devious, overly aggressive, of less value than those who are their detractors. They have been the targets of those who would clean up the wilds as well as the wildish environs of the psyche, extinct[ing] the instinctual, and leaving no trace behind. The predation on wolves and women by those who misunderstand them is strikingly similar. (Estés, 1998: 2)

Her book uses multicultural myths, folktales, and fairy tales to help women to reconnect with their instinctual selves (the Wild Woman that can be found at the core of every woman), thus creating a new level of self-knowledge. She attempts to reconnect women with this hidden – and mostly forgotten – “self” through investigating fairy tales, myths and stories. These tales “provide understandings which sharpen our sight so that we can pick out and pick up the path left by the wildish nature” (Estés, 1998: 4). This “path” leads women into a realm of self-knowledge, where they can retrieve and find succour for their psyches; this is the realm of the Wild Woman. Estés (a poet and *cantadora*<sup>32</sup> as well as a Jungian psychoanalyst) realised that women’s flagging vitality could be restored by “psychic-archaeological” digs in the ruins of the female underworld.<sup>33</sup> Through this process it is possible to uncover the “ways of the natural instinctive

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<sup>32</sup> In the Latina tradition this means: a keeper of the old stories.

<sup>33</sup> This refers to the realm of existence that can be found under the world perceived by the ego; thus it refers to that which women are unconscious off.

psyche” (Estés, 1998: 2) by finding each woman’s personification of the Wild Woman archetype through a specific tale that resonates with what she needs from her life. Therefore, one is imprinted with knowing simply by listening to a tale. Among Jungians this is known as *participation mystique*;<sup>34</sup> “a person cannot distinguish themselves as separate from the object or thing they behold” (Estés, 1998: 387). This term refers to the ability of one’s mind to step away from its ego to merge with another reality for a period of time, thus offering the mind an alternative way of solving a problem, or a different means to understanding.

Becoming an active participant in the tale acts as a “fairy-tale knock at the door of the deep female psyche” (Estés, 1998: 4), which reawakens old memories of complete and undeniable kinship with the wild feminine. The connection that women have with the wild feminine may have become faded for various reasons, such as neglect, fear, ignorance, societal pressures to fit in, or that the wild feminine is no longer understood to form an integral part of women’s lives and for that reason is not instilled in them from a young age. However, Estés states that the Wild Woman (the wild feminine) can never truly be forgotten; women will always yearn for it.

Her book *Women who Run with the Wolves* offers women a chance to reconnect with the Wild Woman by investigating tales such as “La Loba”, “Bluebeard” and “Skeleton Woman”, thus offering solutions to the problems women may face in their daily lives;

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<sup>34</sup> Among Freudians this is known as *projective identification*. (Estés, 1998: 387)

fresh perspectives on relationships and self-esteem; suggestions on how to deal with anger and jealousy, and methods of dealing with society's inability to look beyond appearances. The Russian tale of "Vasalisa the Wise" is about the realisation that things are not what they seem to be. The important message of this tale, for Estés, lies in reliance on one's own intuition and instincts, symbolised by the doll Vasalisa receives from her dying mother. Estés states that "[i]ntuition is the treasure of a woman's psyche" (1998: 70). "The Handless Maiden" is a tale of endurance, in which the heroine has to undergo several trials of initiation. As she completes one trial she is plunged into another, and this cycle strengthens and transforms her; thus it offers material for a woman's entire life journey and initiation (back) into the wild. The wild nature of women "means to establish territory, to find one's pack, to be in one's body with certainty and pride regardless of the body's gifts and limitations, to speak and act in one's behalf, to be aware, alert, to draw on the innate feminine powers of intuition and sensing, to come into one's cycles, to find what one belongs to, to rise with dignity, to retain as much consciousness as we can" (Estés: 1998: 10).

Estés's approach has met with various forms of critique. Jack Zipes (1995: 223) encounters the following problems with physiological approaches to reading fairy tales:

One of the dangers of storytelling today is the neo-Jungian school that takes various New Age forms in books like Robert Bly's *Iron John*<sup>35</sup> and Clarissa Pinkola Estes's *Women Who Run with the Wolves*. These authors and their disciples spread their holy word and believe that fairy tales can heal all of our wounds and solve all of our problems if we learn how to read and follow their symbols. At their worst, neo-Jungians depict the world and our psyche as though they were coloring books with numbers on the parts of each picture - if we paint the right colors on the parts, our lives will become harmonious. . . . Jungian therapists use stories as a means of comprehending how their analysands grasp and cope with the world around them. But even here, they often designate symbols according to a dictionary of meanings that limit their understanding of the exceptional and unique ways their analysands may be trying to narrate their lives.

For Estés, fairy tales offer a means of strengthening oneself psychologically and spiritually in order to go forward. "*Women Who Run with the Wolves* strives to assist the conscious work of individuation" (Estés, 1998: 476). As such, some folklorists argue that it should not be considered as part of the study of folklore since the emphasis of her work is clearly psychological, while others argue (as in the above quotation) that it does not form a valid enough branch of psychology. However, this theory exhibits positive points as well since it investigates the effect of fairy tale structures on specific

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<sup>35</sup> Bly analyses the Brothers Grimm fairy tale, "Iron John" (first published in 1990), to find lessons and advice from the past which may be especially meaningful to men. This controversial book played an important role in the Men's Rights movement.



analysands, moulding their views and interpretations of the society they live in, and, in turn, affecting the way in which fairy tales are presented and told to the next generation. Others level criticism against the folktale and motif indexes created by Aarne, Thompson, Uther and various other folklorists; however, these still remain an integral part of the discipline. The structurally based typology envisioned by Propp has not materialised, and some would say that it is not completely viable since no tale can be seen as a concrete entity (i.e., as unchangeable, as in the case of literature). The tales are idiosyncratic characterisations of experiences and events that people have found entertaining and thought worthwhile to retell. Thompson was aware of this, as he emphasised in his writings that those parts of the narrative that can be identified as motifs are always something out of the ordinary. As with all things that formed part of the oral tradition, these tales altered with every telling, changing an uncaring or absent mother into a wicked step-mother, or bestowing fabulous attributes on ordinary objects (talking mirrors, shoes that dance of their own accord, and so forth).

## *Chapter 3: A Tree of Tales*

Fairy tales, myths and stories provide an understanding which sharpens one's perceptions of the surrounding world in such a way that one can discern between right and wrong. The instructions found in stories reassure the reader that he or she has not strayed from the accepted path, but is defining him- or herself within the framework of his or her society. Thus one is taught to act and react in certain circumstances, sometimes to the detriment of one's personal growth. All societies have their shared belief structures, which are embedded in the tales, whether the message is religious or moral. This is characteristic of fairy tales, folktales, myths and legends, but there are other characteristics that set these story types apart. This chapter is directed toward defining and distinguishing between myths, legends, folktales and fairy tales. These terms are often used interchangeably, which can create some confusion. It may also happen that a tale which is a folktale in one society may be a legend or a myth in another. This is mainly due to the fact that most of these tales formed part of the oral tradition of most cultures. This is why it is necessary to devote some time to defining and distinguishing these four categories (without negating those characteristics which they have in common). It comes as no surprise that myths and legends form an integral part of most societies' structure and history, and therefore are more closely related to each other than to the other story types. However, these two tale types must not be considered as synonymous, and it is important to draw a clear distinction between them.

People have been recounting myths for thousands of years, not only in order to understand themselves, but also to make better sense of the world and of the meaning behind existence. The retelling of myths provided ancient peoples with the basis of a traditional belief system for their specific culture, reflecting not only its social or economic needs, but also its spiritual or religious ones. Myths also concern themselves with a civilization's relationship with the divine or the unknown. They reflect the individual and collective desires, needs and fears of a culture. We still look to the ancient myths as parallels to our own life stories and can easily identify with the many different threads or concepts within the narratives, whoever the characters may be and whatever their behaviour or the outcome of the tales. Like mirrors, they remind us of who we are, and also of how little we as human beings have changed since ancient times. They reveal the powerful expression of the human imagination through a narrative form, to create a universal language. Myths are sacred stories that use symbols to tell their truth. They not only describe our perception of the world, but offer possible answers to questions with which humanity has been struggling since time immemorial. Myths are the timeless expression of our need to understand who we are and where we fit in, into universe (Bartlett, 2009: 12-13).

Mythology is a vast subject, and it is not easy to encapsulate or contain it. There are a multiplicity of myths from around the world, and each of these vast bodies of stories represents the culture and belief systems of a specific group of people. Although many of these cultures differ vastly from one another, one does find common themes, such as the creation of the world, how the universe began, explanations of the forces of nature,

the origins of people, mortality as a punishment for humanity's transgressions, personal quests and behaviour, and social rules and belief (Bartlett, 2009: 13).

Throughout world mythology the most common themes involve the creation of the world and its first peoples. There is often a creator god or a cataclysmic event (sometimes instigated by the creator god) that destroys the first human race, and then the repopulation of the world. There are flood myths from Sumeria and Babylonia, the Maya, and the Yoruba of Africa. In Peru, one finds the myth of the Inca creator god Viracocha who destroyed the first race of giant-like humans with a flood which turned them all into stone. In Greek myth, Deucalion was told by Prometheus to build a boat because Zeus was planning to destroy all forms of life by sending a flood. Likewise Utnapishtum, an ancestor of the hero Gilgamesh, was warned by the god Enki of a great flood. He filled a boat with plants and creatures of every kind, then set sail with his family when the water started to rise (Bartlett, 2009: 20). This myth, of course, bears a striking resemblance to the Biblical story of Noah's Ark in the Old Testament.

Myths are accepted on faith since they are the embodiment of a certain belief system. Myths are sacred to the people who hold them dear – they are often also associated with theology or ritual – and they are usually cited as an authority in answer to disbelief or ignorance (Bascom, 1965: 4). Abrams and Harpham (2005: 206) identify the modern notion of the myth as follows:

[A] system of hereditary stories of ancient origin which were once believed to be true by a specific cultural group, and which served to explain . . . why the world is as it is and things happen as they do, to provide a rationale for social customs and observances, and to establish the sanctions for the rules by which people conduct their lives.

A similar definition is given by Baldick (2008: 217 - 8):

A kind of story or rudimentary narrative sequence, normally traditional and anonymous, through which a given culture ratifies its social customs or accounts for the origins of human and natural phenomena, usually in supernatural or boldly imaginative terms. . . . [M]yths are regarded as fictional stories containing deeper truths [and] expressing collective attitudes to fundamental matters of life, death, divinity, and existence (sometimes deemed to be 'universal').

Taking this into consideration one can formulate the following definition: In the society wherein specific myths are told these myths are considered to be truthful descriptions of what happened in that specific culture's past. They are often referred to in order to elucidate its social customs. Myths also account for the origins of humanity as well as for natural phenomena found in the vicinity of a certain society.

Legends, on the other hand, are often more secular, concerning themselves primarily with human characters. Before progressing further one must remember that, at the time when the concept arose, the word “legend” included both truth and fiction. Legends involve historically sound facts clothed in the garb of a narrative. For this reason one finds historical characters performing deeds and actions that seem well-nigh impossible. These tales tell of wars and victories, and most importantly of the deeds and conquests of heroes and rulers. Variants of a certain legend may be found, placing the action in a slightly different location or substituting one character for another; this can be ascribed to the oral tradition, which was the predominant method of transmitting legends to the next generation. When turning to the legends of the illustrious King Arthur and the chivalric Knights of the Round Table, for example, one finds innumerable variations.

According to Lacy and Ashe (1988: xi), depending on the text,

Mordred may be Arthur’s nephew or illegitimate son. Guinevere’s lover is usually Lancelot but sometimes the position is filled by Bedivere. This fluidity is characteristic of the medieval treatment of the legend, and it greatly accounts for its wealth and vitality, but it also makes it impossible to distinguish between the ‘authentic’ and ‘invented’ elements of the legend.

King Arthur is an unusual legendary hero, as he is the only one whose biography is known to have been produced by a single author, namely Geoffrey of Monmouth (Lacy

& Ashe, 1988: 3-6). Arthur mysteriously enters the *History of the Kings of Britain*, his conception being achieved with the help of Merlin's magical arts, and Geoffrey relates an extraordinary series of events as the life-history of this British hero. After holding our attention for so long, Arthur just as mysteriously disappears from the text when he is carried off to Avalon after being wounded in the battle of Camlann. This extravagance in an otherwise well-ordered chronicle raises the questionability of the accuracy of the historic aspects of Geoffrey's text (Thorpe, 1983: 9-23). However, it is exactly this otherworldliness and mystery which attaches to the figure of Arthur that makes the legends so popular. In the wake of Arthur's popularity legends involving the adventures of other heroes from Arthur's court started to appear, and the Grail story was introduced, as well as the love story between Guinevere and Lancelot.

This does not mean, however, that these tales are devoid of religious aspects. Some legends incorporate religious imagery and motifs, but the focus is not on a deity or his/her deeds, but on the effect of religion on a human character. In Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* (1485), which comprises eight tales that can be divided into three movements, corresponding to the turning of Fortune's Wheel, one finds the following pattern. The first few tales depict the rise of Arthur from his birth and the influence of Merlin on his early career, his marriage to Guinevere, and the introduction of the greatest secular knight, Lancelot. The second movement deals with the glory of Arthur's court, the adventures of various knights, and the quest for the Holy Grail. The last movement portrays the ruin of Arthur, his realm, and the ideals of his court, all instigated by

Mordred's treachery and facilitated by the affair between Guinevere and Lancelot (Lacy & Ashe, 1988: 132-145).

In the second movement the reader finds the tale of the Holy Grail, in which all 150 knights set out to complete the quest to search for the divine presence, but only a few succeed. Galahad does not have to undergo all the trials and temptations the other knights need to face because he is the true Grail Knight. However, the other knights who achieve the Grail (Bors, Lancelot,<sup>36</sup> and Percival) have to face certain obstacles and do penance for their sins before they are able to succeed.

The other two movements of *Le Morte Darthur* concern themselves with the wars, victories and deeds of heroes and kings, thus conforming to both the main characteristics of legends: that they narrate human actions (rather than those of divine beings) perceived to have taken place in history (or at least traceable to some historical basis, albeit perhaps dubious in nature (Baldick, 2008: 185).

Folktales, however, are regarded as fiction. Baldick (2008: 132) defines a folktale as a story that formed part of the oral tradition and was thus continuously modified by new tellers to fit their specific needs before being written down or recorded. Abrams and Harpham (2005: 124) offer a similar definition: "The folktale, strictly defined, is a short narrative in prose of unknown authorship which has been transmitted orally; many of

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<sup>36</sup> Lancelot only partially achieves the Holy Grail.



these tales eventually achieve written form". Many folktales involve mythical creatures and magical transformations, which may also be found in myths and legends. The cardinal difference, however, is that folktales are not considered to form part of history (as in the case of legends) or a belief system (as in the case of myths); this type of tale is not to be taken completely seriously. The conventional opening formulas ("Once upon a time. . ." or "Long ago in a distant land. . .") which introduce a folktale give notice to the listener that the story to come is fiction and that it should not be believed to be true; many tales also include a closing formula (" . . . they lived happily ever after" or " . . . and peace was restored to the land") indicating that the tale which should not be believed has ended. Although these tales are often told simply for amusement they do serve a purpose: they teach moral lessons. Folktales may be set in any time or place, which lends them a universal quality. And on the surface most folktales share the following characteristics: they are easy to understand, so that the audience can immediately grasp the lesson of the story; they include magical or supernatural elements like shoes that can dance of their own accord; human qualities such as wisdom and foolishness are usually coupled with good and evil; the problems and conflicts within the tales are always clear – the audience is never unsure of how an evil character has set obstacles in the way of the good character or of other characters' intentions – and the ending is usually happy or satisfying in that the evil character is punished and the good character rewarded. However, despite the many similarities, there are various sub-types of folktales, including riddles, jokes, tall tales, proverbs, spells, rituals and more (Baldick, 2008: 132). In this study only fairy tales and fables are relevant to be investigated.

