

**Gender Roles Indoctrinated Through Fairy Tales in Western  
Civilization**

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## Introduction

Fairy tales have passed from generation to generation, almost as a rite of passage, throughout western civilization. Whether it is the tales of the Grimm Brothers' or modern Disney versions, fairy tales have permeated society for ages. The question is whether they are merely stories told to children for entertainment or something more. Every tale offers children morals to live up to such as not trusting strangers to being kind to animals. Are morals all that are provided though? Fairy tales seem to have a much more lasting effect on a child's psyche than simply a lesson learned.

In this paper, fairy tales will be examined to see how gender roles are indoctrinated through them. Historian Sylvia D. Hoffert defines a gender ideal as "the cluster of characteristics, behavior patterns, and values that members of a group think a man or a woman should have, a set of cultural expectations."<sup>1</sup> In most fairy tales, females character fall into a dichotomy. The heroine is the ideal good girl. She is unequivocally beautiful, kind, and compassionate. She does not complain or get angry. Instead, she takes her burdens as they come. She is also, in most cases, naïve and sometimes downright foolish. She never tries to save herself, nor does she ask others to save her from misery. As scholar Kay Stone notes "heroines are not allowed any defects, nor are they required to develop, since they are already perfect."<sup>2</sup> In the end, the heroine is saved by a noble Prince and gets her happy ending because she is good. Perhaps ironically, the villain is also generally female. She is cunning and ambitious and, in most cases she is jealous and malicious. She will go to any means to achieve her end. As good as the

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<sup>1</sup> Sylvia D. Hoffert, A History of Gender in America: Essays, Documents, and Articles, (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Education Inc.), xix

<sup>2</sup> Kay Stone, "Things Walt Disney Never Told Us," in Women and Folklore, by Clare R. Ferrer (Texas Press, 1975), 45.

heroine is, the villain is just as evil. These characters suggest if a woman shows agency and takes action, she is automatically evil. To be good, one must be docile.

Good and evil appear as strict categories in fairy tales. Good is rewarded, evil is punished. Right and wrong are not subjective. The fairy tale makes clear who the protagonist is and who the antagonist is. And it is the person, not the act, that defines good and evil. The reader cannot judge a simple act of the Prince, for example, because in the overall context, even a problematic act is deemed justified. In one version of Cinderella, discussed in greater detail later, the hero is set to marry a young woman, but falls in love with her more beautiful, younger sister. He ends up marrying the beautiful girl, and the elder sister then tries to kill the new wife. The prince's fickleness could easily be judged negatively; however, the fairy tale does not allow this. Instead, it is as though the Prince did the right thing, since the scorned woman turned out to be pure evil. His choice is thus deemed correct.

The hero in fairy tales is never wrong. He is handsome and wealthy and generally reputed to be brave. However in many fairy tales, he does not actually do much. He is simply the character who *seems* to cause everything to work out. Upon closer study, it is clear that the supporting actors are those who play the largest part in ensuring that the hero saves the heroine. Still, the fairy tales tell us that the Prince is the ideal. He is the man every woman wants. He is also the one who guarantees the happy ending needed for a fairy tale to be complete. Yet, he has virtually no personality. He rarely shows any emotions save 'love at first sight' or devastation upon seeing his love 'dead.' He has no ambitions, no goals, or even any friends. He is simply the person who arrives to rescue the heroine.

In the following chapters four fairy tales will be analyzed for what they tell us about these gender dynamics. Each fairy tale appeared in multiple versions that circulated throughout Europe, beginning in the early modern period, and they have survived the test of time. Indeed, they were all converted to popular Disney films, which led to their wide appeal and influence in the twentieth century. The Disney versions are the most well known versions today, and therefore have the most impact on children now. Each tale can be traced back to an oral tradition, and so it is impossible to date them. Various individuals transcribed these stories during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. Although the different versions have certain plot variations, they share common features. Each version of Cinderella has the same themes and the same key plot points, which is true for other fairy tales as well. The differences in the versions result mainly from geographical and ethnic distinctions. The Scottish version of tales “sound” different than Italian versions, even when using English translations. Still, the fact that the key themes remain allows one to see the widespread ideas found and indoctrinated by fairy tales. The same ideas about docile women are found in fairy tales in Germany, Ireland, and France, regardless of their unique histories. These gender ideals remain, despite the crossing of an ocean and countless wars fought since their inception. So how do fairy tales influence gender roles in our society, and where do our ideas about gender come from? The classic notion of ‘waiting for Prince Charming to save the day’ has obvious roots in fairy tales. There are, however, subtler, possibly more harmful ideas expounded by these popular stories.

Certain ideals of beauty are paramount in fairy tales. The heroine is beautiful, and the hero is handsome. At the very least, they become beautiful over the course of the tale.

Other characters envy the heroine or work to look more beautiful than she is, while the heroine never has to make any effort. Snow White has skin as white as snow, lips as red as blood, and eyes as black as ebony. The purity of these colors suggests she fits the ideal beauty standard. The evil (step) mother pales in comparison. While stepsisters often physically damage themselves to match the ideal, whether it is starving themselves to fit into the perfect dress or cutting off their toes to fit into the slipper, they never succeed.

The versions of the fairy tales used in this paper are part of an online database. Various versions were collected, translated, and organized by folklorist D.L. Ashliman, professor emeritus of Pittsburgh University. The database is an incomparable resource, providing multiple versions of specific fairy tales across time and place. Despite minor differences in these tales, most maintained standard ideals of gender roles. Such similarities across century and geography suggest the power of gender socialization via fairy tales.

## Chapter 1: Defining Fairy Tales

Fairy tales are special because they are universal; every society has its own set of folk tales that are passed from generation to generation. Marie Louise Von Franz, an authority on the psychological interpretation of fairy tales, writes “fairy tale language seems to be [the] international language of all mankind---of all ages and of all races and cultures.”<sup>1</sup> Still, fairy tales are difficult to define. Grammatically, *fairy* should merely be an adjective to the *tale*. However, if tale is defined as a story, then that would imply that a fairy tale is a story about a fairy. This is, of course, untrue. Yet everyone seems to know what a fairy tale is. Rarely does one ask for clarification. If one did, the definition would almost certainly include examples. It is nearly impossible to define a fairy tale without mentioning those familiar childhood stories that are part of our lexicon. It is that very quality that makes fairy tales so unique. We all know them and they have a capacity to evoke memories of childhood, of home, of elementary school. They remind us of magic, of movies, of bedtime stories. We know that they are meant to teach us moral lessons and bring us comfort. Although sometimes frightening, they generally inspire a sense of security, so much so, that they are easily mistaken as harmless.

Some scholars claim that fairy tales can be broken into two categories. The first are those “stories which relate to definite supernatural beings, held really to exist, and the scenes of which are usually laid in some specified locality.”<sup>2</sup> Stories in this group are also known as sagas. The second group, which includes fairy tales as they are popularly conceived today, have only one requirement--- a happy ending. This description is too simplistic; fairy tales are defined by more than just happy endings. They are mythic.

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<sup>1</sup> Marie Louise Von Franz, Interpretations of Fairy Tales, (Boston: Shambala, Random House, 1996), 27.

<sup>2</sup> Edwin Sidney Hartland, Science of Fairy Tales, (London : Methuen & Co Ltd., 1925), v.



A myth is usually defined as a traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the world view of a people or to explain a practice, belief, or natural phenomenon. Mircea Eliade, an expert in the field explains that “myth narrates a sacred history; it relates an event that took place in primordial Time, the fabled time of the ‘beginnings.’ In other words, myth tells us how, through the deeds of Supernatural Beings, a reality came into existence, be it the whole of reality, the Cosmos, or only a fragment of reality---an island, a species of plant, a particular kind of human behavior, an institution.”<sup>3</sup> Jack Zipes, one of the leading experts on fairy tales, expands on this idea: “the deeds of supernatural beings...sets examples for human beings that enable them to codify and order their lives.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, fairy tales have become myths. Zipes continues, “any fairy tale in our society, if it seeks to become natural and eternal, must become myth.”<sup>5</sup> They illustrate morals, morals that teach the audience how to live. They explain practices, rituals, and events---so much so, that they serve to indoctrinate these concepts into those who read or listen to them.