Tales concerning themselves with talking animals can be traced back to the beast fables of Aesop, a Greek slave who lived around 600 BC (Anthony, 2006: 903-904). This collection of fables is one of the most enduring works of literature, and has counterparts in fable collections from other languages, the best known collection being that by Jean de la Fontaine (1668), which was written in verse form. Talking animals have appeared in an enormous range of texts ever since the appearance of Aesop's fables. Medieval writers, with their fondness for allegory,<sup>37</sup> were particularly apt at using beasts as "spokespersons". Well-known examples include the cycle of stories *Roman de Renart* (*Reynard the Fox*) by the Frenchman Pierre de Saint-Cloud (1173) which includes the tale of Chanticleer the cock, later adapted by Geoffrey Chaucer in "The Nun's Priest's Tale". *The Parliament of Fowls* (published in the period between 1374 and 1386) is another example of Chaucer's work that contains talking animals. A more recent equivalent can be found in the plantation tales of the American journalist Joel Chandler Harris, based on the black folklore of former US slaves. "These fables of 'Brer Rabbit' and 'Brer Fox' [found in Harris's *Uncle Remus* stories dated 1879], like those attributed to Aesop, use animal characters to make statements about human nature and human behaviour" (Pringle, 2006: 22). Thus a (beast) fable can be defined as a short tale featuring personified animal characters displaying the follies of human nature.

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<sup>37</sup> The definition of allegory varies greatly and it is difficult to explain the term in one coherent sentence. In Meyer's (2003: 214) musings on allegory he states that: "[a]llegory is understood as a language capable of 'saying other things' . . ." thus ". . . cloaking hidden meaning behind palpable form". One can thus draw the conclusion that a text that is allegorical in nature will more often than not be concerned with issues that require serious consideration, and that the opinions regarding those issues will be camouflaged in a conspicuous manner.

Fables often conclude with a moral which takes on the form of an epigram,<sup>38</sup> and they are often used to teach children moral lessons by employing fictional creatures to which they can relate.

Fables, more specifically beast fables, are often connected with fairy tales. Animals in fairy tales often have the power of speech; this is derived from a primal desire that lies at the heart of Faërie – the desire of man to communicate with other living beings. But the speech of animals in beast fables has nothing to do with this desire of man. Human beings are usually absent from beast fables and if they do appear they are merely there to flesh out the tale, since the role of the hero or heroine is taken by an animal (Tolkien, 1890: 6).

The realm of fairy tales is full of marvellous beasts and birds, enchantments and perils, since their roots can be found in folktales. In particular they stem from what folklorists refer to as wondertales; however, it is important to draw a distinction between the original wondertales and modern fairy tales. Wondertales were passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth, making any *pure* form of these tales irretrievable. Fairy tales, on the other hand, are a written form, the product of individuals or groups of authors whom we can usually name. According to Pringle (2006: 20), this type of tale became very popular during the late 17<sup>th</sup> century in France and one of the leading practitioners was Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy, author of the collection of tales

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<sup>38</sup> Baldick (2008: 112) defines an epigram as “[a] short poem with a witty turn of thought; or a wittily condensed expression in prose.”

which gave the genre its name, *Les Contes des Fees* (1696-1698). Another collection of fairy tales appeared in 1697, from the Frenchman Charles Perrault, entitled *Histoires, ou contes du temps passé* (also known as *Contes de ma mere l'Oye*, known in English as *Mother Goose Tales*). This collection includes tales such as “Sleeping Beauty”, “Cinderella”, “Little Red Riding Hood” and “Puss in Boots”, which are still some of the best-loved and most endearing tales. According to Pringle (2006: 195), Perrault’s notion that traditional tales can (and should) be rewritten in order to provide an educative tool for the “‘civilization’ of [people] ... has become one of the principal forces shaping modern fantasy fiction [including fairy tales] and the culture of childhood” in modern society. It did not take long for the collections of Perrault and Madame d’Aulnoy to be translated into other languages, and by the nineteenth century these tales had seeped into Western culture.

A hundred years after Perrault the fairy tale canon was expanded once again by the German brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. Jacob Grimm was a pioneer in the study of the German language, and it was his enquiries into the history of the language that pricked his interest in folklore.<sup>39</sup> He found that the folklore of the common folk seemed in danger of extinction; at this point he enlisted the help of his brother in collecting and researching these tales (Pringle, 2006: 173). Their research resulted in their collection

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<sup>39</sup> Defined by this stage in the modern sense of a specific culture or society’s traditional customs, songs, dances, superstitions, anecdotes and stories, which were passed from generation to generation by word of mouth.

of tales *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*<sup>40</sup> (*Household Tales* – universally known as *Grimm's Fairy Tales*) which first appeared in 1812, although the brothers continued to expand and enlarge later editions. The tales that can be found in their collection include "Snow White and the Seven Dwarves", "Hansel and Gretel", "Rumpelstiltskin" and "Rapunzel". Jacob and Wilhelm's work inspired writers of other nationalities, of whom the best known is the Danish writer Hans Christian Andersen, who published his first collection of tales in 1835. Almost all of the tales Andersen published were original; the most famous include the satirical<sup>41</sup> "The Emperor's New Clothes", the parable<sup>42</sup> of "The Nightingale" and the allegory of self-sacrifice found in "The Little Mermaid". "The Snow Queen" is an extravagant *tour de force* and "The Ugly Duckling" is one of the many tales that Anderson wrote which allegorise his perceptions of his own life (Pringle, 2006: 151). At the same time that Andersen published his tales, many British writers started to use fairy tale forms and motifs<sup>43</sup> within a fast-growing new genre, that of fantasy.

We can now turn to defining what exactly may be understood by the term fairy tale. In the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* one finds a wholly unsatisfactory definition: "a story about magic or fairies, usually for children" (527). A more sufficient definition is

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<sup>40</sup> *Märchen* is the German term for tales of marvel and enchantment. This term is usually translated as "fairy tales" even though fairies are conspicuously absent from such tales.

<sup>41</sup> "Satire can be described as the literary art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn, or indignation" (Abrams & Harpham, 2005: 320).

<sup>42</sup> Christ employed parables to teach his followers; examples are his parables of the prodigal son and the good Samaritan.

<sup>43</sup> A motif can be defined as a type of event or formula that is frequently found in works of literature. A common motif in folklore is that of the "loathly lady" who transforms into a beautiful princess at the end of the tale.

found in *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Baldick, 2008: 124): “A traditional folktale adapted and written down for the entertainment of children, usually featuring marvellous events and characters, although fairies as such are less often found in them than princesses, talking animals, ogres, and witches.”

Investigating these definitions, one discovers that the idea that fairy tales are about fairies is an extremely narrow definition. In normal English usage fairy tales are rarely about fairies or elves; they focus rather on the adventures of human beings in the realm of Faërie (the Perilous Realm). To quote one of the masters of the genre:

Faërie contains many things besides elves and fays, and beside dwarfs, witches, trolls, giants, or dragons: it holds the seas, the sun, the moon, the sky; and the earth, and all things that are in it: tree and bird, water and stone, wine and bread, and ourselves, mortal men, when we are enchanted. (Tolkien 1890: 4)

Thus, the definition of a fairy tale is not dependent on the presence of elves or fairies, but on the nature of the Perilous Realm itself.

Furthermore, the reader must remember that fairy tales do not transpire in *our* world (the primary world), but in the world of Faërie (a secondary world). The main advantage of a secondary world is that it frees the author or teller from the restrictions of our world. In a secondary world, if it is the author's wish, a Green Knight can exist, galloping

around on his horse with his head tucked neatly under his arm. The author or teller can get away with things that we do not find in the real world without losing any credibility, since a reader or listener is more easily convinced that magical explosions and mythical creatures are part of a secondary reality than part of the primary world. A secondary world also allows the author or teller to introduce a set of religions, beliefs, norms, values, laws, myths and superstitions with relative ease. Even marvellous occurrences can be introduced without the author losing credibility. "When the marvellous occurs in a secondary world it may appear marvellous to the inhabitants themselves, but more often the marvellous becomes part of the natural law of the secondary world" (Swinfen, 1984: 75).

In making a secondary world acceptable to readers it is essential that the physical laws of nature, a reasonable cause-and-effect relationship, and plants and animals have a structure similar to those in the primary world. The fundamental physical laws of gravity, cold and heat, dark and light, and the turning of the seasons remain based on the primary world (Swinfen, 1984: 78). However, this does not mean that these elements are immune to change. Certain differences from the natural laws of the primary world may occur, but these are rarely arbitrary. They are physical manifestations of the teller's underlying ideas and will play a significant role somewhere in the narrative (Swinfen, 1984: 83).

As previously stated, a fairy tale makes use of the realm of Faërie (a secondary world), and its main purpose may be fantasy, morality, satire or adventure. However, there is

one condition: if satire is present in a tale the author or teller should treat the magic that is ever present in the Perilous Realm with reverence. “Faërie itself may perhaps be translated by Magic – but it is a magic of a peculiar mood and power, at the furthest pole from the vulgar devices of the laborious, scientific, magician” (Tolkien, 1890: 4). Tolkien (1890: 9) further states that fairy tales have, in the whole, three different facets, namely “the Mystical towards the Supernatural”, “the Magical towards Nature”, and “the Mirror of scorn and pity towards Man”. The most prevalent of these facets in fairy tales is the second.

Baldick’s (2008: 124) definition is a more satisfactory one, except for the statement that fairy tales are suited only to children. Fairy tales have been relegated to the nursery by adults; they have not been claimed by children. Children do not like or understand fairy tales any better than adults do, but these tales are sometimes specially reserved for them since that is the notion with which society has been imprinted over the generations.

The term fairy tale, thus, is not synonymous with myth, legend or fable. Firstly, myths are accepted on faith since they are the embodiment of a belief system, sacred stories that use symbols to tell their truth and to explain why the world is as it is and things happen as they do. Legends are often more secular, concerning themselves primarily with human characters. These tales tell of wars and victories, and most importantly of the deeds and conquests of heroes and rulers. They can be traced to some or other quasi-historical basis. Fables, however, cannot be as easily separated from fairy tales



since they both descend from folktales. The best-known characteristic of beast fables is that the author or teller uses the animal characters as spokespersons; they make statements about humanity, displaying the follies of human nature. In fairy tales animals can often speak as well, but they do not replace human characters as the protagonists and antagonists, and their ability to talk is derived from the Realm of Faërie, what Tolkien (1890) called “the Magical towards Nature”.

Thus, for the purpose of this study, this chapter can conclude with the following definition of the term fairy tale: Fairy tales are not specifically about elves and fairies, but about humanity’s adventures in the secondary world of Faërie, which is filled with magic, making the marvellous possible. This type of tale is not age-specific; it can be enjoyed by any person of any age.<sup>44</sup> With this definition in mind, the analyses of the various fairy tales may now commence.

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<sup>44</sup> Fairy tales might not be age-specific, but it remains to be seen whether they are culture-specific. A question arises as to whether a person from a certain culture would be able to fully comprehend the meaning, ironies, tone of voice, customs and beliefs (cultural products) of a fairy tale taken from a completely different culture without prior instruction in that specific culture’s ways. In this context “different cultures” does not refer to cultures that have some common ground, like the British and American cultures, since both are Western, but rather to “Western” cultures and – say – African cultures. The issue is whether a person from one culture would be fully able to understand a fairy tale based in the culture of the other.

## *Chapter 4: Branches from the same Tree*

As stated in a previous chapter, the fairy tales we read and enjoy today are, in the main, descendants of French, German and Scandinavian tales. Thus, when one picks up two different volumes of the Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm, one may well find some variations between the two translations. These differences, however, do not appear to influence the plots dramatically<sup>45</sup> – some would say that they are negligible – but they do influence certain aspects, such as the degree of punishment and reward involved, as well as the way in which certain characters interact. In this chapter two versions of the same tale (“Cinderella”) taken from the fairy tale collection of the Brothers Grimm will be compared. The researcher will attempt to determine the source of the differences between them by scrutinising elements such as the era in which they were translated and the audiences for whom the translations were created. “Cinderella” also offers another interesting point of comparison. It forms part of both the French and German fairy tale traditions, thus enabling the researcher to compare these versions as well. By considering the differences between the versions of the tale the researcher may glean an understanding of their respective sets of morality and beliefs. Before comparing the two tales translated from the German collection, the French version will be compared to one of the German versions from the collection of the Brothers Grimm. This comparison

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<sup>45</sup> The versions are similar in theme and ordinance.

will focus specifically on the differences between characters, the element of magic, and the different endings of these two versions of “Cinderella”.

The following translations will be used in this chapter. The French version (henceforth referred to as “*Cendrillon*”) is taken from a 1957 publication which was translated by Geoffrey Brereton (1906–1979), a scholar and critic of French literature. The German version (hereafter called “*Aschenputtel*”) was translated by Jack Zipes, a professor of German at the University of Minnesota. Zipes’s translation is based on the seventh edition of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* published in 1857. The tales of the Brothers Grimm have been translated numerous times; this version has been selected as a reasonably trustworthy translation since Zipes states:

In preparing the present translation, I have endeavoured to respect the historical character and idiom of each tale and to retain a nineteenth-century flavour while introducing contemporary vocabulary and terms when they were, in my estimation, more apropos. Furthermore, I have tried to let the different voices within the Grimms’ collection speak for themselves. . . . In many instances, I have provided smoother transitions by adding phrases, but I have not departed radically from the texts. . . . Here and there the translations of the titles will differ with those in other translations. My purpose in doing so has been to make the titles historically more accurate. (2007: xlvii-xlviii)

The last version of the tale used in this dissertation is taken from *The Complete Illustrated Works of the Brothers Grimm*, which offers no notes on the translator or the

origins of the tales. This is the version most likely to be found in the nurseries of most Western homes, and it is for this reason that it has been chosen as a comparison to the more correct version offered by Zipes. Since the source of this translation is unclear the English title “Cinderella” will be used when referring to it.

First, when investigating the roles played by parental and familial figures<sup>46</sup> one finds the following: In “*Aschenputtel*” the audience is introduced to Cinderella’s mother who, on her death bed, instructs her daughter to be good and virtuous. Since this is her mother’s dying wish, Cinderella complies without question. However, in “*Cendrillon*” Cinderella’s mother is completely absent and her daughter’s good behaviour is credited to her gentle and loving nature. Her father is also absent from the tale after his marriage with Cinderella’s new step-mother; he only acts as an agent to introduce the character(s) who will cause Cinderella hardship and degradation. In the Brothers Grimm version of the tale the father plays a larger role: when going to town he brings each of the girls a present; he also tears down the dove-cote and cuts down the pear tree<sup>47</sup> when the Prince commands him to. But he plays no role in lightening his daughter’s burden. He even plays a part in her humiliation when the Prince asks about Cinderella at the end of the tale and he replies: “There’s only little Cinderella, my dead wife’s daughter, who’s *deformed*, but she can’t possibly be the bride” [own emphasis] (Zipes, 2007: 113).

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<sup>46</sup> The fairy godmother found in “*Cendrillon*” will not be discussed along with these figures even though she might rightly be considered to belong here. Since she fulfils the same role as the hazel tree and the birds in “*Aschenputtel*” they will be compared later on in this chapter.

<sup>47</sup> No reason is given for Cinderella’s father’s violent reactions. The storyteller does not relate to his audience why Cinderella’s father wishes to destroy her.

Cinderella's step-mother fulfils the role of the main evil-doer, banishing Cinderella to the kitchen to earn her keep. When news of the ball (festival) arrives Cinderella asks her step-mother whether she may attend it. Her step-mother tells her that she can attend if she can perform certain tasks within a time limit. First she tells Cinderella to pick a bowlful of lentils from the ashes of the fire within two hours. When Cinderella accomplishes this task another – seemingly impossible – task is set; she has to pick two bowlfuls of lentils from the ashes in one hour, which she also accomplishes. But still her step-mother denies her the honour of attending the ball (festival), claiming that she would embarrass her sisters, that everybody would laugh at her and that she has nothing to wear. All of these shortcomings are in fact caused by her step-mother, but this is conveniently forgotten. Interestingly enough, Cinderella's step-mother does not play a dominant role in the French version of the tale. She only makes Cinderella work in the kitchen and makes her sleep in the attic. It is Cinderella's step-sisters who make her life a misery, with the younger step-sister treating her only a little better than the elder. The step-sisters are the ones who enforce the status quo; they even ask her whether she would like to go to the ball with them; but knowing that they will not allow her to go, she declines. In this version of the tale she does not receive even a nominal chance to prove herself worthy of attending the ball as in the German version.

Thus, one finds that none of these characters plays exactly the same role in these two versions of the tale. In Perrault's version almost no parental figures are present; they do not play a large role in the tale: Cinderella's mother's death is only mentioned and her mother's grave plays no role at all, while her father only acts as a way of introducing her

step-mother and step-sisters. Even her step-mother<sup>48</sup> is conspicuously absent from the tale; the sisters are the ones who make Cinderella's life miserable. But Perrault goes even further; he differentiates between the two sisters by allowing the younger step-sister to exhibit some redeemable qualities.<sup>49</sup> In "*Aschenputtel*" Cinderella's mother is responsible for her demeanour, and her father plays a more significant part throughout the tale. Although he does nothing to alleviate her plight, he gives her the hazel twig which she plants on her mother's grave. Even though he takes part in her degradation he also (unknowingly) hands her an object of empowerment.<sup>50</sup> Cinderella's step-mother also plays a more active role in making her life as miserable as possible, while the step-sisters are mere adjuncts to their mother, and do not play as large a role in Cinderella's unhappiness as their mother.

Cinderella's fairy godmother in "*Cendrillon*" acts as the magical means that empowers her to attend the ball. Her godmother hollows out a pumpkin and turns it into a gilded coach. She also turns six mice into horses, a rat into a coachman, and six lizards into footmen. Cinderella's ragged clothes are also transformed into a beautiful dress made

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<sup>48</sup> Novels and the literary fairy tales written by Perrault and others like Madam d'Aulnoy during that era (1690–1715) were read mainly by women. Thus, Perrault might have adapted the character of the step-mother so as not to offend the greater part of his target audience. (<http://www.answers.com/topic/france>)

<sup>49</sup> One can only speculate about the reason for this. It could be that Perrault wished to introduce a greater variation of characters or simply because this would make the ending of his tale more plausible. If it was for the former reason it could be because his audience was more sophisticated (the literate upper classes), thus they might find the story unbelievable if confronted with only good and evil characters. A character that is neither purely good nor completely bad offers more of a sense of realism. Or it could have been because of the effect on the ending of the tale. Perrault cannot end the story happily for all of the sisters if there is nothing redeemable about them.

<sup>50</sup> After the hazel twig grows into a tree, every wish that Cinderella expresses while standing under that tree is fulfilled by two birds.

of gold and silver cloth, encrusted with jewels. She also receives a pair of glass slippers. Her godmother warns her that the magic will wear off by midnight, thus she has to leave the ball before then. In "*Aschenputtel*" Cinderella receives magical assistance from the hazel tree she has planted on her mother's grave. Whenever she stands beneath the tree and wishes for something, two birds (doves) provide her with her desire.<sup>51</sup> The festival which she wants to attend stretches over three evenings. Each time she asks for something from the tree she receives beautiful gowns and silk slippers. On the final evening she receives golden slippers from the doves. In this tale there are no magical time constraints, and she can stay as long as she desires, provided she gets home before her sisters. In both of the tales the Prince decides to coat the stairs with pitch so that she cannot run away. Thus she loses her shoe, in the French version a glass slipper and in the German tale a golden one.<sup>52</sup>

Thus one finds that the tales' sources of magic vary considerably, one version of the tale's magic deriving from nature and the other from a "supernatural" individual. The fact that Cinderella has a fairy godmother in the French version is also important in another way: she is not completely isolated from people who act kindly towards her. She has a fairy godmother who cares for her and helps her, while in "*Aschenputtel*" no such person comes to the fore. In the German tale she has to look out for herself, and the

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<sup>51</sup> The magic that grants Cinderella's wishes can be interpreted as her mother's love transcending the grave. (This motif is also found in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series where his mother's loving sacrifice of her own life grants him magical protection against Lord Voldemort.)

<sup>52</sup> "The shoe-test that proves her identity has fuelled an academic debate as to the material of the lost slipper (glass, fur, gold, embroidered silk). However, the test itself matters more than the material details." (<http://www.answers.com/topic/cinderella>)

only help she receives is from nature (the hazel tree and the birds), which may indicate that the audience of this version of the tale held nature and its mysteries in high regard. The Grimms' Cinderella is a strong woman who acts to improve her situation. She calls upon pigeons and turtle-doves to come to her aid to complete her step-mother's impossible tasks. She is not a passive creature awaiting deliverance; she is a resourceful person who plants the twig, waters it, tends it, and then tells the tree to "[s]hake and wobble . . . [to] let gold and silver" fall over her (Zipes, 2007: 111). She also has to devise her own plan for getting to and from the festival since she is not provided with a magic carriage. The Prince in this tale needs to be made aware (by the two doves sitting in the hazel tree) of the fact that he has taken the wrong sister(s) to be his wife – showing once again a reliance on nature. The Prince's status also appears lower, and he seems less heroic, raising Cinderella's status as a strong-willed individual by comparison. In "*Cendrillon*" she is not portrayed as a character who can look after herself, but rather as one who relies on others to save her from her predicament.

Turning to the shoe-test that reveals Cinderella's true identity, one once again finds vast differences between the two versions. In both cases the lost slipper is sent around the kingdom for every girl to try on. However, the scene that unfolds is very different. In "*Cendrillon*" the step-sisters try on the shoe, but it does not fit either of them. Then Cinderella asks whether she can try it on as well, and without much objection she is allowed to. It fits perfectly, and she produces the other shoe for good measure. Her godmother appears again and transforms her ragged clothes into a magnificent dress; she is immediately recognised as the beautiful princess from the ball and escorted to



the palace. In “*Aschenputtel*” the step-sisters, encouraged by their mother, resort to devious tactics to entrap the Prince. They cut off various parts of their feet (one cuts off her toe, and the other a part of her heel!) to fit them into the golden slipper. The birds in the hazel tree warn the Prince that he does not have the right girl. He returns to their home and asks the father whether they do not have another daughter. He is hesitant to reveal Cinderella, but on the Prince’s insistence she is fetched and tries on the golden slipper, which fits her perfectly.

The two – very different – endings of the tale offer different moral lessons for their respective audiences. In “*Aschenputtel*” we see that those who do bad things and use deception to get ahead in the world will be severely punished for their transgressions – the step-sisters’ eyes are pecked out by the birds from the hazel tree. However, in fairy tales as in reality, the fear of punishment is only a limited deterrent against wrongdoings. The conviction that crime does not pay (as portrayed in “*Aschenputtel*” where the two step-sisters cut off various parts of their feet to become the Prince’s bride, but to no avail) is a much more effective means of prevention – since the evil-doer is shown always to fail in the end. While the French version teaches a very different moral, it does teach its audience to treat other people in the way that they themselves would like to be treated; even though her step-sisters are spiteful and vindictive, Cinderella still treats them with kindness and respect. She is also a very forgiving character. When her sisters ask for her forgiveness at the end of the tale she gives it without hesitation or conditions. Furthermore, she asks them to love her and, as a gesture of good faith, finds them suitable husbands among the nobility.

When considering the two different Grimm translations, one finds a few interesting differences. When Cinderella asks to attend the ball, her step-mother in “*Aschenputtel*” tasks her with picking lentils from the ashes, while in “Cinderella” she has to pick beans from the ashes. The difference in size between a lentil and a bean is significant, thus the task set in “*Aschenputtel*” is far harder to accomplish. This degree of severity is found throughout “*Aschenputtel*”; for example, when the Prince enquires about Cinderella at the end of the tale her father calls her deformed, while in “Cinderella” her father simply states that she cannot be the Prince’s bride because she did not attend the ball (festival). In this translation of the tale her father does not go so far as to belittle her. In both translations the step-sisters are punished for their wicked deeds, but the degree of harshness varies: in “Cinderella” they wake up blind on Cinderella’s wedding day, while in “*Aschenputtel*” their eyes are pecked out by the birds from the hazel tree.<sup>53</sup> The fact that the punishment is mitigated in “Cinderella” may well indicate that this version of the Grimm Brothers’ Fairy Tales is intended for an audience which should be protected against violence and overt abuse: children.<sup>54</sup> Modern society is obsessed with the physical, moral, and sexual problems of childhood, thus society tries to keep these and related topics as far away as possible from children. For this reason, perhaps, the step-sisters’ eyes are not gouged out by the birds. However, in Zipes’s translation no such mitigating factors exist.

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<sup>53</sup> Even though their eyes are pecked out they also receive another form of punishment. While they are walking Cinderella down the aisle the birds (sitting on Cinderella’s shoulders) peck out only one of their eyes. They are still able to see Cinderella marry the Prince, before the birds peck out their remaining eyes. Thus the last image they will ever recall is that of their step-sister, whom they despised, marrying a man they both desired.

<sup>54</sup> At least, as the concept of being a child is understood in modern society.

The reason for these discrepancies is that fairy tales gradually became children's literature; they were not originally intended for childhood. "The child" and "childhood" (as we understand it today) are concepts that were brought into existence during the seventeenth century, and elaborated upon from then onwards (Sale, 1979: 27). Ariès (1962: 411) states that "in the Middle Ages, at the beginning of modern times, and for a long time after that in the lower class, children were mixed with adults as soon as they were considered capable of doing without their mothers or nannies, not long after a tardy weaning (in other words, at about the age of seven). They immediately went straight into the great community of men, sharing in the work and play of their companions, old and young alike." During this period there were no specific stages in the growth of children. In medieval and early Renaissance portraits (of noble and royal youths) there were no children; one rather finds depictions of adults of varying sizes wearing royal arms. Thus, one is less surprised when reading Zipes's translations since "the basic sense of the relations of members of a family to each other has changed since fairy tales were commonly told" (Sale, 1979: 27). However, in the case of "Cinderella" both the passing of time and the intervention of well-intentioned people have changed the way the story is told. Sale (1979: 28-29) further states:

We are . . . apt to imagine that there is some implicit schedule in human life, so we can imagine something especially interesting to people of a certain age, or something that is 'too much' for a child, or something we are 'too old for'. . . .  
Parents pick particular books for particular children at particular ages and adjust

their stories so they can be more easily understood or so they can seem more grown-up or up-to-date.

But it should not be forgotten that fairy tales hold no trace of these self-conscious decisions or this selectivity. Of course, in being part of the oral tradition, the teller decided how he would tell the tale in order to convey his specific message, but the changes made to the tale were never focused on whether the audience would be offended or unable to digest its harshness. Being part of the oral tradition has made the tale of Cinderella one of the most widely diffused fairy tales, with hundreds of variations found throughout Europe.<sup>55</sup> The basic plot structures in all of these versions are very closely related, and the universal appeal of such a “rags-to-riches” story may explain its successful diffusion across time and space. As was established earlier in this chapter, the French and German versions of the tale offer strikingly different sets of morals and outcomes, without changing the fundamental flow of the tale. The same can be said of the two translations based on the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. The degree of severity varies between the two translations, but the gist of the tale remains the same.

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<sup>55</sup> “Cinderella is the Italian Cenerentola, the French Cendrillon, the Spanish Cenicienta, the Catalan Ventafochs, the German Aschenbrödel or Aschenputtel (Grimm), the Russian Chernushka, the Hungarian Popelusha, and something similar to do with ashes in a dozen other European languages” (Brereton, 1957: xxxii).

## *Chapter 5: Petals on the Wet, Black Boughs*

In fairy tales the characters' physical appearance is frequently mentioned; women's beauty is highlighted throughout. This does not mean that no mention is made of the attractiveness of male characters, however. Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz (2003) found that the frequency with which reference is made to the physical attractiveness of men and women is almost the same. What is striking, however, is the way in which women's beauty is mentioned. In "Jorinda and Joringel" Jorinda is described as "more beautiful than any other maiden in the kingdom" (Zipes, 2007: 329); the princess in "The Pink Flower" is described as "more beautiful than any painter could have portrayed her" (Zipes, 2007: 347), and in "Rapunzel" it is stated that she is "the most beautiful child under the sun" (Zipes, 2007: 58). Using discourse analysis, Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz (2003) also found a close relationship between beauty and themes such as goodness (morality), industriousness, class, economic privilege and danger. All of these themes will be investigated in this chapter, as well as how characters – whether through negation or assertion of the self – fit into or break free of the power relations/hierarchies found in fairy tale society. The four tales to be discussed in detail in this chapter are: "Bluebeard",<sup>56</sup> "The Juniper Tree",<sup>57</sup> "Mother Holle" and "The Maiden without Hands". The tales will be discussed as follows: In considering the tale of "Mother Holle" specific

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<sup>56</sup> The version of Bluebeard that will be used in this dissertation is taken from Charles Perrault since the German version of the tale found in the Brothers Grimm collection was added posthumously.

<sup>57</sup> In some translations this tale is called "The Almond Tree" (Sale, 1979: 33).

attention will be paid to the relationship between beauty and industriousness. In “The Juniper Tree” one also finds a strong correlation between beauty and aspects such as danger, goodness/morality, and industriousness. “The Maiden without Hands” lends itself to the importance of religion within a society as well as the connection between beauty and aspects like goodness/morality, danger and class. There is a relationship between beauty and economic privilege within this tale but this theme will not be discussed in detail here, since it will be examined in the consideration of “Bluebeard”, as will the relationship between beauty and danger and goodness/morality. “Bluebeard” also lends itself to an investigation of the broader scope of fairy tale society, and will therefore be the final tale to be considered.

The definitive version of the tale “Mother Holle”<sup>58</sup> came from the Brothers Grimm. They took material from other versions<sup>59</sup> to compose a tale about a young maiden who is lovely and industrious and her step-sister who is ugly and lazy. The good sister sits by a well every day and spins until her fingers bleed, while the lazy sister stays at home and does nothing. One immediately realises that beauty is equated with industriousness, while unattractiveness is associated with negative characteristics. When the good sister accidentally drops her spindle down the well, her mother (who loves the lazy sister more, for she is her own flesh and blood) compels her to find it. Afraid of what her step-mother might do to her, she jumps down the well to search for the spindle. She

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<sup>58</sup> This tale is sometimes titled “Mother Holda” or “Mother Hulda”.

<sup>59</sup> Other versions of this tale include “The Fairies” found in Charles Perrault’s collection of fairy tales (1697), and Giambattista Basile’s “Three Fairies” published in the *Pentamerone* (1634-1636).

discovers that the bottom of the well leads to another realm. While searching for her missing spindle she comes across various strange phenomena. She encounters an oven, which asks her to take out its hot buns before they burn, and she meets an apple tree which asks her to pick its apples because they are ready to eat. She complies with both requests, since she is a good-natured and hard-working person. Later, when her sister, following in her footsteps in search of riches, encounters the same marvels, she refuses to help them since they cannot possibly give her what the good sister received. After the good sister has helped the oven and the apple tree she comes across a cottage where she meets an old woman, Mother Holle.<sup>60</sup> Mother Holle asks her to help with some household chores, and she complies with this request immediately. The most important chore she is tasked with is to make Mother Holle's bed; she must shake the pillows and duvet so hard that the feathers fly. If this occurs it will snow<sup>61</sup> on earth. She works hard, and Mother Holle treats her well. But family bonds prove more powerful; feeling homesick, she asks Mother Holle if she may return home. The old woman takes her to the gate, and as a reward for her industriousness showers her with gold, which sticks to her (as well as returning the spindle which had been dropped down the well). When she returns home, greed and the fact that she cannot stand the enrichment of the good maiden above her own daughter drive the step-mother to send her own daughter

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<sup>60</sup> "In *Deutsche Mythologie (German Mythology)* Jacob Grimm wrote that Mother Holle was a mythical creature who could do good or evil depending on whether one maintained an orderly household" (<http://www.answers.com/topic/mother-holle-1>).

<sup>61</sup> Snow can be seen as having a negative effect on humanity. Then why does the beautiful maiden comply with Mother Holle's request? Since this tale is a German tale, and it has already been established in the previous chapter that the Germans hold nature in high regard, one can assume that they were aware of the importance of seasonal changes. If winter does not come, the ground has no chance to rest before producing crops in spring and summer. (Snow also often heralds Christmas in the northern hemisphere.)

on the same journey. When the lazy daughter arrives at Mother Holle's house she receives the same invitation as her sister. However, instead of working hard she slacks off, which results in her dismissal. Mother Holle takes her back to the portal and "rewards" her for her work by pouring pitch over her. The lazy sister cannot wash it off, and it remains as a symbol of her slovenly behaviour for the rest of her life.<sup>62</sup> Nepotism plays a major role in this tale. If the mother had treated both girls equally the story might have ended differently for all parties involved. If she had not inspired fear in the good sister, there would have been no need for her to jump down the well in search of the spindle. And if she had tasked the lazy sister with chores, she would have turned out a better person. This illustrates the effect one person (especially a parent) can have on another's life. However, this is not the intended message of "Mother Holle". The tale teaches that hard work will always be well repaid.