It is impossible to date the origins of fairy tales----they are in many ways timeless. There is no sense of an “original” fairy tale. Most come from oral folk traditions. Many scholars, including Zipes, believe they were stories told to members of a tribe to “explain natural occurrences such as the change of the seasons and shifts in the weather or to celebrate the rites of harvesting, hunting, marriage, and conquest. The emphasis in most folk tales was harmony.”<sup>6</sup> Storytelling is a tradition dating back thousands of years. In

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<sup>3</sup> Mircea Eliade reviews Jan de Vries’s *Betrachtungen zum Märchen, besonders in seinem Verhältnis zu Heldensage und Mythos* (1954) in *La Nouvelle Revue Française* in May, 1956, and used the opportunity to elaborate his ideas about myths and fairy tales, in Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tale and Myth*, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 1

<sup>4</sup> Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tale and Myth*, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

different places the manner in which folk lore was disseminated varied. Edwin Sidney Hartland, a late nineteenth-century scholar, studied the institution of storytelling. He posits that,

a people which requires its story-tellers to relate their stories in the very words in which they have been conveyed from time immemorial, and allows no deviation, will preserve its traditions with the least possible blemish and the least possible change. In proportion as latitude in repetition is permitted and invention is allowed to atone for want of memory, tradition will change and encouraged by different social states. A social state is part of, and inseparable from, the sum total of arts, knowledge, organization and customs which we call the civilization, or the stage of civilization, of a people.<sup>7</sup>

Hartland, goes on to discuss various examples of storytelling in different areas. For example, in the Gaelic tradition, tailors and shoemakers would pass on stories to townspeople.<sup>8</sup> In Wales, families would sit around the fire sharing tales they had heard.<sup>9</sup> This idea of sharing stories defines the oral tradition. Storytelling is what makes fairy tales so widespread and accepted. They have an aura of family and community. They are shared by the fire or heard from a neighbor.

The oral tradition continued across Europe and beyond until Guttenberg invented the printing press in 1440. The first to transcribe these stories were two Italians, Giovanni Francesco Straparola and Giambattista Basile. In about 1550, Straparola published Le piacevoli notti, which provided translations of some common Italian oral tales. This secured his title as the ‘father’, or progenitor, of fairy tales. In France, Charles Perrault wrote down fairy tales in his Coutes De Temps Passe in 1697 because he wanted to introduce the stories into high culture. Storytelling though, was a practice followed widely, in that “the faithful delivery of the tradition is the principle underlying all

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<sup>7</sup> Hartland, Science of Fairy Tales, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 6-7.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 8-9.

variation of manner, and it is not confined to any one race or people.”<sup>10</sup> Perrault and his contemporaries in France institutionalized fairy tales by writing them down and publishing them. The Grimm Brothers’ collected fairy tales from around Germany and beyond that were told to children. They then published them during the early to mid-1800s in seven different editions, with an additional small edition published later.<sup>11</sup>

The Grimm versions of fairy tales were especially popular, in Germany, across Europe and eventually in other parts of the world. They were read to children generation after generation. Jacob Ludwig Carl Grimm was born on January 4, 1785, in Hanau, Germany, son of Philipp Wilhelm Grimm (a lawyer and court official) and his wife Dorothea Grimm. His brother Wilhelm Carl Grimm was born a year later. In 1806, while studying at the University of Marburg, Jacob and Wilhelm were influenced by the folk poetry collection of Clemens Brentano and Achim von Arnim, *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, and began to collect folktales. They later worked as librarians and professors. Wilhelm Grimm died in 1859, at the age of 73. Jacob died four years later at the age of 78.<sup>12</sup>

The Dutchman, Hans Christian Andersen, is the last of the significant early transcribers of fairy tales. Born in 1805, he is said to be a product of two cities, Odense in his native Netherlands where he grew up and Copenhagen where he lived and worked for much of his adult life. In Odense, he learned old customs and traditions. The elderly women in town told him the folklore that would later inspire his work. His passion, however, was the theater. In 1819, he fled to Copenhagen to try to gain a foothold as an actor and dancer. He was, fortunately, unsuccessful. He then attempted to become a

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>11</sup> D.L. Ashliman, “Grimm Brothers’ Home Page,” <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/grimm.html#chronology>, last revised August 12, 2008.

<sup>12</sup> Ashliman, *Grimm Brothers’ Home Page*

playwright, which also proved the wrong path. But Andersen did gain popularity through his work with fairy tales.<sup>13</sup> The bulk of his works were written in the mid-1800s.

Although Walt Disney based his film adaptations of Cinderella, Snow White, and Beauty and the Beast on the Grimm Brothers' and Perrault versions, he took a few, like the Little Mermaid, from Andersen.

Every one of these authors did more than simply 'transcribe,' they retooled the tales. From the Perrault to Andersen, they all wanted to put these tales on paper for a purpose. One reason seems to be, what could be called, nation building. Each of these tales were collected from different parts of their respective countries, brought together to create a version that would now be identified by its nation of origin. Historically, this is intriguing. Most of these authors worked in an era full of revolution, nation after nation rising to create a new identity. In the midst of these struggles, these writers pulled together tales that came from their past, possibly to find a national literature they could all find comfort in.

The conversion of tales from oral to written form had a significant effect on the entire concept of fairy tales. These were stories based on an oral tradition that were meant for community bonding. The act of writing them down, in and of itself, broke that tradition. Furthermore, writing these stories down also privatized their circulation. Now individuals in their own homes, on their own time, read fairy tales. Since written copies were expensive, initially they were limited to the aristocracy. Oral stories, of course, continued among the lower classes, but the fundamental idea of the folk tales shifted. The stories were for adults to read for pleasure. The printing of the tales could have led to

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<sup>13</sup> The Hans Christian Andersen Center, "The Life of Hans Christian Andersen," Institute of Literature, Media, and Cultural Studies, University of Southern Denmark, [http://www.andersen.sdu.dk/liv/index\\_e.html](http://www.andersen.sdu.dk/liv/index_e.html), last modified on December 10, 2008.

their disappearance. This did not happen, however. Despite the fact that very few could afford the printed editions and that the aristocracy and the new bourgeoisie stopped passing down the tales orally, fairy tales survived. They shifted, though, from stories told to explain natural occurrences to tales with morals and happy-endings that everyone wanted to read or hear.

Another significant change starting in the latter part of the eighteenth century when the stories were sanitized for children. Indeed, most of the earlier tales were rather graphic and violent. Even the relatively censored Grimm Brothers' versions included material that would be considered far too explicit for children in modern times. Disney sanitized them further. Although, often criticized for not creating any original stories, until arguably *The Lion King*, Disney managed to achieve something amazing: fairy tales, through children's books and movies stayed embedded in our society. As a result, children in the kindergartens of Iowa can still recite, in some version, the very same stories the Grimm Brothers' heard as they traveled around Germany. Marcia R. Lieberman has noted that "the best-known stories...those that Disney has popularized, have affected masses of children in our culture. Cinderella, the Sleeping Beauty, and Snow White are mythic figures who have replaced the old Greek and Norse gods, goddesses, and heroes for most children."<sup>14</sup>

There are many different theories as to where the ideals and themes presented in fairy tales came from. In the eighteenth century, there was a movement to try to locate the origin of tales. Some investigators argued that they all derived from India and then were brought to Europe. Others claimed the source was actually ancient Babylonia. Two men

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<sup>14</sup> Marcia R. Lieberman, "'Some Day My Prince Will Come': Female Acculturation through the Fairy Tale," *College English* 34. no. 3 (Dec., 1972): 383-384.

of the Finnish School decided that it was not possible for the stories to have originated in only one country, but perhaps each of the fairy tales groups came from one place, i.e. all Beauty and the Beast tales came from a single location. All of these theories were speculative at best, however.<sup>15</sup> The effort to locate origins, however, coincided with the new interest in an Indo-European culture---the Aryan culture that many scholars studied in the eighteenth century. The theories developed because many tales, such as Cinderella, appear in areas far beyond Europe. There are versions of Cinderella in both India and China. Scholars at the time searched for an original language, discovering that Sanskrit had cognates in both Latin and Greek. They took this to mean that there was one common land from which all people came originally.<sup>16</sup> This theory implies that fairy tales today could have emerged from pre-historic times, outdating even Babylonia.