In "The Juniper Tree" one also finds a correlation between beauty and goodness/morality. When the tale begins the audience is informed of "a rich man who had a beautiful and pious wife" (Zipes, 2007: 207-208). Immediately a positive characteristic is equated with beauty. The wife dies shortly after the birth of a son, and after some time the boy's father remarries. The step-mother's appearance is never described, but it is mentioned that she mistreats him. This also illustrates the relationship between beauty and goodness, since the lack of a physical description

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<sup>62</sup> In other versions of the tale the good daughter is rewarded with gold and jewels for helping an old woman or fairy. When she speaks these gifts fall from her tongue, while the lazy daughter spits out toads and snakes.



would lead the audience or reader to decide what she looks like. And since evil characters are usually described as ugly, most would imagine her to be so. All we can be sure of is that she is not beautiful, since it would have been mentioned if she were. She also commits a series of evil deeds against the boy:

[W]henever she looked at the boy, her heart was cut to the quick. She could not forget that he would always stand in her way and prevent her daughter from inheriting everything, which is what the woman had in mind. Thus the devil took hold of her and influenced her feelings toward the boy until she became quite cruel toward him: she pushed him from one place to the next, slapped him here and cuffed him there, so that the poor child lived in constant fear. (Zipes, 2007: 209)

When he returns from school she coaxes him to take an apple from a chest, and as he looks inside she slams the lid down, decapitating him. Afraid of what might happen to her, she replaces the boy's head on his body and places him on a chair with an apple in his hand. His half-sister, Marlene, who also wants an apple, asks her mother about it, and is instructed to "box him on the ear" if he does not want to give her his apple (Zipes, 2007: 210). Marlene does as her mother has told her, and because her brother's head is only precariously balanced on his body, she knocks it off. This once again illustrates how wicked Marlene's mother is. She does not protect her daughter from experiencing death, and furthermore she allows Marlene to feel guilty about (as she believes) having killed her brother. Marlene's mother also decides to chop the boy up and add him to the

stew to get rid of the evidence. During dinner she feeds the boy to his father;<sup>63</sup> she also lies about his whereabouts, saying that he has gone to visit some of his mother's relatives for six weeks. By feeding his only son to her husband, Marlene's mother attains the classical epitome of evil. Marlene, being a good and kind soul, gathers all her brother's bones and buries them under the juniper tree, which leads to the resurrection of the boy as a beautiful songbird. At the end of the tale the step-mother is punished for her evil deeds, when the songbird drops a millstone on her which kills her. At this point the boy is also resurrected in human form. Both children have been victims of the step-mother's deeds. Thus one also finds a correlation between beauty and danger in this tale. When the boy is born he is described as looking exactly as his mother had wished: "a child as red as blood and as white as snow"<sup>64</sup> (Zipes, 2007: 208). Even when the boy dies he returns as a beautiful bird, thus strengthening his claim to beauty.

In this tale, beauty also acts as a tool for improving one's situation. The townspeople give the bird various gifts because it sings so magnificently – a skill that is linked with its

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<sup>63</sup> The motif of a father eating his own offspring has been used numerous times. In Greek mythology Cronos eats his children (Hestia, Hades, Demeter, Poseidon and Hera) because it has been prophesied that one of his children will supplant him. The prophecy does come to fulfillment because his wife Rhea devises a plan to save her next child, Zeus (Ferguson, 2000: 20). In the case of the Greek myth the children are consumed because of their father's fear of losing power, while in "The Juniper Tree" the father eats the child unknowingly. He is fed to his father because his step-mother is afraid of what might happen to her if the truth of his murder is revealed.

<sup>64</sup> The same motifs are found in "Snow White" (source of translation: "*Schneewittchen*", 1812). In this fairy tale the mother wishes for a child "as white as snow, as red as blood, and as black as the wood of the window frame" (Zipes, 2007: 237). Soon afterwards she gives birth to a daughter whose skin is as white as snow and who has lips as red as blood and hair the colour of ebony. The mother dies shortly after her child's birth, which is also the case in "The Juniper Tree".

physical appearance. One of the gifts the bird asks for and receives is a millstone<sup>65</sup> which he uses to kill his wicked step-mother. After she dies he is returned to his human form and lives happily ever after with his father and sister. In this tale one also finds a correlation between beauty and industriousness. The bird sings his song to the townspeople in return for gifts which he uses to reward or punish his family members. He plays an active role in improving his situation, something that does not happen in Perrault's "Sleeping Beauty". An almost identical motif is used in this tale: the mother of the Prince (who frees Sleeping Beauty from her hundred-year sleep) is said to have some ogre genes, and when the newly crowned King goes to war the Queen Mother decides that she wants to eat the Queen (Sleeping Beauty) and her two children. However, this does not come to pass since one of the servants decides to hide them and serve the Queen Mother animals in their stead. The point here is that characters who are placed in danger rarely play a decisive role in positively influencing their situations – especially when they are female characters. But the boy in "The Juniper Tree" works vigorously towards restoring his place in his father's household.

Turning towards social issues in this tale, one finds an interesting comparison between Marlene and her brother, since both are, to a certain extent, victims of Marlene's mother. Thus, the reader/audience is offered the chance to analyse how male and female characters react in the same situation. Both are confronted with an evil (step-) mother. The boy's fate is, indeed, much more severe than that of his sister, but the

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<sup>65</sup> He also receives a golden chain which he gives to his father, and red shoes which he gives to Marlene.

comparison will hold for the present purpose. The boy actively works towards restoring his place, while Marlene does nothing except burying her brother's remains. Since they were both raised within the same environment, the only logical reason for their different attitudes towards their circumstances would be that they were taught to act differently in accordance with their gender. Even though the boy is murdered, it seems that Marlene is more of a victim than he is. She takes the blame for her brother's death, and she becomes an unwilling accomplice to the enforced cannibalism. She is also effectively silenced by guilt and her mother. The only thing Marlene can do is cry; she cannot speak out about what truly happened to her brother. He, on the other hand, in the form of a bird, sings to the townspeople of the terrible things that befell him. In return he receives gifts from the goldsmith, the shoemaker, and the workers at the mill, using the gifts to restore his human form, reward his father and sister, and punish his step-mother. As the tale progresses one also finds out that the boy has gone to school, while Marlene has remained at home. Here, one finds that education is only destined for male characters, while female characters have to remain home and see to the household chores. This tale also provides its audience/reader with the sense that children were regarded as smaller versions of adults. Marlene's mother does not shy away from involving her daughter in cutting up and stewing her brother – something modern society would attempt to shield children from.<sup>66</sup> And when the father asks about the boy's whereabouts and is told that he has gone to visit family in the country, what

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<sup>66</sup> Modern society makes use of age restrictions and content control to keep harmful subject matter, like violent crimes and explicit sexual content, from children who are deemed too young and impressionable.

upsets him most is that the boy did not say goodbye, rather than that he is travelling alone.

The tale also offers its audience/reader a set of religious beliefs. At the outset one finds out that the boy's mother is pious, thus introducing one to the fact that religion will play a role in the plot of the tale. The first wife also prays for the birth of a child, and because of this she seems to be more than just an incidental figure. Later in the tale Marlene mirrors the first wife's actions,<sup>67</sup> thus reminding the reader/audience of the good mother. This also likens Marlene to the first wife, rather than to her own mother. The step-mother's evil behaviour is ascribed to the devil's influence, as has been shown. The step-mother in this tale is very interesting, since she is the only step-mother in Western fairy tales who actually consummates her hatred and succeeds in murdering the child.<sup>68</sup> However, other elements come into play to rectify her wrongdoing. Immediately after she kills the boy she feels guilty and afraid. "She scurries around after the murder, puts the boy's head back on his shoulders, places the blame on her own daughter, whom she loves, and serves the boy to his father in a stew" (Sale, 1979: 35). She is not as clever as Snow White's step-mother, for instance; she is violent and heartless, but haunted by her acts. She is also a very frightening character in herself, since she does not use supernatural or demonic powers. The devil encourages her to commit her

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<sup>67</sup> The boy's mother prays for a child under the juniper tree, and afterwards feels happy and sure that her prayers will be answered. Marlene buries her brother's remains under the juniper tree, then feels happy and "as if her brother were still alive" (Zipes, 2007: 211).

<sup>68</sup> Snow White's step-mother does not attempt to murder Snow White herself. The same may be said of Sleeping Beauty's step-mother, who thinks that Sleeping Beauty and her children have been killed and made into delicacies for her delight.

various sins, but this does not make her demonic; rather it makes her human. At the end of the tale her guilty conscience gets the better of her. When the bird sings outside the window she states: "I'm so scared that my teeth are chattering. I feel as if fire were running through my veins" (Zipes, 2007: 215). Here one finds an implicit reference to hell;<sup>69</sup> it appears that the step-mother suspects that her end is near and that she will suffer for all her grievous wrongdoing. The teller of this tale shows his audience/reader the pitfalls of not guarding oneself against evil. The first wife acts as a contrast to the second wife, illustrating that there is a righteous way, and a way that will lead one to perdition. One path will give one exactly what one wants, while the other will lead to one's demise. Thus this tale contains a religious (moral) lesson: live a righteous and pious life, doing no harm to others;<sup>70</sup> those who do wrong will receive just punishment.

The tale "The Maiden without Hands" offers a more explicit religious message, since the plot is dependent on divine and demonic stimuli. At the beginning of the tale the heroine is portrayed as a complete innocent, something that changes in the course of the tale.<sup>71</sup> She becomes more aware of external influences and how harsh life can really be, but without blemishing her virtue. To a certain extent, however, she is stuck in a kind of

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<sup>69</sup> In two more instances fiery imagery is used to describe the step-mother: "Her hair flared up like red-hot flames" (Zipes, 2007: 217) and her uneasy feelings: "I feel as if the whole house is shaking and about to go up in flames!" (Zipes, 2007: 216).

<sup>70</sup> Do not harm others physically or psychologically. The (step-)mother harmed the boy physically when she killed him and she hurt Marlene psychologically by letting her innocent daughter take the blame and suffer the guilt for the murder of her brother.

<sup>71</sup> This does not mean that she loses her innocence; rather that she obtains knowledge of the world without becoming tainted by greed and hate.

limbo.<sup>72</sup> she will remain at home, sweeping the yard, for the rest of her life if external conditions do not prompt her to take action. This does happen, in the form of an ill-conceived which her father (the miller) unknowingly makes with the devil. This horrible moment marks the dramatic beginning of her forthcoming journey and development. She finds herself in a variety of terrible situations, all instigated by the devil, which she transcends through the grace of God and her own inner strength. The first obstacle she faces is her father's unknowingly bartering her for wealth (he does not realise that the devil is referring to her as the bargain). Witting or not, this is a monumental betrayal, since the parent (who is supposed to keep her out of danger) is the one placing her in harm's way. She, however, does not show any signs of betrayal or hurt, and the reader/audience assumes that she forgives her father immediately since the tale makes no further mention of it. This instance also makes one attend to the disastrous influences of greed and luxury. The father has fallen on hard times and the bargain with the mysterious man in the forest will help him regain his wealth and live a comfortable life, one where he does not have to chop down trees. Two other lessons that can be drawn from the deal with the devil are: firstly, if something sounds too good to be true, it usually is; and secondly, that one should guard against the weaknesses of one's own soul.

The Maiden spends the next three years (the allotted time before the devil comes to fetch her) "in fear of God and without sin" (Zipes, 2007: 145). When the devil comes to

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<sup>72</sup> Like most heroines she is portrayed as a passive figure who only reacts towards the situations in which she is placed.

collect what belongs to him, he is unable to touch her because “she [has] washed herself clean and [drawn] a circle around her with chalk” (Zipes, 2007: 145). Her physical cleanliness becomes a symbol of her spiritual virtue. The devil cannot touch her because she lives a righteous life. So the devil commands her father to keep his daughter away from water (this refers implicitly to objects that might clean her spiritually); otherwise he can have no power over her. Once again her physical cleanliness reflects her faith in God. She cries on her hands to keep them clean, therefore the devil still has no power over her. The tears that keep her hands clean symbolise repentance for the sins her hands might have committed. The devil then commands her father to cut off her hands so that she may not cry them clean. Her father complies once again, saying to her: “My child, if I don’t chop off both your hands, the devil will take me away, and in my fear I promised I’d do it. Please help me out of my dilemma and forgive me for the injury I’m causing you” (Zipes 2007: 145). She forgives her father because she is a kind person, but she also replies that she is his daughter and he may do with her as he pleases. She is her father’s property and because of her obedience she does not object to disfigurement. The devil returns a third time, but still cannot touch her, as she has cried the stumps of her arms clean. At this point the devil appears to give up. In the character of the father, one sees how easily a person can be subverted to do evil deeds through greed and fear. The tale instructs that one should always be on one’s guard against such weaknesses or sins.

After the devil leaves, the miller tells his daughter that he will give her a lavish life because of his new-found wealth. She declines this offer and sets off to wander the



world. The reason for her behaviour is probably rooted within her religion. She cannot make use of any advantage which was obtained through a deal with the devil. And even though her father meant well, he is the person who endangered her. She must strike out on her own. After walking the entire day she comes to a royal garden with fruit trees but cannot get to them because the garden is bordered by a moat. She prays to God because she is hungry, and an angel appears who closes one of the locks so that she may walk through the moat. Once again, this story instructs its audience to trust in God,<sup>73</sup> not in earthly possessions or fallible human beings. The angel leads her to a pear tree; after she has eaten a single pear she disappears into a bush. The gardener sees all of this. The next evening, the gardener, the king and a priest watch the same events unfold. The king falls in love with her and marries her.

After some time the king has to go to war, and during this time his son is born. His mother sends him a letter, but along the way the devil intercepts it and substitutes his own letter. Once again the devil tries to tempt people to sin. The letter the king receives states that the child is a changeling.<sup>74</sup> The natural reaction to this terrible news is to have the child killed, since changelings are notorious for the havoc and pain they cause.

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<sup>73</sup> Matthew 6:26-32 states: "26 Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? 27 Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? 28 And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin . . . 31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? 32 . . . for your heavenly father knoweth that ye have need of all these things".

<sup>74</sup> It was believed that witches and fairies sometimes exchanged human children with their own. "Sometimes the devil himself was believed to affect the exchange. Having carried off young maidens, he had intercourse with them and kept them till they were delivered. A human child was then stolen by him, and the offspring of this union was put in its place" (Hastings & Selbie, 2003: 361).

However, the King's letter instructs his mother to keep the child and his wife safe until he returns. Having failed in his first attempt to get the child killed, the devil intercepts this letter too. The letter the King's mother receives instructs her to kill the child and the wife, but as she cannot bring herself to follow her son's orders, she writes to him once more. As before, the devil changes the letters and she receives the same message as before. She loves the Handless Maiden and her son, and decides to send them away to keep them safe. With this decision she is risking her own life, for if the King finds out that she has disobeyed his orders, he may have her executed. This decision illustrates once more that the devil's power over humanity is limited. He only influences the lives of those who allow him to do so. The maiden's father succumbed to the enticements of the devil, while the King and his mother did not. This can also teach a far more mundane lesson: do not take everything at face value. If you are unsure about something, or something does not seem right, then you should not act upon it. Follow your instincts.

The characters in this tale rely heavily on God; the Handless Maiden must weather countless attacks from the devil. Because of her faith she receives her "happily ever after": her hands grow back and her husband finds her and their son. The King fasts while he wanders the world in search of his wife and son. He is sustained by God until he finds them. Thus, the teller of this tale wanted to instruct his specific audience to trust in God.

This tale also lends itself to an examination of the relationship between beauty and class. In fairy tales, beautiful women have a good chance of ending up as part of the

nobility. At the beginning of her tale, the Handless Maiden is only a miller's daughter. Within the hierarchy of classes, she ranks very low. However, through her trials and tribulations she becomes upwardly mobile within this hierarchy. The King sees her in the garden, immediately falls in love with her and marries her. Thus, she moves from one of the bottom tiers to the top tier: becoming part of the monarchy. This is true in many fairy tales. Cinderella is elevated from her servant status to princess when she marries the prince. The unnamed maiden in "The Three Spinners"<sup>75</sup> marries the prince after spinning the allotted amount of flax. Interestingly, the Handless Maiden loses her access to all the privileges of a queen because of the devil's trickery. She wanders around until she comes across a cottage where she is welcomed by an angel. She stays there until her husband finds her (and their son) many years later. She lives a simple hermit's life, moving down the hierarchy of class again but attaining a higher level of spirituality – so much so that, by the grace of God, her hands grow back. After she is reunited with her husband she regains all the advantages that go along with the monarchy. However, she never uses the money or power associated with her social rank before the devil's deception. This again illustrates that she is not dependent on worldly possessions, but has rooted her happiness in something more solid: religion.<sup>76</sup>

The tale "The Maiden without Hands" is intended as a basis of instruction for a specific

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<sup>75</sup> In this tale it seems that industriousness is a negative characteristic since the maiden asks three spinners to do the work for her. When the queen sees the beautiful flax, she offers her son the prince's hand in marriage to the maiden. The maiden invites the three spinners to her wedding, and when the prince sees how ugly they are he commands his new bride that she may never spin again.