In the nineteenth century, Ludwig Laistner developed an alternative theory that all fairy tales derive from dreams. He claimed that all mankind has elementary thoughts that are stored as an archetypal image, which come out in dreams and then develop into fairy tales.<sup>17</sup> If Laistner's ideas are to be believed, then the two-dimensional ideals of fairy tales are archetypal images that everyone---across place and time--strives to achieve. All women would want to be pure, good, and helpless. All men would want to save the day, no personality necessary. Marie Louise von Franz voices a similar concept, writing that it is in fairy tales that "one can best study the comparative anatomy of the psyche." She goes further, using a metaphor from nature: "we can't study plants, without studying the soil in which they grow...in mythology we, the individual human beings, are the soil of

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<sup>15</sup> Franz, *Interpretations of Fairy Tales*, 6.

<sup>16</sup> Edwin F. Byrant, "Introduction," *Hindu Philosophy Spring 2009* (lecture presented in Scott Hall 123, College Ave Campus, New Brunswick N.J., January 20, 2009)

<sup>17</sup> Franz, *Interpretations of Fairy Tales*, 7.

symbolic motif.”<sup>18</sup> She goes on to theorize that fairy tales can be interpreted like dreams, in a Freudian way. They tell us our repressed desires and our goals. The interesting aspect of this theory is the influence these fairy tales have. She says that our minds influence the symbolic motif of the tales. Still, if a tale has survived centuries then it is not a great leap to say that readers are not the only ones playing an active role. Perhaps, the fairy tales are the soil to our psyche, nurturing and feeding certain ideals in our minds from generation to generation. The effect that fairy tales have on children and adults, then, is far greater than most realize.

To take just one example, ideals of feminine beauty solidified over time. As women gained more social opportunities and power, the issue of beauty became even more important. Some scholars offer a simple reason---ideals of beauty allow the continuance of gender inequality. In “The Pervasiveness and Persistence of the Feminine Beauty Ideal in Children’s Fairy Tales,” Lori-Baker Sperry and Liz Grauerholz argue, “as women gain greater social status and independence, reliance on normative controls become more important to maintain gender inequality at structural and interpersonal levels.”<sup>19</sup> For instance, women who wear make-up in the workplace are seen as heterosexual, healthier, and more competent than those who do not. These ideas, they claim, are indoctrinated through fairy tales. In the Grimm Brothers’ Cinderella, one stepsister actually cuts off her toes in order to fit her foot into the slipper. This is the lengths to which she would go in order to achieve the ideal of beauty. In 1975, folklorist Kay Stone published an interview with a twenty-nine-year-old woman, who admitted: “I remembered the feeling of being left out in fairy stories. Whatever the story was about, it

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<sup>18</sup> Franz, *Interpretations of Fairy Tales*, 12.

<sup>19</sup> Lori Grauholz and Lori-Baker Sperry, “The Pervasiveness and Persistence of the Feminine Beauty Ideal in Children’s Fairy Tales,” *Gender and Society* 17, no. 5, (October 2003): 4.

wasn't about *me*. But this feeling didn't make me not interested in them—I knew there was something I was supposed to do to fit in but I didn't. So I thought there was something wrong with *me*, not with the fairy stories.”<sup>20</sup> As proof of the importance of children's literature in society, one scholar claims that children's stories are a “major means by which children assimilate culture.”<sup>21</sup>

There is also a racial significance underlying these tales. Black characters are virtually non-existent in fairy tales, yet these stories were read by children of all racial and social statures. In fairy tales themselves, white represents good while black represents bad. In one of the Grimm Brothers' tales, *Mother Holle*, the lazy daughter is covered in black pitch. In another tale, *The White Bride and the Black Bride*, the evil mother and daughter are cursed with blackness and ugliness. By the same token, Snow White and Cinderella are deemed as white as snow and utterly beautiful. They are also good, while the dark women are bad. The ideal woman, the archetypal image, is that of a woman white as snow with light eyes and red lips. Her hair can be as dark as ebony or a perfect blonde, because both are pure colors. This is the ideal.

In 1934, an article in a national magazine noted, “Psychiatrists have traced the effect of these [fairy] tales and find that their influence extends into adult life.”<sup>22</sup> Many scholars echo this idea. Fairy tales teach and guide people of all ages. One of the most amazing aspects of the fairy tale is that they change over time while still remaining fundamentally the same. For example, Snow White, which is still popular today, was told in various versions around Europe before the Grimm Brothers transcribed it. They

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<sup>20</sup> Kay Stone, “Things Walt Disney Never Told Us,” in *Women and Folklore*, by Clare R. Ferrer (Texas Press, 1975), 49.

<sup>21</sup> Grauholz and Sperry, “The Pervasiveness and Persistence of the Feminine Beauty Ideal in Children's Fairy Tales,” 4.

<sup>22</sup> Jane Stafford, “Tell Fairy Stories to Your Children,” *The Science News-letter* 26, no. 108 (Nov 3, 1934)



sanitized the story a bit, but even without them, the story was different in various nations. The Disney version is far cleaner and more child-friendly than any before it, but regardless, the fundamentals of the story remain. The “moral,” the heroine, the hero, the jealous maternal figure all survive. Fairy tales, as Zipes notes, “are constantly rearranged and transformed to suit changes in tastes and values, and they assume mythic proportions when they are frozen in an ideological constellation that makes it seem that there are universal absolutes that are divine and should not be changed.”<sup>23</sup> Therein lies the magic of the tales, despite the alterations in plot and setting, the *ideals* remain. These ideals then are passed down from one generation to the next. They survive from oral folk lore to the printing press and animation. The ideals seem to come from times that even history cannot recall. It is these ideals that become mythic. It is not difficult to see why so many in our society still hold out for the happy endings of fairy tales if we are to believe that this is what people have wanted since fairy tales began.

Visual and textual influence is especially powerful in children. They are virtual sponges, soaking up knowledge from everywhere around them. The stories they are told before bedtime, the movies they watch as “acceptable entertainment” include numerous fairy tales. Zipes states that “such is the power of visual representation that children tend to believe that Disney’s version of the fairy tale is the real story rather than the ‘classic’ version to which they may or may not have been exposed to through school or home.”<sup>24</sup> And they believe the lessons are what every child needs to know. They do not realize that the tales were once stories that the French aristocracy read for leisure. Instead, Disney

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<sup>23</sup> Zipes, *Fairy Tale and Myth*, 19.

<sup>24</sup> Jack Zipes, *6 Features of how fairy tales were institutionalized for children*, (1994) in Dorothy L. Hurley, “Dorothy L. Hurley, “Seeing White: Children of Color and the Disney Fairy Tale Princess,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 74, no. 3, (Summer 2005)

makes them magical, giving children beautiful images to see and ideals to which to aspire. Dorothy L. Hurley has said that “self-image in children is shaped in some degree by exposure to images found in written texts, illustrations, and film...Moreover, it is clear that children, if they are to develop a positive self-image, need to ‘see’ themselves or their images in texts.”<sup>25</sup> It is clear that hearing fairy tales and watching them on film can lead any little girl to want to be a princess. This is obvious when looking at the number of Disney princesses walking around every Halloween. It is an image that they aspire to without realizing the repercussions.

In 1901, an article in a prominent nursing journal claimed that fairy tales were necessary in a child’s life because “the chief pedagogic value they possess is that they exercise and cultivate the imagination...stimulate the idealizing tendency. What were life worth without ideals.” The author went further by cautioning parents, “do not take moral plum out of the fairy-tale pudding, but let the child enjoy it as a whole.”<sup>26</sup> This advice is over a century old, but does not sound foreign. Fairy tales are told today for virtually the same reasons. The magic captures a child’s imagination, the happy endings give children hope, and they teach everyone that being good brings rewards.