<sup>76</sup> The tale in this form is intended for a Christian audience, but if the audience changes the teller can easily alter the divine and demonic stimuli to deities of other religions without changing the intended message of the tale.

society. It teaches people certain morals, how to act towards others, and most importantly to place all trust in God. To a certain extent all fairy tales teach something; even an evil character like Bluebeard can have a positive influence on the reader/audience.

Bluebeard is one of the most monstrous fairy tale husbands found in the genre; in the opening paragraph of the tale it is stated that his blue beard made him look “terrifyingly ugly” (Brereton, 1957: 27). However, he is not the only fairy tale groom or husband who is ruthlessly cruel. The sorcerer in “Fitcher’s Bird” and the groom in “The Robber Bridegroom”, to name only two, exhibit the same characteristics. These two tales also share other characteristics with “Bluebeard”: the grooms hide a dark and dangerous aspect of themselves from their future brides; they all put their wives/brides through a test of faithfulness (which they fail for the most part), and the villains are all punished for their despicable behaviour. The manner in which they are brought to justice varies in each of these tales. Since “Fitcher’s Bird”, “Bluebeard” and “The Robber Bridegroom” make use of almost identical motifs, they may be investigated together.

In “Bluebeard” the wife-to-be consents to marrying him after he puts up a front of being agreeable; afterwards she imagines that his beard is not as blue as she first thought it to be. This demonstrates that she is willing to give Bluebeard a second chance, perhaps because of her naivety. This act of trust is later repaid by a test of faithfulness, which she fails. Bluebeard tells his new wife that he must go away on business; he leaves her the keys of the house, telling her that she can go anywhere and use anything she

desires, his only prohibition being that she may not enter “the little room at the end of the long gallery on the ground floor” (Brereton, 1957: 29). Bettelheim (1977) equates the forbidden room with sexual infidelity, since this is, according to him, the only transgression that is punishable by death. He strengthens his argument by interpreting the key that opens the forbidden room as a phallic symbol since the blood that cannot be wiped from it represents the blood that flows when the hymen is first broken. Bettelheim offers a valid interpretation; however, it is in my opinion too narrow. If one follows Bettelheim’s interpretation one has to assume that Bluebeard is a reasonable character, that he conforms to and follows the rules of the society in which he lives. This seems unlikely since it is mentioned that the new bride’s friends did not want to visit her while her husband was home because they were afraid of him. A man who instils fear in the majority of society is rarely a person who feels obliged to obey societal rules and norms. Furthermore, one cannot assume that Bluebeard will kill his current wife (and would have killed all his previous wives) based on a single norm accepted in his society (that if a wife has sexual relations with anyone except her husband she may be punished with death). It is safe to assume that he is a very unreasonable character, and one can therefore also assume that he does not need a valid reason to kill his wives. These tales originate in an era when women were seen as good for only three things: having children, raising children, and housework. Only a select few women were privileged enough to receive a rudimentary education, learning to read and write – and they were still deemed unworthy to learn everything men did. Knowledge was forbidden. Thus, it would be more reasonable to suppose that Bluebeard’s wife was curious about

everything that was forbidden, not only about sexual exploration. She was tempted by something unknown, which was considered to be exclusively male property.

With his test of faithfulness Bluebeard sets out to assess two things about his new wife: whether she knows her place, and her obedience to him. These two aspects are closely related since both evaluate her subservience to others; the first instance refers to her role within the society while the second refers to her role as his wife. It must be mentioned that the society of this tale is male-dominated. One of the first clues the reader receives of this is when Bluebeard asks “a lady of good family” (Brereton, 1957: 27) for the hand of one of her daughters in marriage. It seems that she is unable to refuse his request, even though she knows that all his previous wives have mysteriously disappeared. The fact that women consented to marry him even though he was “so terrifyingly ugly that there was not a woman or girl who did not flee at the sight of him” (Brereton, 1957: 27) also indicates that male-dominated power relations are the order of the day. Thus, it is not far-fetched that Bluebeard tests his wife because of his superiority and his desire to have power over others. By leaving the small key which opens the forbidden room in his wife’s care Bluebeard tempts her, much as the serpent tempted Eve in Paradise. He is almost sure that his wife’s female curiosity will get the better of her; however, if she is an obedient wife she will heed his warnings and stay away from the room ... which she does not do. Also, when she decides to explore the room she does it while she has guests, showing that she does not conform to the traditional role of compliant and engaging hostess (although this does not form part of Bluebeard’s test). However, on both fronts, being subservient to her husband as well as

conforming to the society she lives in, she breaks free of what is expected of her. But not to such an extent as to defend herself against her husband's unjust punishment; she does not even inform her sister, Anne, of the contents of the forbidden room. She also waits for her brothers to visit instead of sending an urgent message to them.

Another interesting point concerning "Bluebeard" is that beauty is likened to good, while an ugly appearance is associated with a dark or evil character. It also becomes apparent that even if a character possesses beautiful things, as in the case of Bluebeard, these possessions do not make him or her a righteous character. Wealth is gathered by a seeker, whereas beauty is innate. This suggests that virtue is not something that can be taught, but a quality that can only be inherited. Since one's appearance is predetermined by genetics, does this then also imply that one's personality is predetermined? In fairy tales this is for the most part true; the characters play the roles they are assigned, they do not display existential dilemmas, or question or doubt themselves, or lament their woeful situations. Being part of the oral tradition these tales were intended to convey a certain general message, be it humorous or serious, so they did not focus on how a certain individual struggled with his or her plight. Thus, it is all the more interesting when a character strays from the path they are supposed to follow. Bluebeard's wife is beautiful; thus, it is predetermined that she is inherently good and for this reason she cannot personally bring Bluebeard to justice. In a patriarchal society she would be prosecuted for murder if she did decide to kill him herself. She does not run away either, although this appears like the logical way out. This may seem strange, but if one bears in mind that she would probably be shunned by her society for

such behaviour, even with damning evidence against her husband, one comes to understand why she waits for her brothers to rescue her from the tyrant. Thus, she does break away from the role of subservient wife, but she still remains a passive character out of fear of what might happen to her.

Contrarily, In “Fitcher’s Bird” (which makes use of the same motifs) the heroine becomes an active participant in the outcome of her fate. She tricks the sorcerer numerous times. When she goes exploring she leaves the egg he entrusted to her in a safe place. After she opens the forbidden room she finds her two sisters, who were the sorcerer’s previous victims, and reanimates them after arranging all their hacked-up body parts correctly.<sup>77</sup> When the sorcerer returns she hides her sisters. After he has examined the keys and egg and found nothing wrong with them he announces that she is worthy to marry him. “But, he no longer had any power over her and had to do what she requested” (Zipes, 2007: 206). Curiously, the power dynamic of the tale turns around completely. She persuades him to carry her sisters and some gold back to her parents’ house while she organises their wedding ceremony. She invites all of his friends and escapes from the castle by disguising herself as a strange bird (hence the title). Once she is safely away, her brother and other relatives burn the castle to the ground. Even though she is not the one who strikes the sorcerer down, she plays a much more significant role in her salvation than Bluebeard’s wife. She sends word to

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<sup>77</sup> Mediaeval tales made use of the same motif. In “Gawain and the Green Knight”, the Green Knight reattaches his severed head; in the “Tale of Sir Gareth” a damsel uses a special ointment to the same end.



her brother to save her from the sorcerer, while Bluebeard's wife tells no one of her predicament; she waits for her brothers to come and visit, leaving her survival to chance. In yet another tale, "The Robber Bridegroom", the girl is also responsible for her own survival. However, her escape from the cannibalistic bridegroom is aided by an old woman who takes pity on her and slips a sleeping draught into the cannibals' stew; after they all fall asleep the girl and the woman escape.

These three women come to their (potential) husbands in different ways. Bluebeard's wife decides to marry him of her own accord (after he pressures her mother into giving him one of her daughters to marry); the girl in "Fitcher's Bird" is stolen from her home. In "The Robber Bridegroom" the girl has no say in whom she wants to marry; however, the person exerting pressure on her to marry is her father, because he "wanted to see her well provided for and well married" (Zipes, 2007: 187). Once again, her father's desire for her to marry ties in with social convention: her livelihood and happiness depend on a man who can provide for her. It would seem that this man's credentials are not checked further than his monetary ability to provide for his new wife, since it is overlooked that he is not only a robber, but also a cannibal. She, however, has an uneasy feeling about her future husband, and on her way to his house she leaves a trail of peas and lentils so that she will be able to find her way home. Once she arrives she realises the true nature of her future husband. He and his friends have kidnapped another girl whom they cut to pieces. As evidence she takes the slaughtered girl's ring finger. When he comes to visit her she exposes him in front of everyone. He and his fellow cannibal thieves are captured, taken to the magistrate and later executed. The degree to which each of

these women/girls participates in their own survival varies. Bluebeard's wife is the most passive of the three, while the girl in "Fitcher's Bird" is the most active. However, the degree of activity/passivity is not the issue here; what is important is that each of these female characters steps away from what is expected of them by their (future) husbands: blind obedience – thus, obtaining various degrees of independency and agency. These tales present female characters who are naturally curious about their husband or grooms and their immediate environment. These are cautionary tales, but they do not warn against a healthy sense of curiosity.<sup>78</sup> Inquisitiveness helps one grow as an individual, and being blind to one's environment only places one in more danger. These tales also instruct one to follow one's instincts and not simply to conform to what is expected: one must find one's own way.

As with the women in the previous three tales, most heroines in fairy tales are beautiful and their beauty is usually equated with goodness. However, being ugly is not always equated with evil as in the case with Bluebeard.<sup>79</sup> In another tale by Charles Perrault, "Ricky with the Tuft", the Queen gives birth to a boy "who was so ugly and misshapen that . . . they doubted whether he was human" (Brereton, 1957: 65). However, he is not evil or conniving, but loving and intelligent. This being a fairy tale, however, he cannot

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<sup>78</sup> "Yet illustrators, commentators, and re-tellers alike seem to have fallen in line with Perrault's view, as expressed in his moral to the tale, that 'Bluebeard' is about the evils of female curiosity" (<http://www.answers.com/topic/bluebeard-2>).

<sup>79</sup> The robber bridegroom and the sorcerer are never physically described, thus being ugly cannot be universally identified with being evil. And, conversely, Snow White's evil step-mother is described as "the (second-) fairest in the land."

remain ugly since he is a very good person.<sup>80</sup> Thus, at the end of the tale he is transformed into a handsome prince<sup>81</sup> when a beautiful (but stupid) princess falls in love with him. In return she becomes intelligent. If one considers these reciprocal gifts one finds a stunning dissonance. They are not equal: beauty fades while intelligence remains. Even in this tale one finds that men are superior to women, since the gift that Ricky gives to his future bride is of more worth than the one he receives. Also, before she bestows her love on Ricky, he must first explain to her that if she chooses to love him he will be turned into an attractive prince, illustrating that even though she receives wit and intelligence, she is still inferior to a male character. For this reason the tale remains within the socially accepted norm: men are (always) superior to women. However, in this tale one does find that the power relation between Ricky with the Tuft and the princess is more equal than that between Bluebeard and his wife. Ricky does not force her to marry him; he grants her wish and then gives her a year to decide for herself whether she wants to do so. Even after a year has passed, and she still has not made a decision, he reasons with her, explaining to her what will happen if she does decide to marry him. He never forces her or tricks her.

Turning to the relationship between beauty and other aspects in the tale of “Bluebeard” one finds a close relationship between beauty and three of the five aspects identified:

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<sup>80</sup> Virtuous characters are usually rewarded in some way or another. Their reward is usually something that they are lacking: wealth, freedom, or (as in Ricky’s case) beauty.

<sup>81</sup> In “Beauty and the Beast” the same transformation occurs. The Beast, who appears monstrous, is in reality a kind and generous being. In the end he is transformed (back) into a handsome prince because Beauty realizes she loves him.

danger, economic privilege and goodness/morality. In “Bluebeard” it is the girl’s beauty that places her in danger. Because she is beautiful, she (along with her sister, Anne) catches Bluebeard’s eye, which leads to their marriage and, later, to his test of fidelity, which she fails. The same instances are found within “Fitcher’s Bird” and “The Robber Bridegroom”: the girls come to the attention of the villains because of their appearance.

It seems that beauty does not necessarily act as an agent to remove women from danger. It does happen that a beautiful girl marries a prince who removes her from her terrible circumstances, as in the case of Cinderella. Thus, her beauty plays a part in improving her circumstances, even though her appearance is also responsible for her initial situation. But Bluebeard’s wife’s beauty does not fulfil the same double role. Bluebeard’s wife is plunged into her dire situation because of her good looks, but she is not saved by them. As mentioned earlier, her brothers rescue her from her husband. Interestingly, neither of the female characters in “Fitcher’s Bird” and “The Robber Bridegroom” is rescued by beauty, but rather by their own resourcefulness. Both devise ways to escape from their murderous grooms and reveal their true identities. Beauty also plays a decisive role in the economic privilege of these female characters. Because they are beautiful they marry, become engaged to, or are kidnapped by wealthy evil characters who desire beautiful wives.

It is never mentioned in the tales how these evil characters came by their treasure, only that they have it. It is safe to assume that they acquired their wealth in some devious way, since fairy tale characters rarely have both good and evil characteristics. In the tale

of “Bluebeard” his wife inherits all his wealth after his demise. In “Fitcher’s Bird” the third sister smuggles her two elder sisters and some gold from the sorcerer’s hideout. Thus, beauty does not guarantee the economic privilege of the female characters at the outset of the tale. Bluebeard’s wife comes from a good family, and one assumes that they are relatively well off, while the three sisters in “Fitcher’s Bird” do not possess any riches. However, at the end of both these tales the female characters receive some form of monetary gain. The relationship between beauty and economic privilege is also found in “Cinderella”: it is never mentioned that her father is poor; on the contrary, he must have some wealth and status at court for his family to be invited to the royal ball. But Cinderella has no access to that money. She only gains positive economic status when she marries the prince.

The relationship between beauty and goodness/morality is also found in each of these tales. Ugliness is usually equated with evil, as in the case of Cinderella’s step-sisters, step-mother and Bluebeard; however, this is not always the case. As mentioned earlier, Ricky with the Tuft as well as the Beast<sup>82</sup> in “Beauty and the Beast” are both ugly, but they are not evil. Instead their ugliness is taken away at the end of their respective tales so that their appearance matches their inherently noble characters. Bluebeard’s wife’s good characteristics are shown throughout the tale. Firstly she consents to marry Bluebeard after she gets to know him a little better; she decides to give him another

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<sup>82</sup> Enchanted beasts “do not wish to be animals, and, while enchanted, they are the kindest, the most patient, the most gentlemanly or ladylike, the most civilized creatures in the stories. They are willing to put up with faithless, inconsiderate, and rude human behavior in order to regain their human form, often so they can marry the very people who are hardest on them” (Sale, 1979: 78).

chance even though no-one knows what may have happened to his previous wives. Her decision can be ascribed to naivety, but even if that is the case it does not detract from her essentially good nature: placing her trust in a man who does not really deserve it. Her good nature is emphasised when she uses her new-found wealth at the end of the tale to “marry her sister Anne to a young nobleman who had long been in love with her, and . . . to buy captains’ commissions for her brothers” (Brereton, 1957: 35). The girl in “Fitcher’s Bird” is also a good character since she risks her own life to save her sisters. In Perrault’s version of “Cinderella”, she also forgives her step-sisters for all their wrongdoing against her and finds them husbands in the court.