Yet they also indoctrinate children in ideals that may be outmoded given the dramatic economic, social, and cultural changes over the past two centuries. Nowhere is such indoctrination into traditional values as clear as in the area of gender roles. As women’s historians Marilyn J. Boxer and Jean H. Quataert note, “Modern men are defined by occupations---‘what does he do?’ ask most typical parents about the prospective boyfriends of their daughters. ‘Who is she?’ ask the parents of sons. Women

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<sup>25</sup> Dorothy L. Hurley, “Seeing White: Children of Color and the Disney Fairy Tale Princess,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 74, no. 3, (Summer 2005)

<sup>26</sup> “The Use of Fairy Tales.” *The American Journal of Nursing* 1, no. 11, (Aug. 1901)

today continue to be identified first and foremost by relationships to men—whose wife, daughter, mother, lover is she?”<sup>27</sup> This idea is facilitated by the gender ideals set by fairy tales. Men are perceived as the ‘active’ sex, while women are attached to them. Men save women and women need saving. In the following chapters, the depiction of women in fairy tales, specifically the beautiful, naïve, and helpless depiction of women, as well as the heroic, two-dimensional hero will be examined.

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<sup>27</sup> Marilyn J. Boxer and Jean H. Quataert Connecting Spheres: Women in the Western World, 1500 to the Present. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 8.

## Chapter 2: Female Roles in Fairy Tales

Female roles in fairy tales can only be described as polarized. The heroine is perfect in every way. She is beautiful, kind, helpful, and compassionate. She is the idealized 'good.' She is also helpless, naive and lacks any sort of intelligence. It may be extreme to say that the heroine is ignorant, but in many ways this adjective fits. She is certainly not smart, clever, or ambitious. She does not find her way out of situations with the use of her wit or savvy, but waits for others to save her. The female characters that do show signs of intelligence or ambition are evil. In some tales, this vindictiveness comes out of nowhere and in others it seems justified. Either way the woman who is cruel to the poor heroine is defeated in the end. The effects fairy tales have on children and adults is well documented. When it comes to female roles the message these tales convey is that there are only two types of women: the helpless and the malicious. Good women do not save the day, they do not scheme, nor do they get themselves out of bad situations; they wait until a Prince saves them. Women who have desires and the moxie to achieve them are villainous and will be punished in the end.

These fairy tales first appeared widely in published form in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This was a moment when women's roles were undergoing major transformations in Western Europe and the United States, yet fairy tales gained great popularity. Through the rise of feminism and the advent of women in the workforce, fairy tales remained a widely-read genre. Historians Nancy Hewitt and Kirsten Delegard have noted that "depictions of women...have changed dramatically over the years, but in each era dominant images have provided ideals to be either

emulated or defied.”<sup>1</sup> Fairy tales have presented such images to generations of girls and young women.

### **Cinderella**

The five versions of Cinderella examined for this paper were all written down in the late nineteenth century, though they were based on earlier tales. They vary in certain ways, yet, all have the same themes and pertinent plot points to render the same moral. In sum, the tale is about a girl who is abused by female family members. She is made to cook and clean, while the others live lavishly. The King holds a ball for a designated number of nights (which varies in different versions) to find a bride for his son. The girl remains behind while her (step) sisters go to the grand ball. A magical creature comes to her rescue and prepares her for the occasion. She arrives at the ball, and immediately the Prince falls in love with her. The clock strikes midnight, and she must leave quickly before it is too late. In her haste, she leaves behind a slipper. The Prince searches the land for the woman whose foot fits the shoe perfectly. He arrives at the girl’s house, where the other women try on the shoe first. In the end, the Prince finds the girl who captures his heart, and they live happily ever after.

In all these versions, the girl is the quintessential fairy tale heroine. She is beautiful beyond measure. In the French version Cinderella is, “a hundred times more beautiful than her sisters.”<sup>2</sup> Similarly in the Irish version, in which her name is

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy Hewitt and Kirsten Delegard, *Women, Families, and Communities: Readings in American History Volume II Since 1865*, (New York: Pearson Education Inc., 2008), xvii.

<sup>2</sup> D.L. Ashliman, *Cinderella; or, The Little Glass Slipper*. <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0510a.html>, Source: Andrew Lang, *The Blue Fairy Book* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., ca. 1889), 64-71. Lang’s Source: Charles Perrault, *Histoires ou contes due temps passé, avec des moralites: Contes de ma mere l’Oye* (Paris, 1697).

Trembling, she was said to be “more beautiful than the other two.”<sup>3</sup> Not only is she physically superior to those around her, she has a better nature. The Scottish version claims that Roshin-Coatie (Cinderella) was “a bonnie lassie and good.”<sup>4</sup> All the others echo the same sentiment. She is kind-hearted and hard working. She slaves over the housework, never rebels and does not think to stand up for herself. Instead, she is the good-hearted victim. She makes no decisions of her own.

The only version that shows the heroine with any sort of opinion is from Italy. Here, the father goes out of town and promises a present to all three of his daughters. The eldest asks for a beautiful dress, while the middle girl asks for a fine hat and shawl. The youngest, who was called Cinderella because she liked to sit by the chimney corner, asks for a little bird. The girls called her a simpleton for not asking for an ornate present. Upon his return, the father brings word of a ball. The youngest, having nothing to wear, does not attend. The ball is for three nights, and in the following two days, both the sisters and the father urge her to attend. The girl always refuses. In this tale, the girl is not beautiful from birth, but instead, upon asking her bird for help, becomes beautiful for the ball. She is so dirty, in fact, that in the end when the Prince comes with the slipper in search of the owner, the father says he has only two daughters. Upon seeing a third, the father remarks that “she is all in the ashes, the coals...I do not call her my daughter from shame.”<sup>5</sup>

The Italian version presents Cinderella as at least vaguely human. She is stubborn in her refusal to attend the balls with her family. Yet, despite this minor show of

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<sup>3</sup> D.L. Ashliman, *Fair, Brown, and Trembling*, <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0510a.html>, Source: Jeremiah Curtin, *Myths and Folk-Lore of Ireland* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1890), 37-48.

<sup>4</sup> D.L. Ashliman, *Rashin-Coatie*, <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0510a.html>, Source: George Douglas, *Scottish Fairy and Folk-Tales*, (London: Walter Scott Publishing Co., 1901), 17-20.

<sup>5</sup> D.L. Ashliman, *Cinderella*, <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0510a.html>, Source: Thomas Frederick Crane, *Italian Popular Tales* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1885), no 9. 42-47.

personality, she is still the typical heroine. She makes none of her own decisions, and is completely reliant on others to save the day. It is her bird that responds when she entreats, “Little Bird Verdelió, make me more beautiful than I am.”<sup>6</sup> The bird gives her beautiful clothes. He seems rather omniscient in the tale, for he also gives her on the first night a bag of money. She ends up throwing the money out the window to distract the greedy servants when they are chasing her as she exits at midnight. The second night he gives her sand, because the King had threatened his servants with death if such greed was repeated. She uses the sand to blind them on the next night. It is the third night when she loses the slipper in her haste. When the Prince comes to find his beloved, she refuses to go until the bird makes her beautiful again. The bird then tells Cinderella to hide him in her bosom and take him with her, which she does so.

The bird makes every single decision that relates to his mistress finding a better life. Cinderella does make a few contributions to being a model damsel. On the first night of the ball, she drops a bracelet for her eldest sister to find. When the sister tries to return it, she tells her to keep it. The second night, she drops a necklace for her other sister. The last night it is a gold snuffbox full of money for her father. This shows her generosity. It resolutely puts her on the side of “good” as her sisters make fun of her for not attending the ball and show off their presents to her, and her father later says he is ashamed of her. She is kind hearted and compassionate compared to them. Despite the obvious signs of her goodness, she is the only Cinderella in the various versions that has any hint of imperfection. Her family is not explicitly cruel to her in the beginning. They do not force her into manual labor, nor do they keep her away from luxuries. They even invite her to go with them. They do mock her for not attending, but that is the worst of her sisters’

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<sup>6</sup> Ashliman, *Cinderella*, 42-47.

actions. In the end, it is only her father who is truly unkind, and even this is only due to his shame. She is the one who initially refuses to attend the ball and then chooses not to tell them that she was the beautiful woman who awed everyone at the event. Despite this, she is still the good, beautiful, helpless heroine.