Beauty thus has an interesting relationship with industriousness, goodness/morality, economic privilege, danger, and class. It appears that beautiful women in fairy tales are usually kind-hearted and hard-working, as illustrated in the tales discussed in this chapter. They are usually rewarded for their goodness (beauty) by gaining some form of monetary advantage and/or an increase in their social standing (class). Beauty also seems to go hand-in-hand with danger, be it for Cinderella, Snow White, Rapunzel or any other unnamed princess or damsel. They become targets of malicious attacks because of their physical appearance. These attacks are usually instigated by other women: predominantly their step-mothers and step-sisters. Men are rarely the direct cause of the heroine’s suffering even though the societies in which these tales take place are patriarchal. The Handless Maiden’s hands are chopped off by her father because of his ill-conceived deal with the devil, not because he is vindictive or malicious. However, women are usually treated as inferior to men. Bluebeard wants to

kill his wife because she has disobeyed his orders. She had no real say in whether she wanted to marry Bluebeard or not; he told her mother that he wanted to wed either her or her sister. Fairy tales abound with similar instances of women being treated like chattels, the reason being that when these tales were told women had a very specific role in society. When a daughter was born to a royal/noble family, she was seen as a means to cement bonds with other influential families. Thus, they were treated like property; as something that might increase a family's standing, power, or wealth. Women are not treated as property in all of these tales, as some tales steer away from teaching women how to behave within their society and focus on other aspects that will instruct a society as a whole. "The Maiden without Hands" instructs people religiously: to trust in God and be wary of the devil's influence. Most of the messages in fairy tales still teach and instruct people today, even if not in exactly the same way as a hundred years or more ago. A tale like "Cinderella" still teaches people to be kind and generous if they are reading Perrault's version, or strong and independent if they read a translation based on the Grimm Brothers' tale. Some would say that these messages are archaic and demeaning to women. However, these tales can still teach valuable life lessons if one is willing to navigate the perilous realm of Faërie, wary of the pitfalls and traps left along the way by generations of storytellers. Since fairy tales rightfully belong to communities, and not to any single author, one can easily change them to fit in with a new worldview/perspective. One can transform a heroine into a stronger, more active character without changing the outcome of a tale. A good example of this is the girl from "Fitcher's Bird". The tale makes use of the same motifs and conventions as "Bluebeard" but the girl saves her own life and those of her sisters. This offers a possible answer to

the question posed to the knight in “The Wife of Bath’s Tale”: women want to be treated as equals and to be allowed to think and act for themselves.



## *Conclusion*

Fairy tales reach back into a dateless time and speak with serene assurance of the wishes, fears, beliefs and morals of older societies. The lessons and knowledge that these tales try to impart to their audiences or readers may appear archaic but they may still instruct, even if not in the way they were originally intended to.

The purpose of this dissertation was to investigate the constructs of gender and society within the context of Western fairy tales. Special attention was given to the representation of female characters and how they act and re-act to the social/physical situations in which they find themselves. The institution of gender relies heavily on gender roles and images. Lorber (1994, 30-31) refers to this as “the cultural representations of gender and [the] embodiment of gender in symbolic language and artistic productions that reproduce and legitimate gender statuses.” Fairy tales that emphasise qualities such as the passivity and beauty of female characters act as gendered scripts, serving and supporting the dominant gender systems of societies. Many of the structures that suppress, or “socialise”, women are found in fairy tales. These texts can reinforce certain gender stereotypes, but they can also break free to create new representations of gender. This all depends on the reader or analyst’s point of view.

However, before getting to the actual analysis, the researcher found it prudent first to define the term fairy tale (for the purpose of this study) since it is easily confused with myths, legends and other types of folktales, especially (beast) fables. After extensive research the following definition was theorised: Fairy tales are not specifically about elves and fairies, but about humanity's adventures in the secondary world of Faërie, which is filled with magic, making the marvellous possible. This type of tale is not age-specific; it can be enjoyed by any person of any age.

Since the fairy tales most Westerners read descend mainly from French, German and Scandinavian tales, it was fruitful to investigate how differently they have been translated. "Cinderella" lent itself favourably to comparison, since it is one of the most wide-spread fairy tales. The researcher used translations based on Charles Perrault's French version of the tale, as well as the German version taken from the collection of the Brothers Grimm. Interestingly, it was found that even though the plot is never changed the characters behave differently and the tales convey different morals. In Perrault's version of the tale the step-mother is conspicuously absent and it is the step-sisters who make Cinderella's life miserable. In "*Aschenputtel*", on the other hand, Cinderella's step-mother plays the role of the main evil-doer, banishing Cinderella to the kitchen to earn her keep. The German version of the tale also teaches radically different lessons from the French. In "*Aschenputtel*" one finds that someone who does bad things and uses deception to get ahead in the world will be severely punished for these transgressions – the step-sisters' eyes are pecked out by the birds from the hazel tree. The French version teaches its audience to treat other people in the way that they

themselves would like to be treated; even though her step-sisters are spiteful and vindictive, Cinderella still treats them with kindness and respect.

Cinderella is a kind and loving character and she is also beautiful; the relationship between beauty and kindness (goodness/morality) is found in many fairy tales, along with industriousness, class, economic privilege and danger. The four main tales that were discussed relating to beauty and these other aspects were: “Bluebeard”, “The Juniper Tree”, “Mother Holle” and “The Maiden without Hands”. These tales were also used to investigate fairy tale societies: their customs, morals, and religion. “The Maiden without Hands” teaches religious lessons that are still valid today (within Christianity): God will provide. “The Juniper Tree” also contains some religious aspects, but the characters do not rely on, and are not influenced by, divine or demonic stimuli (except in the case of the step-mother). This tale teaches self-reliance, while “Mother Holle” teaches people to work hard (if they do, they will be rewarded). The tale of “Bluebeard” offers the most profound lesson, one that is not only applicable to women, but to men as well. Curiosity is healthy; you must become aware of your environment. This does not only pertain to the physical environment, but to the people with whom you interact on a regular basis.

The question posed to the knight in “The Wife of Bath’s Tale” was: what do women most desire? The answer amounted to “maistrie”. However, this is not just mastery of one’s husband or lover, as the Wife’s tale suggests, or even mastery of any situation one may find oneself in. The reader or audience of a fairy tale should also master that tale in

reading or listening. As mentioned in the introduction, the realm of Faërie is filled with traps and pitfalls placed there by previous tellers, not necessarily to ensnare the reader/listener, but because they formed part of the message the tellers wanted to convey. Such messages become traps if they remain part of a story while the society in which it is told changes. Thus, moral messages and concepts that are no longer accepted remain, and may become pitfalls for modern readers. The reader must master them if he or she wishes to unlock the true potential of fairy tales and safely navigate the realm of Faërie.

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## *Appendix*

The following tales were taken from Zipes, J. (2007). *Brothers Grimm, The Complete Fairy Tales*:

“Mother Holle” (pp. 119-122)

“The Juniper Tree” (pp. 207-217)

“The Maiden without Hands” (pp. 144-150)

“Bluebeard” was taken from Brereton, G. (1957). *Charles Perrault Fairy Tales*. (pp. 27-36).

## **Mother Holle**

A widow had two daughters, one that was beautiful and industrious, the other ugly and lazy. But she was fonder of the ugly and lazy one because she was her own daughter. The other had to do all the housework and carry out the ashes like a Cinderella. Every day the poor maiden had to sit near a well by the road and spin and spin until her fingers bled.

Now, one day it happened that the reel became quite bloody, and when the maiden leaned over the well to rinse it, it slipped out of her hand and fell to the bottom. She burst into tears, ran to her stepmother, and told her about the accident. But the stepmother gave her a terrible scolding and was very cruel. 'If you've let the reel fall in,' she said, 'then you'd better get it out again.'

The maiden went back to the well but did not know where to begin. She was so distraught that she jumped into the well to fetch the reel, but she lost consciousness. When she awoke and regained her senses, she was in a beautiful meadow where the sun was shining and thousands of flowers were growing. She walked across the meadow, and soon she came to a baker's oven full of bread, but the bread was yelling, 'Take me out! Take me out, or else I'll burn. I've been baking long enough!'

She went up to the oven and took out all the loaves one by one with the baker's peel. After that she moved on and came to a tree full of apples.

'Shake me! Shake me!' the tree exclaimed. 'My apples are all ripe.'

She shook the tree till the apples fell like raindrops, and she kept shaking until they had all come down. After she had gathered them and stacked them in a pile, she

moved on. At last she came to a small cottage where an old woman was looking out of a window. She had such big teeth that the maiden was scared and wanted to run away. But the old woman cried after her, 'Why are you afraid, my dear child? Stay with me, and if you do all the housework properly, everything will turn out well for you. Only you must make my bed nicely and carefully and give it a good shaking so the feathers fly. Then it will snow on earth, for I am Mother Holle.'<sup>83</sup>

Since the old woman had spoken so kindly to her, the maiden plucked up her courage and agreed to enter her service. She took care of everything to the old woman's satisfaction and always shook the bed so hard that feathers flew about like snowflakes. In return, the woman treated her well: she never said an unkind word to the maiden, and she gave her roasted or boiled meat every day. After the maiden had spent a long time with Mother Holle, she became sad. At first she did not know what was bothering her, but finally she realized she was homesick. Even though everything was a thousand times better there than at home, she still had a desire to return. At last she said to Mother Holle, 'I've got a tremendous longing to return home, and even though everything is wonderful down here, I've got to return to my people.'

'I'm pleased that you want to return home,' Mother Holle responded, 'and since you've served me so faithfully, I myself shall bring you up there again.'

She took the maiden by the hand and led her to a large door. When it was opened and the maiden was standing right beneath the doorway, an enormous shower

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<sup>83</sup> Whenever it snowed in olden days, people in Hessa used to say Mother Holle was making her bed.

of gold came pouring down, and all the gold stuck to her so that she became completely covered with it.

‘I want you to have this because you’ve been so industrious,’ said Mother Holle, and she also gave her back the reel that had fallen into the well. Suddenly the door closed, and the maiden found herself back up on earth, not far from her mother’s house. When she entered the yard, the cock was sitting on the well and crowed:

*‘Cock-a-doodle-doo!’*

My golden maiden, what’s new with you?’

She went inside to her mother, and since she was covered with so much gold, her mother and sister gave her a warm welcome. Then she told them all about what had happened to her, and when her mother heard how she had obtained so much wealth, she wanted to arrange it so her ugly and lazy daughter could have the same good fortune. Therefore, her daughter had to sit near the well and spin, and she made the reel bloody by sticking her fingers into a thorn bush and pricking them. After that she threw the reel down into the well and jumped in after it. Just like her sister, she reached the beautiful meadow and walked along the same path. When she came to the oven, the bread cried out again, ‘Take me out! Take me out, or else I’ll burn! I’ve been baking long enough!’

But the lazy maiden answered, ‘I’ve no desire to get myself dirty!’

She moved on, and soon she came to the apple tree that cried out, ‘Shake me! Shake me! My apples are ripe.’

However, the lazy maiden replied, ‘Are you serious? One of the apples could fall and hit me on my head.’

Thus she went on, and when she came to Mother Holle's cottage, she was not afraid because she had already heard of the old woman's big teeth, and she hired herself out to her right away. On the first day she made an effort to work hard and obey Mother Holle when the old woman told her what to do, for the thought of gold was on her mind. On the second day she started loafing, and on the third day she loafed even more. Indeed, she did not want to get out of bed in the morning, nor did she make Mother Holle's bed as she should have, and she certainly did not shake it hard so the feathers flew. Soon Mother Holle became tired of this and dismissed the maiden from her service. The lazy maiden was quite happy to go and expected that now the shower of gold would come. Mother Holle led her to the door, but as the maiden was standing beneath the doorway, a big kettle of pitch came pouring down over her instead of gold.

'That's a reward for your services,' Mother Holle said, and shut the door. The lazy maiden went home covered with pitch, and when the cock on the well saw her, it crowed:

*'Cock-a-doodle-doo!*

My dirty maiden, what's new with you?'

The pitch did not come off the maiden, and remained on her as long as she lived.



## **The Juniper Tree**

All this took place a long time ago, most likely some two thousand years ago. There was a rich man who had a beautiful and pious wife, and they loved each other very much. Though they did not have any children, they longed to have some. Day and night the wife prayed for a child, but still none came, and everything remained the same.

Now, in the front of the house there was a yard, and in the yard stood a juniper tree. One day during winter the wife was under the tree peeling an apple, and as she was peeling it, she cut her finger, and her blood dripped on the snow.

‘Oh,’ said the wife, and she heaved a great sigh. While she looked at the blood before her, she became quite sad. ‘If only I had a child as red as blood and as white as snow!’ Upon saying that, her mood changed, and she became very cheerful, for she felt something might come of it. Then she went home.

After a month the snow vanished. After two months everything turned green. After three months the flowers sprouted from the ground. After four months all the trees in the woods grew more solid, and the green branches became intertwined. The birds began to sing, and their song resounded throughout the forest as the blossoms fell from the trees. Soon the fifth month passed, and when the wife stood under the juniper tree, it smelled so sweetly that her heart leapt for joy. Indeed, she was so overcome by joy that she fell down on her knees. When the sixth month passed, the fruit was large and firm, and she was quite still. In the seventh month she picked the juniper berries and ate them so avidly that she became sad and sick. After the eighth month passed, she called her husband to her and wept.

'If I die,' she said, 'bury me under the juniper tree.'

After that she was quite content and relieved until the ninth month had passed. Then she had a child as white as snow and as red as blood. When she saw the baby, she was so delighted that she died.

Her husband buried her under the juniper tree, and he began weeping a great deal. After some time he felt much better, but he still wept every now and then. Eventually, he stopped, and after more time passed, he took another wife. With his second wife he had a daughter, while the child from the first wife was a little boy, who was as red as blood and as white as snow. Whenever the woman looked at her daughter, she felt great love for her, but whenever she looked at the little boy, her heart was cut to the quick. She could not forget that he would always stand in her way and prevent her daughter from inheriting everything, which is what the woman had in mind. Thus the devil took hold of her and influenced her feelings toward the boy until she became quite cruel toward him: she pushed him from one place to the next, slapped him here and cuffed him there, so that the poor child lived in constant fear. When he came home from school, he found no peace at all.

One time the woman went up to her room, and her little daughter followed her and said, 'Mother, give me an apple.'

'Yes, my child,' said the woman, and she gave her a beautiful apple from the chest that had a large heavy lid with a big, sharp iron lock.

'Mother,' said the little daughter, 'shouldn't brother get one too?'

The woman was irritated by the remark, but she said, 'Yes, as soon as he comes home from school.' And, when she looked out of the window and saw he was coming,

the devil seemed to take possession of her, and she snatched the apple away from her daughter.

‘You shan’t have one before your brother,’ she said and threw the apple into the chest and shut it.

The little boy came through the door, and the devil compelled her to be friendly to him and say, ‘Would you like to have an apple, my son?’ Yet, she gave him a fierce look.

‘Mother,’ said the little boy, ‘how ferocious you look! Yes, give me an apple.’

Then she felt compelled to coax him.

‘Come over here,’ she said as she lifted the lid. ‘Take out an apple for yourself.’

And as the little boy leaned over the chest, the devil prompted her, and *crash!* she slammed the lid so hard that his head flew off and fell among the apples. Then she was struck by fear and thought, How am I going to get out of this? She went up to her room and straight to her dresser, where she took out a white kerchief from the drawer. She put the boy’s head back on his neck and tied the neckerchief around it so nothing could be seen. Then she set him on a chair in front of the door and put the apple in his hand.

Some time later little Marlene came into the kitchen and went up to her mother, who was standing by the fire in front of a pot of hot water, which she was constantly stirring.

‘Mother,’ said Marlene, ‘brother’s sitting by the door and looks very pale. He’s got an apple in his hand, and I asked him to give me the apple, but he didn’t answer, and I became very scared.’

‘Go back to him,’ said the mother, ‘and if he doesn’t answer you, give him a box on the ear.’

Little Marlene returned to him and said, ‘Brother, give me the apple.’

But he would not respond. So she gave him a box on the ear, and his head fell off. The little girl was so frightened that she began to cry and howl. Then she ran to her mother and said, ‘Oh, Mother, I’ve knocked my brother’s head off!’ And she wept and wept and could not be comforted.

‘Marlene,’ said the mother, ‘what have you done! You’re not to open your mouth about this. We don’t want anyone to know, and besides there’s nothing we can do about it now. So we will make a stew out of him.’

The mother took the little boy and chopped him into pieces. Next she put them into a pot and let them stew. But Marlene stood nearby and wept until all her tears fell into the pot, so it did not need any salt.