The French and German versions of the tale are the most similar to each other. In the French story, the father gets remarried to a woman with two daughters of her own. The stepmother then forces her stepdaughter to do the meanest labor in the house. She and her eldest daughter call her “Cinderwench” due to her filthy rags. The younger sister was kinder and called her Cinderella. Cinderella is perfect in every way. She does all the work without complaint and always lends a helping hand. The sisters have her help them dress and do their hair for “she had excellent ideas, and her advice was always good.”<sup>7</sup> As her sisters leave for the ball, her fairy godmother notices the tears in her eyes. So the godmother makes her a chariot, horses, and a dress so that she may attend the ball as well. When Cinderella arrives, the Prince falls in love with her right away. He dotes on her and brings her various sweets. She is so kind that she sits at the table with her family, who do not recognize her, and gives them oranges and citron out of the kindness of her heart. She leaves the ball before midnight and is home in time to hear about all that happened at the ball from her family. The next night, her godmother once again gives her all the means for her happiness so she may go to see the Prince. This time, she loses track of time because she has so much fun listening to everything the Prince has to say. Thus she has to rush out when the clock strikes and loses her glass slipper. The Prince seeks out the mysterious beauty, and when her foot fits perfectly, the Prince takes her away to live happily ever after. Since she is the epitome of goodness, she does not forget her cruel

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<sup>7</sup> Ashliman, *Cinderella; or, The Little Glass Slipper*.



family. Instead, she “took them up, and as she embraced them, said that she forgave them with all her heart, and wanted them always to love her.”<sup>8</sup>

It is remarkable to see how little personality the heroine has in this tale. She suffers silently and only cries when her family leaves. Her godmother, a magical being, is the one who saves her. She makes no conscious decision of her own to find a way to the ball. She is not rebellious in her actions or even scheming. She merely follows along. Cinderella is kind to her abusers and later forgives them completely. She holds no grudge or even any ill will. It is utterly inhuman. She has no bad emotions or ambition. She does not even seek to go to the ball to snag the Prince, but merely to attend the event. She has no negative or ambiguous qualities. She is beautiful, kind, and helpless.

In the German version, she has the same personality. The differences between the tales lie in some minor plot devices. Instead of a fairy godmother, she is told by her dying mother to plant a tree over her grave, which will help in a time of need.<sup>9</sup> As her mean stepsisters leave for the ball on the first night, they tell her to pick through lentils separating the good from the bad. The pigeons come to help her. They remind her of the tree and tell her to wish upon it. The tree gives her a dress and the means to go the ball. She attends and the Prince falls in love with her. The second night the pigeons help her sort through seeds, and once again tell her to go to the tree. The final night they help her sort through peas. This time she leaves behind a gold slipper and the Prince comes to find her. This Cinderella is also abused but does not complain. She kindly helps all, but asks for nothing. The pigeons think of solutions for her. She even depends on her mother’s tree to go to the ball. Logically, she should have gone to the tree years earlier and asked

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<sup>8</sup> Ashliman, *Cinderella; or, The Little Glass Slipper*.

<sup>9</sup> D.L. Ashliman, *Cinderella*, <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0510a.html>, Source: Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Kinder-und Hausmarchen*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (Berlin, 1812), v.1, no.21. trans. D.L. Ashliman, 1998.

for a way out of the abuse she faced every hour. Instead, she asks to go to a ball. It is not as if she knows she will find her Prince there, she merely wants to attend. She has no ambition or drive, or even any active plan to get herself out of her predicament. The pigeons save her. She, however, is good, beautiful, and helpless.

In the Irish version of the tale, it is the King who has three daughters, Fair, Brown, and Trembling, respectively. The youngest is our heroine. Instead of a ball, she is not allowed to go to church on Sundays because she is so beautiful and her sisters are jealous. A henwife says she should be able to go and will help her. The henwife asks her what she wants to wear; Trembling picks clothes as white as snow for the first Sunday. She goes and enchants everyone there, but runs out before anyone can speak with her. The Prince of Omany was in love with her eldest sister, Fair, and they were set to marry. Upon seeing Trembling, however, he is awed. The third Sunday, he waits outside for her and when she accidentally leaves her slipper behind, he takes it and vows to find his love. He searches the lands for her and takes her as his wife. Even in this tale, the heroine's only decisions are to choose the style of her clothes. Even, the man she 'loves,' happens to be the only man who actually came and searched for her. It can be argued, that this meant he was worthy of her. It can also be said that she simply loved the man who loved her, instead of choosing for herself. She does nothing to fix her life. The henwife tells her she should go to church, and the Prince comes and saves her. She is good, beautiful, and helpless.

In the Scottish version, the heroine, Rashin-Coatie, is the younger, prettier, but less favored of two sisters. Her parents abuse her because they prefer her ugly sister. A young calf brings her food so that she can properly eat. This angers her parents because

they do not want her nourished and beautiful. They discover the calf and are ready to kill him, but he convinces Rashin-Coatie to run away with him. They go to the King's court, where she procures work in the kitchen. Yule time comes, and the calf gives her beautiful clothes to wear to the party. She goes and the Prince falls in love with her. She drops her slipper, and he goes in search of his beloved. A bird tells him to find his love in the kitchens. She is saved from burdensome labors and lives happily ever after. The girl could not do anything without her calf. She did not even run away when her parents refused her food; it is the calf that comes up with the plan. He told her to go to the party and he brought her clothes. She did nothing, but look beautiful and work hard. Yet, she got her happily ever after. She was good, beautiful, and helpless.

In the Cinderella stories, the villain is generally female members of the family. In most of these versions, if the stepmother is evil, the real mother was good and wondrous. The sisters or stepsisters are made out to be greedy because they want to marry the Prince at any cost. Practically speaking, there is nothing wrong with this goal. In reality, this was the goal for every unmarried woman. The Prince is the richest, most eligible bachelor in the area; it only makes sense that any young woman looking to make a favorable match would try to impress the Prince. The real cruelty lies in how the heroine is abused. In the French and German versions, she is forced to slave away in the kitchen. In the Scottish version, she is starved. In the Irish version, she is merely prohibited from attending church, while in the Italian version even this does not occur. It is understandable why her Irish sisters do not want her to attend church: she is competition. They want a good husband, and she would draw attention away from them. This is exactly what happens. Trembling goes to Church, and her eldest sister's betrothed falls in love with her. A

reader might even feel sympathy for Fair. That is until Trembling is married and pregnant, and Fair comes supposedly to assist her. Out of jealousy, Fair throws her sister into the ocean. In the end, she is sentenced to death for her cruelty. The lesson here is that ambition leads to evil. Fair begins by not wanting her sister to attend Mass and ends by trying to kill her. There is no room for an ambiguous character. The tale could have ended, like most of versions, with the wedding of the heroine. This, however, would have left Trembling at fault since she marries the man her sister loved. Instead, the story continues, so that it is clear that Trembling is innocent of all wrongdoing, and Fair is obviously evil. Of course, the Prince made the right decision in marrying the prettier of the sisters because she was also the better in temperament. In a similar effort to make clear who the villain is, the eldest stepsister in the German version is overtly cruel to Cinderella. Upon hearing that she might have seen the carriages arriving at the ball from a pigeon post, the eldest sister cuts it down. She wants no happiness for her stepsister. In the end she too, is punished.

There are very specific ideas of beauty presented through these tales. Cinderella, more than the other fairy tales discussed here, emphasizes a model of beauty based on “fitting in.” In the French version, the stepsisters “hadn’t eaten a thing for almost two days,”<sup>10</sup> in excitement and so that they may fit into their ball gowns. Cinderella, on the other hand, is physically perfect. Cinderella is the model; she is the ideal; and everyone should try to duplicate her beauty. The stepsisters have to starve themselves even to look presentable. They then break over a dozen laces so that they can have fine slender figures. As previously discussed, fairy tales effect readers of all ages. Any young woman who is not perfectly beautiful, like the stepsisters, feels the need to try to be so. In the

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<sup>10</sup> Ashliman, *Cinderella; or, The Little Glass Slipper*

German and Scottish versions, the sisters cut off their toes to fit their feet into the dainty slipper. They do so to marry the Prince, but clearly the implication is that their feet are not perfect. If they were, they would fit into the slipper. They hurt themselves so that they can ‘fit in.’ The Italian version is the only one where the heroine is not physically perfect from the start, but the bird makes her beautiful so that she can attend the ball. Indeed, Cinderella refuses to try on her lost slipper until the bird makes her beautiful again. She takes her bird with her so that Vedilió can make her look just as beautiful every day. In order to get the Prince, she needs to be perfect, to wear the best clothes and have the best shoes. In the Irish version, when the sisters return from church the first Sunday the “mysterious woman” attends, they “would give no peace till they had two dresses like the robes of the strange lady.”<sup>11</sup> They want to dress exactly like the woman that all the men desired. She was the ideal, and they had to try their best to live up to her standard. The underlying lesson is that women who are less than perfect should try to become so. No one is content with the way they look except the most beautiful woman in the land.