When the father came home, he sat down at the table and asked, ‘Where’s my son?’

The mother served a huge portion of the stewed meat, and Marlene wept and could not stop.

‘Where’s my son?’ the father asked again.

‘Oh,’ said the mother, ‘he’s gone off into the country to visit his mother’s great-uncle. He intends to stay there a while.’

‘What’s he going to do there? He didn’t even say good-bye to me.’

‘Well, he wanted to go very badly and asked me if he could stay there six weeks. They’ll take good care of him.’

‘Oh, that makes me sad,’ said the man. ‘It’s not right. He should have said good-bye to me.’ Then he began to eat and said, ‘Marlene, what are you crying for? Your brother will come back soon.’ Without pausing he said, ‘Oh, wife, the food tastes great!’ Give me some more!’ The more he ate, the more he wanted. ‘Give me some more,’ he said. ‘I’m not going to share this with you. Somehow I feel as if it is all mine.’

As he ate and ate he threw the bones under the table until he was all done. Meanwhile, Marlene went to her dresser and took out her best silk neckerchief from the bottom drawer, gathered all the bones from beneath the table, tied them up in her silk kerchief, and carried them outside the door. There she wept bitter tears and laid the bones beneath the juniper tree. As she put them there, she suddenly felt relieved and stopped crying. Now the juniper tree began to move. The branches separated and came together again as though they were clapping their hands in joy. At the same time smoke came out of the tree, and in the middle of the smoke there was a flame that seemed to be burning. Then a beautiful bird flew out of the fire and began singing magnificently. He soared high in the air, and after he vanished, the juniper tree was as it was before. Yet, the silk kerchief was gone. Marlene was very happy and gay. It was as if her brother were still alive, and she went merrily back into the house, sat down at the table, and ate.

Meanwhile, the bird flew away, landed on a goldsmith’s house, and began to sing:

‘My mother, she killed me.

My father, he ate me.

My sister, Marlene, she made sure to see

my bones were all gathered together,

bound nicely in silk, as neat as can be,  
and laid beneath the juniper tree.

*Tweet, tweet!* What a lovely bird I am.'

The goldsmith was sitting in his workshop making a golden chain. When he heard the bird singing on his roof, he thought it was very beautiful. Then he stood up, and as he walked across the threshold, he lost a slipper. Still, he kept on going, right into the middle of the street with only one sock and a slipper on. He was also wearing his apron, and in one of his hands he held the golden chain, in the other his tongs. The sun was shining brightly on the street as he walked, and then he stopped to get a look at the bird.

'Bird,' he said, 'how beautifully you sing! Sing me that song again.'

'No,' said the bird, 'I never sing twice for nothing. Give me the golden chain, and I'll sing it for you again.'

'All right,' said the goldsmith. 'Here is the golden chain. Now sing the song again.'

The bird swooped down, took the golden chain in his right claw, went up to the goldsmith, and began singing:

'My mother, she killed me.

My father, he ate me.

My sister, Marlene, she made sure to see

my bones were all gathered together,

bound nicely in silk, as neat as can be,

and laid beneath the juniper tree.

*Tweet, tweet!* What a lovely bird I am.'

Then the bird flew off to a shoemaker, landed on his roof, and sang:

‘My mother, she killed me.

My father, he ate me.

My sister, Marlene, she made sure to see

my bones were all gathered together,

bound nicely in silk, as neat as can be,

and laid beneath the juniper tree.

*Tweet, tweet!* What a lovely bird I am.’

When the shoemaker heard the song, he ran to the door in his shirt sleeves and looked up at the roof, keeping his hand over his eyes to protect them from the bright sun.

‘Bird,’ he said, ‘how beautifully you sing!’ Then he called into the house, ‘Wife, come out here for a second! There’s a bird up there. Just look. How beautifully he sings!’ Then he called his daughter and her children, and the journeyman, apprentices, and maid. They all came running out into the street and looked at the bird and saw how beautiful he was. He had bright red and green feathers, and his neck appeared to glisten like pure gold, while his eyes sparkled in his head like stars.

‘Bird,’ said the shoemaker, ‘now sing me that song again.’

‘No,’ said the bird, ‘I never sing twice for nothing. You’ll have to give me a present.’

‘Wife,’ said the man, ‘go into the shop. There’s a pair of red shoes on the top shelf. Get them for me.’

His wife went and fetched the shoes.

‘There,’ said the man. ‘Now sing the song again.’

The bird swooped down, took the shoes in his left claw, flew back up on the roof, and sang:

‘My mother, she killed me.

My father, he ate me.

My sister, Marlene, she made sure to see

my bones were all gathered together,

bound nicely in silk, as neat as can be,

and laid beneath the juniper tree.

*Tweet, tweet!* What a lovely bird I am.’

When the bird finished his song, he flew away. He had the chain in his right claw and the shoes in his left, and he flew far away to a mill. The mill went *clickety-clack, clickety-clack, clickety-clack*. The miller had twenty men sitting in the mill, and they were hewing a stone. Their chisels went *click-clack, click-clack, click-clack*. And the mill kept going *clickety-clack, clickety-clack, clickety-clack*. The bird swooped down and landed on a linden tree outside the mill and sang:

‘My mother, she killed me.’

Then one of the men stopped working.

‘My father, he ate me.’

Then two more stopped and listened.

‘My sister, Marlene, she made sure to see.’

Then four more stopped.

‘My bones were all gathered together,

bound nicely in silk, as neat as can be.’



Now only eight kept chiseling.

‘And laid beneath. . .’

Now only five.

‘. . . the juniper tree.’

Now only one.

‘*Tweet, tweet!* What a lovely bird I am.’

Then the last one also stopped and listened to the final words.

‘Bird, how beautifully you sing! Let me hear that too. Sing your song again for me.’

‘No,’ said the bird, ‘I never sing twice for nothing. Give me the millstone, and I’ll sing the song again.’

‘I would if I could,’ he said. ‘But the millstone doesn’t belong to me alone.’

‘If he sings again,’ said the others, ‘he can have it.’

Then the bird swooped down, and all twenty of the miller’s men took beams to lift the stone. ‘Heave-ho! Heave-ho! Heave-ho!’ Then the bird stuck his neck through the hole, put the stone on like a collar, flew back to the tree, and sang:

‘My mother, she killed me.

My father, he ate me.

My sister, Marlene, she made sure to see

my bones were all gathered together,

bound nicely in silk, as neat as can be,

and laid beneath the juniper tree.

*Tweet, tweet!* What a lovely bird I am.’

When the bird finished his song, he spread his wings, and in his right claw he had the chain, in his left the shoes, and around his neck the millstone. Then he flew away to his father's house.

The father, mother, and Marlene were sitting at the table in the parlour, and the father said, 'Oh, how happy I am! I just feel so wonderful!'

'Not me,' said the mother. 'I feel scared as if a storm were about to erupt.'

Meanwhile, Marlene just sat there and kept weeping. Then the bird flew up, and when he landed on the roof, the father said, 'Oh I'm in such good spirits. The sun is shining so brightly outside, and I feel as though I were going to see an old friend again.'

'Not me,' said his wife. 'I'm so frightened that my teeth are chattering. I feel as if fire were running through my veins.'

She tore open her bodice, while Marlene sat in the corner and kept weeping. She had her handkerchief in front of her eyes and wept until it was completely soaked with her tears. The bird swooped down from the juniper tree, where he perched on a branch and began to sing:

'My mother, she killed me.'

The mother stopped her ears, shut her eyes, and tried not to see or hear anything, but there was a roaring in her ears like a turbulent storm, and her eyes burned and flashed like lightning.

'My father, he ate me.'

'Oh, Mother, said the man, 'listen to that beautiful bird singing so gloriously! The sun's so warm, and it smells like cinnamon.'

'My sister, Marlene, she made sure to see ...'

Then Marlene laid her head on her knees and wept and wept, but the man said, 'I'm going outside. I must see the bird close up.'

'Oh, don't go!' said the wife. 'I feel as if the whole house were shaking and about to go up in flames!'

Nevertheless, the man went out and looked at the bird.

'... My bones were all gathered together,  
bound nicely in silk, as neat as can be,  
and laid beneath the juniper tree.

*Tweet, tweet!* What a lovely bird I am.'

After ending his song, the bird dropped the golden chain, and it fell around the man's neck just right, so that it fit him perfectly. Then he went inside and said, 'Just look how lovely that bird is! He gave me this beautiful golden chain, and he's as beautiful as well!'

But the woman was petrified and fell to the floor. Her cap slipped off her head, and the bird sang again:

'My mother, she killed me.'

'Oh, I wish I were a thousand feet beneath the earth so I wouldn't have to hear this!'

'My father, he ate me.'

Then the woman fell down again as if she were dead.

'My sister, Marlene, she made sure to see ...'

'Oh,' said Marlene, 'I want to go outside too and see if the bird will give me something.' Then she went out.

‘... My bones were all gathered together,  
bound nicely in silk, as neat as can be.’

Then the bird threw her the shoes.

‘And laid them beneath the juniper tree.

*Tweet, tweet!* What a lovely bird I am.’

Marlene felt gay and happy. She put on the new red shoes and danced and skipped back into the house.

‘Oh,’ she said, ‘I was so sad when I went out, and now I feel so cheerful. That certainly is a splendid bird. He gave me a pair of red shoes as a gift.’

‘Not me,’ said the wife, who jumped up, and her hair flared up like red-hot flames. ‘I feel as if the world were coming to an end. Maybe I’d feel better if I went outside.’

As she went out the door, *crash!* the bird threw the millstone down on her head, and she was crushed to death. The father and Marlene heard the crash and went outside. Smoke, flames, and fire were rising from the spot, and when it was over, the little brother was standing there. He took his father and Marlene by the hand, and all three were very happy. Then they went into the house, sat down at the table, and ate.

## **The Maiden without Hands**

A miller had been falling little by little into poverty, and soon he had nothing left but his mill and a large apple tree behind it. One day, as he was on his way to chop wood from the forest, he met an old man whom he had never seen before.

‘There’s no reason you have to torture yourself by cutting wood,’ the old man said. ‘I’ll make you rich if you promise to give me what’s behind your mill.’

What else can that be but my apple tree, thought the miller, and he gave the stranger his promise in writing.

‘In three years I’ll come and fetch what’s mine,’ the stranger said with a snide laugh, and he went away.

When the miller returned home, his wife went out to meet him and said, ‘Tell me, miller, how did all this wealth suddenly get into our house? All at once I discovered our chests and boxes are full. Nobody’s brought anything, and I don’t know how it all happened.’

‘It’s from a stranger I met in the forest,’ he said. ‘he promised me great wealth if I agreed in writing to give him what’s behind our mill. We can certainly spare the large apple tree.’

‘Oh, husband!’ his wife exclaimed in dread. ‘That was the devil! He didn’t mean the apple tree but our daughter, who was behind the mill sweeping the yard.’

The miller’s daughter was a beautiful and pious maiden who went through the next three years in fear of God and without sin. When the time was up and the day came for the devil to fetch her, she washed herself clean and drew a circle around her

with chalk. The devil appeared quite early, but he could not get near her, and he said angrily to the miller, 'I want you to take all the water away from her so she can't wash herself anymore. Otherwise I have no power over her.'

Since the miller was afraid of the devil, he did as he was told. The next morning the devil came again, but she wept on her hands and made them completely clean. Once more he could not get near her and said furiously to the miller, 'Chop off her hands. Otherwise I can't touch her.'

The miller was horrified and replied, 'How can I chop off the hands of my own child!'

But the devil threatened him and said, 'If you don't do it, you're mine, and I'll come and get you myself!'

The father was so scared of him that he promised to obey. He went to his daughter and said, 'My child, if I don't chop off both your hands, the devil will take me away, and in my fear I promised I'd do it. Please help me out of my dilemma and forgive me for the injury I'm causing you.'

'Dear Father,' she answered, 'do what you want with me. I'm your child.'

Then she extended both her hands and let him chop them off. The devil came a third time, but she had wept so long and so much on the stumps that they too were all clean. Then he had to abandon his game and lost all claim to her.

Now the miller said to his daughter, 'I've become so wealthy because of you that I shall see to it you'll live in splendor for the rest of your life.'

But she answered, 'No, I cannot stay here. I'm going away and shall depend on the kindness of people to provide me with whatever I need.'

Then she had her maimed arms bound to her back, and at dawn she set out on her way and walked the entire day until it became dark. She was right outside a royal garden, and by the glimmer of the moon she could see trees full of beautiful fruit. She could not enter the garden though, because it was surrounded by water. Since she had travelled the entire day without eating, she was very hungry. Oh, if only I could get in! she thought. I must eat some of the fruit or else I'll perish! Then she fell to her knees, called out to the Lord, and prayed. Suddenly an angel appeared who closed one of the locks in the stream so that the moat became dry and she could walk through it. Now she went into the garden accompanied by the angel. She caught sight of a beautiful tree full of pears, but the pears had all been counted. Nonetheless, she approached the tree and ate one of the pears with her mouth to satisfy her hunger, but only this one. The gardener was watching her, but since the angel was standing there, he was afraid, especially since he thought the maiden was a spirit. He kept still and did not dare to cry out or speak to her. After she had eaten the pear, and her hunger was stilled, she went and hid in the bushes.

The next morning the king who owned the garden came and counted the pears. When he saw one was missing, he asked the gardener what had happened to it, for the pear was not lying under the tree and had somehow vanished.

'Last night a spirit appeared,' answered the gardener. 'It had no hands and ate one of the pears with its mouth.'

'How did the spirit get over the water?' asked the king. 'And where did it go after it ate the pear?'

‘Someone wearing a garment as white as snow came down from heaven, closed the lock, and dammed up the water so the spirit could walk through the moat. And, since it must have been an angel, I was afraid to ask any questions or to cry out. After the spirit had eaten the pear, it just went away.’

‘If it’s as you say,’ said the king, ‘I shall spend the night with you and keep watch.’

When it became dark, the king went into the garden and brought a priest with him to talk to the spirit. All three sat down beneath the tree and kept watch. At midnight the maiden came out of the bushes, walked over to the tree, and once again ate one of the pears with her mouth, while the angel in white stood next to her. The priest stepped forward and said to the maiden, ‘Have you come from heaven or from earth? Are you a spirit or a human being?’

‘I’m not a spirit, but a poor creature forsaken by everyone except God.’

‘You may be forsaken by the whole world, but I shall not forsake you,’ said the king.

He took her with him to his royal palace, and since she was so beautiful and good, he loved her with all his heart, had silver hands made for her, and took her for his wife.

After a year had passed, the king had to go to war, and he placed the young queen under the care of his mother and said, ‘If she has a child, I want you to protect her and take good care of her, and write me right away.’

Soon after, the young queen gave birth to a fine-looking boy. The king’s mother wrote to him immediately to announce the joyful news. However, on the way the messenger stopped to rest near a brook, and since he was exhausted from the long



journey, he fell asleep. Then the devil appeared. He was still trying to harm the pious queen, and so he exchanged the letter for another one that said that the queen had given birth to a changeling. When the king read the letter, he was horrified and quite distressed, but he wrote his mother that she should protect the queen and take care of her until his return. The messenger started back with the letter, but he stopped to rest at the same spot and fell asleep. Once again the devil came and put a different letter in his pocket that said that they should kill the queen and her child. The old mother was tremendously disturbed when she received the letter and could not believe it. She wrote the king again but received the same answer because the devil kept replacing the messenger's letters with false letters each time. The last letter ordered the king's mother to keep the tongue and eyes of the queen as proof that she had done his bidding.

But the old woman wept at the thought of shedding such innocent blood. During the night she had a doe fetched and cut out its tongue and eyes and put them away. Then she said to the queen, 'I can't let you be killed as the king commands. However, you can't stay here any longer. Go out into the wide world with your child and never come back.'

She tied the child to the queen's back, and the poor woman went off with tears in her eyes. When she came to a great wild forest, she fell down on her knees and prayed to God. The Lord's angel appeared before her and led her to a small cottage with a little sign saying 'Free Lodging for Everyone'. A maiden wearing a snow white garment came out of the cottage and said, 'Welcome, Your Highness,' and took her inside. She untied the little boy from her back and offered him her breast so he could have something to drink. Then she laid him down in a beautifully made bed.

‘How did you know that I’m a queen?’ asked the poor woman.

‘I’m an angel sent by God to take care of you and your child,’ replied the maiden in white.