### **Snow White**

The three versions of Snow White discussed here also feature a beautiful and naïve heroine who is hunted by an envious maternal figure. In every tale Snow White proves to be remarkably unintelligent, but exceptionally beautiful. The maternal figure is so cruel that in two cases she wants to eat the girl’s organs. Jealousy and anger cause the ‘mother’ to be the unequivocal villain. In the end, Snow White gets a happy ending, although she ‘dies’ before achieving it.

In the Grimm Brothers’ version from Germany, collected in the mid-1800s, the mother, who is also the Queen, wished for Snow White to be born. As the Queen sewed,

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<sup>11</sup> Ashliman, *Fair, Brown, and Trembling*, 37-48.

she pricked her finger on the needle, and three drops of blood fell on the white snow through her window. She looked at it and said, "If only I had a child as white as snow, as red as blood, and as black as this frame." Soon thereafter, she had such a girl. The Queen was rather proud of her beauty and had a mirror that would tell her who the most beautiful woman in the land was. Everyday she asked, "Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who in this land is fairest of all?"<sup>12</sup> The mirror had long replied, "You, my queen, are fairest of all."<sup>13</sup> But when Snow White turned seven, the mirror replied, "You, my queen, are fair; it is true. But Little Snow-White is still a thousand times fairer than you."<sup>14</sup> The Queen then turns her attention to killing her own daughter in order to ensure her continued standing as the fairest in the land.

It is here that gender and power come into play. The Queen, a mother, shows no compassion for her daughter. Due to her pride, she will go to any lengths to achieve her goal. In her first attempt to kill her daughter, she tells a hunter to take her daughter into the wood, kill her, and bring the lungs and liver back so that she may cook them with salt and eat them. The flaw of pride apparently explains the Queen's transformation into a cannibal. When the first plan fails, she tries to kill Snow White three more times. Dressed as an old woman, she tightens Snow White's bodice too tight, then gives her a poisoned comb, then finally a poisoned red apple. Every time she fails. At the very end of the tale, Snow White and the Prince invite her to their wedding. When she attends, they force her to put on a pair of iron shoes that were heated in fire until they glowed, and then dance herself to death. This is the punishment for pride. She is publicly humiliated and is the

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<sup>12</sup> D.L. Ashliman, *Little Snow White*, <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type 0709.html>. Source: *Kinder und Hausmarchen*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (Berlin, 1812), v.1, no. 53

<sup>13</sup> Ashliman, *Little Snow White*

<sup>14</sup> Ashliman, *Little Snow White*

only one who actually dies. Yet she is also the only character in the entire tale with any intelligence or cunning.

Snow White, on the other hand, is extremely naïve. She appeals to the hunter by crying, to the dwarves by crying, and then to the Prince by her beauty. Even then, she does not actively seduce the Prince. Instead she is laid in a glass coffin to be preserved in ‘death,’ and the Prince is enchanted. Moreover, even though the dwarves tell her time and time against not to let anyone in the door because the Queen is trying to kill her, she still does so three times. Each time, it is an old woman offering goods. Not only does she not listen to common sense, she does not figure out after the first time that the Queen can disguise herself as an old woman. Although Snow White is naïve, if not downright stupid, she is, also beautiful and kind. She takes care of the dwarves, does not have an ill thought regarding her mother and happily marries the Prince who loves her. She has no real thoughts throughout the tale, nor does she have ambition, doubt, or judgment. She is, however, the ideal beauty and gets her happily ever after.

In the Scottish version of the tale, the Queen’s name is Silver Tree, while her daughter is Gold Tree. One day they both go to a glen, where the mother asks a trout in a well, “Troutie, bonny little fellow, am not I the most beautiful queen in the world?”<sup>15</sup> The trout responds that her daughter is actually the most beautiful. The Queen becomes so jealous that upon returning home she vows that she will never be well until she eats the heart and liver of her daughter. The King believes her to be ill and asks her what he can do for her. She tells him that only her daughter’s heart and liver will do. The King instead marries Gold Tree to a great King abroad and brings his wife the organs of a goat. A year

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<sup>15</sup> D.L. Ashliman, *Gold-Tree and Silver-Tree*, <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0709.html>, Source: Joseph Jacobs, *Celtic Fairy Tales* (London: David Nutt, 1892), no. 11, 88-92.

later, the Queen returns to the glen to ask once again if she is the most beautiful in the land. The trout replies that her daughter still outshines her, and she is still alive and living abroad. The Queen returns home and asks her husband for a ship so that she may see her beloved daughter. The King obliges. When Gold Tree sees her mother coming, she tells her servants, “she will kill me.”<sup>16</sup> The servants lock her in a room for her own safety. When the Queen finds out, she goes to the room and calls out to her daughter to greet her. Gold Tree says that she cannot. Silver Tree then asks that at the very least put out one finger to welcome her. Despite knowing that her mother was jealous and admitting just moments before that her mother was there to kill her, she puts a finger out. The Queen puts a poisoned ring on her finger, and Gold Tree falls dead.

It is remarkable just how foolish the heroine is here. She acknowledges the danger, but still obliges her mother. She is the ‘good girl’ who listens to her mother and is naïve and innocent enough to believe no harm will befall her. The Queen returns to her own kingdom after killing her daughter. When the King finds her, he is devastated. He locks her body in a room because she is too beautiful for him to bury. Soon, he remarries. Once, when he leaves the kingdom, his new wife finds the key to the room and opens it. She takes the ring off Gold Tree’s finger, and the heroine awakens. When the Prince returns he is overjoyed. His new wife offers to leave, but he tells her that he can love them both. One year later, Silver Tree returns to the glen and asks her question, and once again, the trout expounds the beauty of her daughter. The Queen, for a second time, sets sail to her daughter’s kingdom to kill her. Upon seeing her mother’s ship, Silver Tree fears for her life and does not know what to do. The King’s new wife tells her not to

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<sup>16</sup> Ashliman, *Gold-Tree and Silver-Tree*, 88-92.



worry. She walks to Silver Tree and tricks her into drinking the very poison the mother was going to use on her daughter. Then they all live happily ever after.

The only good woman in the tale with intelligence is the King's new wife. She selflessly brings her husband's love back and kills the villain in the end. Still, she is but a minor character. The real heroine is Gold Tree, who is both naïve and incapable of handling her own problems. Nor does she show any emotion. When she wakes up, she is not upset that her husband married again. Even when her mother tries to kill her, she does not save herself; instead, the servants or the new wife handle the problem. All she does is look beautiful. The villain, on the other hand, is full of envy and rage. She sets out repeatedly to kill her only daughter because of her own vanity. She is determined to be the most beautiful, and she is willing to sacrifice anything. Her search for the idealized version of beauty ultimately leads to her death. Her daughter, however, has no such emotions. She is beautiful and good, feeling neither jealousy nor anger. The mother feels these distinctly human emotions and takes them too far. There is apparently no middle ground.

The third version of Snow White appears in Italian. In this tale, the heroine at first shows signs of intelligence and a will to survive. Overall, though, she remains naïve and helpless. This time, a jealous stepmother asks her husband to kill his daughter, Maria. Instead, the father decides to leave her in the middle of the forest. Maria realizes something is wrong and brings bran with her. During the journey out, she leaves a trail of bran. Upon coming to a cliff, the father throws a loaf of bread down and asks his daughter to get it. She obliges, but when she returns her father is gone. She starts to cry, but remembers her bran trail and sets off for home. Up until now, Maria seems to be

rather smart for a fairy tale heroine. She manages her own survival. However, this spark of intelligence quickly fades. Upon returning home, her father comforts her, and she voices neither anger nor dismay with her father for abandoning her in the middle of the forest. The next morning, her father once again takes her into the forest. This time she forgets to bring the bran and is stuck by herself. For someone who just the day before suspected her father's plan, she does not have the foresight to bring a means for survival again. Instead, she cries until she sees the home of seven robbers. She sneaks inside and tidies up the place. When the robbers return, they do not know how this happened. The next day one robber stays behind in order to see what occurs. He finds Maria and tells her that she can live with them as their sister if she cleans and cooks for them. The robbers all warn her that when they are away she could be in danger. One morning an old poor woman comes by. Maria ends up telling the woman her entire story, including how her stepmother wants her dead. The old woman goes to her stepmother and tells her that Maria is alive. The stepmother gives her a magic ring to give to Maria. The poor woman does so, and the heroine falls dead. The seven robbers find her body and are devastated. They put her in a gold casket and send her to the King. The King finds her so beautiful that he cannot part from her. Fortunately, his mother sees the body and takes the ring off Maria's finger. When she wakes up, the King decides to marry her.