So the queen stayed seven years in the cottage and was well cared for. By the grace of God and through her own piety her hands that had been chopped off grew back again.

When the king finally returned from the wars, the first thing he wanted to do was to see his wife and child. However, his old mother began to weep and said, ‘You wicked man, why did you write and order me to kill two innocent souls?’ She showed him the two letters that the devil had forged and resumed talking. ‘I did as you ordered,’ and she displayed the tongue and eyes.

At the sight of them the king burst into tears and wept bitterly over his poor wife and little son. His old mother was aroused and took pity on him. ‘Console yourself,’ she said. ‘She’s still alive, I secretly had a doe killed and kept its tongue and eyes as proof. Then I took the child and tied him to your wife’s back and ordered her to go out into the wide world, and she had to promise me never to return here because you were so angry with her.’

‘I shall go as far as the sky is blue, without eating or drinking, until I find my dear wife and child,’ the king said. ‘That is, unless they have been killed or have died of hunger in the meantime.’

The king wandered for about seven years and searched every rocky cliff and cave he came across. When he did not find her, he thought she had perished. During this time he neither ate nor drank, but God kept him alive. Eventually, he came to a

great forest, where he discovered the little cottage with the sign: 'Free Lodging for Everyone.' Then the maiden in white came out, took him by the hand, and led him inside.

'Welcome, Your Majesty,' she said, and asked him where he came from.

'I've been wandering about for almost seven years looking for my wife and child, but I can't find them.'

The angel offered him food and drink, but he refused and said he only wanted to rest awhile. So he lay down to sleep and covered his face with a handkerchief. The angel went into the room where the queen was sitting with her son, whom she was accustomed to calling Sorrowful, and said, 'Go into the next room with your child. Your husband has come.'

So the queen went to the room where he was lying, and the handkerchief fell from his face.

'Sorrowful,' she said, 'pick up your father's handkerchief and put it over his face again.'

The child picked the handkerchief up and put it over his face. The king heard all this in his sleep and took pleasure in making the handkerchief drop on the floor again. The boy became impatient and said, 'Dear Mother, how can I cover my father's face when I have no father on earth. I've learned to pray to "our Father that art in heaven," and you told me that my father was in heaven and that he was our good Lord. How am I supposed to recognize this wild man? He's not my father.'

When the king heard this, he sat up and asked her who she was.

'I'm your wife,' she replied, 'and this is your son, Sorrowful.'

When the king saw that she had real hands, he said, 'My wife had silver hands.'

'Our merciful Lord let my natural hands grow again,' she answered.

The angel went back into the sitting room, fetched the silver hands, and showed them to him. Now he knew for certain that it was his dear wife and dear son, and he kissed them and was happy.

'A heavy load has been taken off my mind,' he said.

After the Lord's angel ate one more meal with them, they went home to be with the king's old mother. There was rejoicing everywhere, and the king and queen had a second wedding and lived happily ever after.

## **Bluebeard**

Once there was a man who owned splendid town and country houses, gold and silver plate, richly upholstered furniture, and gilded coaches. But unfortunately this man had a blue beard. It made him look so terrifyingly ugly that there was not a woman or girl who did not flee at the sight of him.

A lady of good family, who lived near him, had two marvellously beautiful daughters. He asked her to give him one of them in marriage, leaving her to choose which of them it should be. Neither of them wanted him, and they bandied him to and fro between them, unable to bring themselves to accept a man with a blue beard. What put them off still more was the fact that he had been married several times already and no one knew what had become of his other wives.

In order to make their acquaintance, Bluebeard invited the sisters to spend a week in one of his country houses, with their mother and three or four of their best friends and a few young men from the neighbourhood. The week was a continual round of amusement. There were hunting and fishing parties, banquets, dances, and suppers. No one thought of going to bed and they spent the nights joking and playing pranks on each other. In short, it was such a success that the younger daughter began to think that their host's beard was not as blue after all and that he was quite an agreeable man. As soon as they were back in town, the marriage was arranged.

A month afterwards, Bluebeard told his wife that he had to go away for at least six weeks on important business. He told her to enjoy herself during his absence, to

invite her friends and take them down to the country if she wished, and in any case to entertain them lavishly.

‘Here,’ he said, ‘are the keys of the two big furniture-stores; these are for the gold and silver plate which is not used on ordinary days; these unlock the strong-boxes in which I keep my gold and silver; these are for my jewels; and this is the master-key to all the rooms. As for this little key, it belongs to the little room at the end of the long gallery on the ground floor. Unlock everything, go everywhere you like, except into the little room. That I forbid you to enter, and I forbid you so absolutely that, if by any mischance you should do so, there would be no bounds to my anger.’

She promised to obey all his instructions faithfully and, after kissing her good-bye, he got into his coach and set off on his journey.

Her friends and neighbours did not wait to be asked to call on the young bride. They were too eager to see all the fine things in her house, which they had not dared to visit while her husband was there because they were afraid of his blue beard. Now they went swarming through the bedrooms, the closets, and the dressing-rooms, finding each more splendid than the last. Then they went up to the rooms where the furniture was stored, and gaped in admiration at the many lovely tapestries, beds, sofas, cabinets, tables, large and small, and especially the mirrors, which reflected them from head to foot and whose frames – some of bevelled glass and others of silver and silver-gilt – were the most magnificent they had ever seen. They could not conceal their wonder and envy at the sight of their friend’s good fortune, but she took little pleasure in all these costly things because of her impatience to go and look into the little room on the ground floor.

Her curiosity was so strong that, without considering that it was not polite to leave her guests, she went down by a secret staircase, hurrying so fast that she nearly tripped and broke her neck. When she reached the door of the little room, she paused there for some moments, thinking of her husband's orders and reflecting that something unpleasant might happen to her if she disobeyed them. But the temptation was too great. So she took the little key and unlocked the door with a trembling hand.

At first she saw nothing because the shutters were closed. But after a few moments she began to see that the floor was covered with dried blood and that in this blood was reflected the bodies of several women which were hanging on the walls. They were the various wives whom Bluebeard had married, and whose throats he had cut one after another. She almost fainted with terror, and the key to the room, which she had just withdrawn from the lock, slipped from her hand.

When she had collected her wits a little, she picked up the key, relocked the door, and went up to her own room to recover from the experience. But she was so disturbed that she could not forget it.

Noticing that the key to the little room was bloodstained, she wiped it once or twice, but the blood did not disappear. She washed it, and even scoured it with sand and grit, but the blood was still there, for it was a magical key and there was no means of cleaning it completely. When she removed the blood from one side, it came back on the other.

That same evening Bluebeard came home from his journey. He said that while he was on the road he had received letters informing him that the business he was

about had already been concluded satisfactorily. His wife did everything possible to make it appear that she was delighted by his prompt return.

On the next day he asked her to return the keys to him. She gave them back, but her hand was shaking so much that he guessed at once what had happened.

'How is it,' he asked, 'that the key to the little room is not here?'

'I must have left it upstairs on my table,' she said.

'Do not forget to give it to me soon,' said Bluebeard.

After putting him off several times, she was obliged to take him the key. Bluebeard looked at it carefully and said to her:

'Why is there blood on this key?'

'I have no idea,' said the poor woman, growing as pale as death.

'You have no idea!' said Bluebeard. 'But I have. You tried to go into the little room! Well, Madam you *shall* go in. You shall take your place with the ladies you saw there.'

She flung herself at her husband's feet, weeping and imploring him to forgive her for having disobeyed him. Her beauty and her distress would have melted a stone, but Bluebeard's heart was harder than any stone.

'You must die, Madam,' he said, 'and at once!'

'Then since I must die,' she replied, looking at him with eyes swimming with tears, 'give me a little time to say my prayers.'

'I will give you ten minutes,' said Bluebeard, 'but not a moment longer.'

When she was alone, she called her sister and said to her:



‘Sister Anne,’ – for that was her name – ‘please go up to the parapet of the tower and see if my brothers are coming. They promised that they would come and visit me to-day. And if you see them, wave to them to hurry.’

Sister Anne went up to the parapet of the tower and every few minutes the poor young bride called out to her:

‘Anne, sister Anne, what do you see?’

And sister Anne replied:

‘Only the grass growing green and the sun shimmering.’

Meanwhile Bluebeard, holding a big sword in his hand, began to shout at the top of his voice:

‘Come down at once, or I shall come up!’

‘One moment more, please,’ said his wife. And she called out softly:

‘Anne, sister Anne, what do you see?’

And sister Anne replied:

‘Only the grass growing green and the sun shimmering.’

‘Come down at once,’ shouted Bluebeard, ‘or I shall come up!’

‘I am coming,’ said his wife, and then she called:

‘Anne, sister Anne, what do you see?’

‘I can see,’ said sister Anne, ‘a big cloud of dust approaching from over there.’

‘Is it my brothers?’

‘Alas, no, sister. It is a flock of sheep.’

‘Will you come down?’ shouted Bluebeard.

‘Just one moment more,’ said his wife, and then she called:

‘Anne, sister Anne, what do you see?’

‘I see,’ she replied, ‘two horsemen coming from over there. But they are still a long way off.’

‘Heaven be praised!’ she cried a moment later. ‘It is our brothers. I am waving as much as I can to make them hurry.’

Bluebeard began to shout so loudly that the whole house shook. His poor wife came down into the courtyard and flung herself at his feet, weeping and dishevelled.

‘It is no use,’ said Bluebeard, ‘you must die.’

Then seizing her hair with one hand and raising his sword with the other, he was about to slash off her head. The wretched woman, turning her face towards him and looking at him imploringly, begged him to give her one more moment in which to collect her thoughts.

‘No, no!’ he said. ‘Commend your soul to God,’ and again raising his arm. . . .

At that moment there was such a knocking at the gate that Bluebeard stopped short. The gate was opened and immediately the two horsemen burst in and rushed on Bluebeard sword in hand.

He recognized them as his wife’s brothers, one a dragoon and the other a musketeer, and turned tail quickly in order to escape. But they were so close that they were upon him before he could reach the steps into the house. They ran him through with their swords and left him dead. His poor wife was scarcely more alive than he was and she had not even the strength to get up and embrace her brothers.

It turned out that Bluebeard had no heirs, so that all his wealth remained in his wife’s possession. She used part of it to marry her sister Anne to a young nobleman

who had long been in love with her, and another part to buy captains' commissions for her brothers. With the rest she herself married an exceedingly pleasant man, who soon made her forget the bad time she had had with Bluebeard.

## *Abstract*

Fairy tales emphasise such things as the passivity and beauty of female characters, thus functioning as gendered scripts which serve and support the dominant gender systems in societies. Beauty, which is represented as an ideal state of being in fairy tales, is a socially constructed notion indicating that the physical appearance of a woman is her most important quality, and that she should therefore strive to perfect it. The ideal of feminine beauty is “viewed largely as an oppressive, patriarchal practice that objectifies, devalues, and subordinates women” (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003: 711); however, some women willingly strive to attain beauty since this is seen as a way to empower themselves.

Studying the significance of beauty in fairy tales from a gendered perspective can provide an insight into the dynamics that exist between power, culture and gender, as well as their significance. This study is therefore interested in the gender dynamics of the texts, the state of gender relations between various characters from the texts, and the patriarchal attitudes limiting characters (particularly female characters) to a certain sphere of existence. Thus, the norm of being accepted (as well as other societal norms) plays an important role.

The instructions found in stories reassure readers that they have not strayed from the accepted path, but that they are defining themselves within the framework of the society they live in. Thus one is taught to act and react in certain circumstances, sometimes to

the detriment of one's personal growth. All societies have their shared belief structures, which are embedded in the tales, whether the message is religious or moral.

Depending on the source of the translation, the same tale can teach different moral lessons. In "*Aschenputtel*" one finds that a person who does bad things and uses deception to get ahead in the world will be severely punished for his or her transgressions. The French version, "*Cendrillon*", on the other hand, teaches its readers or audience to treat other people in the way that they themselves would like to be treated.

Beauty, as illustrated in fairy tales, has an interesting relationship with industriousness, goodness/morality, economic privilege, danger, and class. In fairy tales, it appears, beautiful women are usually kind-hearted and hard-working, as illustrated in the tales discussed in this dissertation. They are usually rewarded for their goodness (beauty) by gaining some form of monetary gain and/or an increase in their social standing (class). Beauty also seems to go hand-in-hand with danger; they become targets of malicious attacks because of their physical appearance. Women are usually treated as inferior to men since fairy tales are set in patriarchal societies. Some women would say that these messages are archaic and demeaning. However, these tales can still teach valuable life lessons if the reader is willing to navigate through the perilous realm of Faërie, wary of the pitfalls, dungeons and traps left along the way by generations of storytellers. Thus, the reader of fairy tales must gain mastery of the text in order to avoid these traps and to be able to master the lessons and morals embedded within the tales.

## *Abstrak*

Sprokies beklemtoon eienskappe soos die passiwiteit en die skoonheid van vroulike karakters; dit dien en ondersteun die dominante gender-stelsels in gemeenskappe. Skoonheid, wat as 'n ideaal in sprokies teenwoordig is, is 'n sosiaal-gekonstrueerde idee wat aandui dat die fisiese voorkoms van vrouens as 't ware hul belangrikste karaktereienskap is, en dat hulle daarna moet streef om dié kwaliteit te bereik. Die ideaal van vroulike skoonheid word hoofsaaklik as 'n onderdrukkende, partriargale praktyk beskou wat vrouens as minderwaardig en ondergeskik ag (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003: 711), maar sommige vrouens strewer tog na die verkryging van skoonheid, omdat dit gesien word as 'n manier om hulself te bemagtig.

Deur skoonheid in sprokies vanuit 'n gender-perspektief te bestudeer, word insig verkry in die belangrikheid van die dinamika wat tussen mag, kultuur en geslag bestaan. Hierdie studies spits hom toe op die gender-verhoudings tussen die verskillende karakters in sprokies, en op die manier hoe partriargale houdings die karakters (veral vrouens) tot 'n sekere bestaansvlak beperk. Die norm van aanvaarding, naas ander sosiale norme, speel 'n belangrike rol in die vorming van karaktereenskappe.

Die instruksies wat in sprokies gevind word help die leser om nie af te dwaal van dit wat aanvaarbaar is nie, en om homself/haarself te definieer binne die “korrekte” raamwerk. Dus word 'n mens geleer hoe om op te tree en te reageer in sekere omstandighede,

soms tot die nadeel van 'n mens se persoonlike groei. Alle samelewings het hul eie geloofstrukture, wat in die stories saamgevat word.

Afhangend van die bron van die vertaling kan dieselfde verhaal verskillende morele lesse leer. In "*Aschenputtel*" vind 'n mens dat 'n persoon wat ander probeer verneuk en kwaad aandoen, vir persoonlike beswil, swaar gestraf sal word vir hierdie oortredings. Die Franse weergawe ("*Cendrillon*") leer die leser/gehoor egter om ander mense te behandel soos hulle self graag behandel sou wou word.

Skoonheid, soos in sprokies geïllustreer, toon 'n interessante verhouding met ywer, deug/moraliteit, ekonomiese voorreg, gevaar, en klas. Dit blyk dat mooi vrouens in sprokies gewoonlik gaaf en hardwerkend is, soos geïllustreer deur die stories wat in hierdie verhandeling bespreek word. Hulle word gewoonlik vir hul weldade (skoonheid) beloon deur een of ander geldelike voordeel en/of 'n toename in hul sosiale stand (klas) te verkry. Dit blyk ook dat skoonheid 'n noue verhouding het met gevaar: as gevolg van hulle fisiese voorkoms word die vrouens die teikens van kwaadwillige aanvalle. Vrouens word gewoonlik beskou as ondergeskik aan mans, aangesien sprokies meestal in patriargale samelewings plaasvind. Sommige vroue sal sê dat hierdie boodskappe argaïes is, en selfs vernederend. Maar hierdie verhale kan steeds waardevolle lewenslesse oordra as 'n mens bereid is om versigtig deur die sprokieswêreld te beweeg, behoede op die slaggate en strikke wat deur vorige vertellers langs die pad gelaat is. Die leser moet dus sy/haar leeswerk bemeester om hierdie strikke te vermy en om die lesse wat in die tekste gevind word, te kan bemeester.

## *Key Terms*

- Fairy Tales
- Brothers Grimm
- Beauty
- Industriousness
- Goodness/morality
- Economic privilege
- Class
- Danger
- Socialisation
- Women