In the end, Maria achieves her happily ever after, but it does not excuse her inability to think throughout the tale. She knows her father has tried to abandon her once, but still she does not find a way to save herself. Despite the fact that the robbers warn her of danger, she trusts all her secrets to a perfect stranger and ends up dead. The stepmother has no reason for hating Maria other than the belief that, "stepmothers have always been

that way.”<sup>17</sup> She hates the girl simply because she does. Maria, as the typical heroine, can do nothing to stop her. Instead, she waits until someone brings her back from death so that she can live a happy life.

### **Sleeping Beauty**

Sleeping Beauty also appears here in three versions, all of them offering a minimal role for the heroine. For most of the story, she lives up to the title and sleeps. One common point in these versions is that the girl has no idea she is cursed and actively seeks the flax/spindle that will put her to sleep. Why no one informed the girl of her fate so that she could save herself is unknown. This does make her a perfect fairy tale heroine, though. She gets herself into trouble through no fault of her own (she is cursed after all), and a Prince comes to save her in a hundred years. The Italian version is arguably the most interesting. The Princess’s father puts her sleeping body in one of his country mansions. After a good many years, a King is riding by the mansion and sees her. He carries the woman named Talia to the bed, “where he gathered the first fruits of love.”<sup>18</sup> He then leaves her to go back to his kingdom. In nine months, she gives birth to two twins, a boy and a girl named Sun and Moon. Upon seeking milk, one infant accidentally sucked on her finger instead of her nipple. As the cursed flax was stuck under her nail, the baby managed to dislodge it, and the beauty awakes. When the King returns and sees his children he is extremely happy. However, he must return to his kingdom and his wife. Talia remains perfectly innocent the whole time. She fell asleep and woke up with two

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<sup>17</sup> D.L. Ashliman, *Maria, the Wicked Stepmother, and the Seven Robbers*. <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0709.html>, Source: Laura Gonzenback, “Maria, die böse Stiefmutter und die sieben Rauber,” *Sicilliansche Marchen, aus dem Volksmund gesammelt* (Leipzig: Verlag von Wilhelm Engelmann, 1870), vol. 1, no. 2, 407.

<sup>18</sup> D.L. Ashliman, *Sun, Moon, and Talia*. <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0410a.html>. Source: The Pentameron of Giambattista Basile, trans. Richard F. Burton (Privately printed 1893), day 5. tale 5, trans. D.L. Ashliman.

children, who she of course loved. When the King came to see her, she loved him as well despite the fact that he raped her in her sleep. In the end the wife, who is of course evil, dies, and Talia lives happily ever after.

In the French version, the woman is asleep for a hundred years and wakes up when a Prince rescues her by cutting through all the vines that grew around her palace. The Prince hides her because he does not trust his ogre mother. When he ascends the throne, he brings his wife to court. He is proven right about his mother, but in the end the evil woman dies. The princess, of course, is perfect. She did nothing wrong and merely woke up to her Prince. In the German version, the story is similar. Briar-Rose is the character's name, and she sleeps for a hundred years until her Prince wakens her. She is, of course, beautiful as in every other version. The fairies that bless her give her perfect beauty and virtue. She does no wrong, and in these versions, she is not sexually assaulted while sleeping but simply awakes to her happy fate.

The evil female in the French and Italian tales is extremely cruel. In the Italian version, the wife sends a spy to follow her husband because she does not trust him and discovers his attraction to the sleeping beauty. She then has the cook bring the two children of the heroine and fashion a meal of them. The cook hides the children, however, and uses lambs. The wife makes her husband eat the food, thinking she was forcing him to consume his own flesh. She is described in the tale as both Nero and Medea, two villainous characters from history and mythology. She later has Talia brought to court and says, "Welcome, Madam Busybody! You are a fine piece of goods, you ill weed, who are you enjoying my husband. So you are the lump of filth, the cruel bitch, that has caused my head to spin? Change your ways, for you are welcome in purgatory, where I

will compensate you for all the damage you have done to me.”<sup>19</sup> She forces her to strip and almost kills her before her husband comes to save the day.

This woman is extremely hateful, and the nineteenth century versions seem intended for adults rather than children to read given the graphic violence and language. If the characters were not so polarized, it would be very easy to sympathize with the wife since her husband cheats on her and hides a second family. She has every right to be angry, but she takes vengeance too far. It is interesting to note that both Talia and the Queen have reason for anger but only the Queen shows it, and she is the evil one. Talia is perfectly happy with her rapist. She is virtuous despite the assault and does not show anger.

In the French version, the Prince does not trust his ogre mother though when he ascends the throne and leaves to fight a war, he entrusts the kingdom to the woman. She decides to eat her grandchildren. In fact she “could smell any fresh meat.”<sup>20</sup> The cook saves the children and the Princess in this version by hiding them. The King comes and punishes his mother for her evil. In this, case the evil mother comes out of nowhere. She has no reason for eating young---she just does it. She is pure evil to Sleeping Beauty’s pure good.

### **Beauty and the Beast**

The Beauty and the Beast tales, unlike most others, suggest that it is possible to see beyond physical beauty. This turns out to be case only for men, however; the woman is still utterly perfect. In the German version, a man steals a rose for his youngest

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<sup>19</sup> Ashliman, *Sun, Moon, and Talia*.

<sup>20</sup> D.L. Ashliman, *The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood*, <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0410a.html>. Source: Andrew Lang, *The Blue Fairy Book* (London: Longmans, Green and Company, ca. 1889). Lang’s source: Charles Perrault, *Histoires ou contes du temps passé, avec des moralitez* (Paris 1697).

daughter. The Beast sees this and says that he has eight days to bring him the reason for the theft. The father agrees hoping to escape. In eight days, the Beast arrives at the home and asks for his wife. The youngest daughter, who is the “most beautiful”<sup>21</sup> and the most virtuous, agrees to go with him because she does not want to see her father harmed. She ends up very happy with the Beast because he is kind to her. She does not care that he forced her into marriage. She is virtuous and sweet, and in the end, she loves him so he turns into a handsome Prince. Either way, she has no choice in the matter. She just does what is right, without anger or bitterness.

In the Swiss version of the tale, the youngest daughter wants a grape. After she is forced to marry the Beast, she is happy, but curious. There is no light allowed after dark in the house. She stays with him a year and then they go to visit her father. He tries to sneak her matches, but the Beast sees. This happens three times, before she gets the matches. It is interesting to note, that she does not ask for the matches, she is merely given them. A good, virtuous girl would not do anything against the rules. When she does light a match, she sees that at night the Beast turns into a handsome Prince. Now that she has seen him, he can remain that way. Even her one act of slight rebellion is thus good. It is what needed to be done to reach the happy ending. Once again, only in the Italian version of the tale does the woman have any sort of emotion. The heroine, named Zelina, does not want to marry the Beast because “she did not feel at all like marrying the monster, because he was too ugly and looked like a beast.”<sup>22</sup> The Beast tells her that if she does not marry him, her father will die, so she consents. He then turns into a Prince.

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<sup>21</sup> D.L. Ashliman, *The Summer and Winter Garden*, <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0425c.html>, Source: Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, “Von dem Sommer-und Wintergarten.” *Kinder-und Hausmarchen* (1812), vol. 1, no. 68

<sup>22</sup> D.L. Ashliman, *Zelina and the Monster*, <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0425c.html>, Source: Thomas Frederick Crane, *Italian Popular Tales*, (London: Macmillan and Company, 1885), no. 2, 7-11.

Note that her reasons for refusal had nothing to do with force or the fact that he was threatening her family. She just thought he was too ugly. Other than this she has no problem with him. She is too good and perfect to have a truly cruel thought. The heroine in all these versions is perfectly fine with being forced into a loveless marriage. She never rebels or gets angry. She is far too perfect for that and so receives her happy ending.

Throughout Europe and America, the role of women has changed over the centuries that the fairy tales are collected, transcribed, published, and popularized. Lower class women always had to work and care for families in ways their superiors never did. In the era that these fairy tales were transcribed, the role of women matches the ideal set by fairy tales perfectly:

By the 1850s definitions of what constituted ideal femininity had changed, particularly for white women in the middle and upper classes. The ideal middle-class woman was now supposed to be physically delicate, economically dependent, and aesthetically decorative. In an increasingly commercial economy, the material well being of her family became more and more dependent upon her husband's income rather than on her domestic skills. While it was her job to conserve and manage the resources of the household, the acknowledged economic value of her domestic work declined. She was also less valued for her fertility since middle-class children, who were not expected to contribute materially to the family unit, became a drain on its resources.<sup>23</sup>

Over the course of a century, the roles of women changed. They joined the workforce, gained the right to vote in the United States, and entered politics.<sup>24</sup> In 1963, the United States Congress passed the Equal Pay Act, making it law that men and women had to be paid equally for the same work. The 1970s saw a resurgence of feminism throughout the nation, with rallies and protests around the United States. Yet when Kay Stone conducted

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<sup>23</sup> Sylvia D. Hoffert, *A History of Gender in America: Essays, Documents, and Articles*, (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Education Inc.), 4.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*,

interviews with forty women and girls between 1972 to 1973, the influence fairy tales still had was quite apparent. She observes,

All had read fairy tales, almost all could name several favorite heroines but rarely any heroes, and most of these tales were from Disney or the Grimms. Many admitted that they were certainly influenced by their reading of fairy tales. Some had openly admired the lovely princesses and hoped to imitate them—especially their ability to obtain a man and a suburban castle without much effort. An eleven-year-old told me, “I thought I’d just sit around and get money. I used to think ‘Cinderella’ should be *my* story.” Another admirer of Cinderella, a nine-year-old, said, “Well, I wouldn’t really want to marry a prince like she did—just somebody *like* a prince.”<sup>25</sup>

It is clear that despite dramatic changes in the roles of women, the ‘ideal’ female image had not changed much.

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<sup>25</sup> Kay Stone, “Things Walt Disney Never Told Us,” in Women and Folklore, by Clare R. Ferrer (Texas Press, 1975), 48.



### **Chapter 3: Male Roles in Fairy Tales**

While women's roles underwent significant transformations as fairy tales became popular in printed versions, men remained in economic, political, and familial control. The heroes of fairy tales appeared two-dimensional at best, rich and powerful but lacking in personality. They tend to be royalty, handsome, and ideal in every way. Yet they have very simple needs and emotions. They fall in love, generally at first sight, and are devastated if their ladylove is 'dead.' Even when their actions may be construed as controversial, they are never wrong. The Prince of a fairy tale is always right and always wins in the end. He gets his bride and a happy ending, regardless of the plot. Most of the time, he does not even cause the successful conclusion, but depends on minor characters who are on his side. Regardless, he is still the unequivocal hero. Monarchs throughout Europe held a similar position. They were ordained by God and were meant to be strong, diplomatic, and always right. By the eighteenth century, revolution was erupting in various parts of Europe. In France, the revolution called for 'liberty, equality, and fraternity.' Still, despite the movement for democracy, fairy tale ideals did not change. The hero was still the prince. The ideal man, according to fairy tales, is one who is always right and always wins, but shows no real cunning, foresight, or flaws. Thus, even as monarchies lost power across Europe in the late nineteenth century, their fictional counterparts remained all powerful, but intellectually unimpressive.

#### **Cinderella**

The Prince in the Cinderella stories is basically the man looking for a bride who has to find a beautiful maiden and fall in love with her. In the French version, the Prince is taken with the fair lady upon seeing her on the first night of the ball. He spends the

night dancing with only her. The next night, when she returns, he “was always with her, and never ceased his compliments and kind speeches to her.”<sup>1</sup> When the heroine runs away at midnight, he follows but cannot overtake her. Instead, he finds her glass slipper. He has the lands searched to find the maiden whose foot fits the slipper. When the man ordered to find the lady sees that Cinderella’s foot fits, he realizes he has the right woman. Her fairy godmother then appears and turns her rags to beautiful clothing. She is then taken to the Prince “dressed as she was...He thought she was more charming than before.”<sup>2</sup> He then marries her, and they live happily ever after. Throughout this tale, the Prince does very little. During the ball, women come to him, including Cinderella who finds her way to him both nights. He simply waits for the woman he apparently loves. When she leaves, he has someone else take the slipper and find her. This does not seem unusual because a Prince would have servants to do the menial work, but it still seems odd that the Prince does virtually nothing. He never sees Cinderella in her rags. She is always immaculate to him. It is not as if he finds out about her suffering and chooses to rescue her; he is simply in awe of her beauty and wants her as his bride. In this version, Cinderella even forgives her stepsisters so there is no chance of the Prince avenging his love. Instead, he just lives happily ever after. The reader has no sense of what his life was like before the balls, nor is it clear what he does or feels. He is the prize at the end of a difficult race. Yet, he is presented as the goal. Cinderella escapes her toil by marrying the Prince. She would of course want him, but it is not as if she is tired of her misfortune and

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<sup>1</sup> D.L. Ashliman, *Cinderella; or, The Little Glass Slipper*. <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0510a.html>, Source: Andrew Lang, *The Blue Fairy Book* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., ca. 1889), 64-71. Lang’s Source: Charles Perrault, *Histoires ou contes due temps passé, avec des moralites: Contes de ma mere l’Oye* (Paris, 1697).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

decides to find a neighbor to love. He is the handsome and rich Prince, who takes her away from her misery, even if he does not actually do any of it.

The Italian version of the tale presents an almost identical Prince. He dances with the heroine and then has his servants find his love. He simply waits in the castle for his happy ending to arrive.<sup>3</sup> The same Prince exists in the Scottish tale. He is the man Rashin-Coatie dances with, and he has his servants find his lady. In the end, when she turns out to be a servant from the kitchen, he does not care, and marries her. There is no reaction to the fact that she was a servant, nor to anything else. He simply marries her and builds her a house for her beloved calf.<sup>4</sup>

In the German version of the tale, the Prince falls in love in the same manner. His beloved leaves behind a gold slipper for him. In this tale, the Prince goes personally to search for his ladylove. When he arrives at Cinderella's home, one of her stepsisters cut a part of her heel so her foot can fit in the slipper. The Prince believes he has found the woman who captured his heart. He then escorts her to his carriage so that they may marry. Fortunately, two pigeons call out to him, "Rook di goo, rook di goo! There's blood in the shoe. The shoe is too tight, The bride is not right!"<sup>5</sup> He goes back, and this time the second stepsister cuts off a piece of her toe so that the slipper may fit. The Prince once again takes the maiden to the carriage and is again stopped by the pigeons. It is not until the third attempt, when he has the cinder girl try on the shoe that it fits properly. He realizes that this is his bride and rides away with the pigeons' approval.

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<sup>3</sup> D.L. Ashliman, *Cinderella*, <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0510a.html>, Source: Thomas Frederick Crane, *Italian Popular Tales* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1885), no 9. 42-47.

<sup>4</sup> D.L. Ashliman, *Rashin-Coatie*, <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0510a.html>, Source: George Douglas, *Scottish Fairy and Folk-Tales*, (London: Walter Scott Publishing Co., 1901), 17-20.

<sup>5</sup> Ashliman, *Cinderella*.

Although, the Prince does take action in this tale, he is remarkably unaware. He does not recognize his love at all. Twice imposters fool him, and he needs pigeons to steer him in the right direction. Yet, he is still the ideal hero. He rescues the cinder girl from her misery so that they may live happily ever after. Granted he is a Prince, and apparently wealthy, so every maiden in the land would want to marry him. The tale suggests that it is not only his wealth that makes him a 'catch,' however; he is the ideal man who can rescue the heroine. Yet he does not recognize her without aid, nor does he realize that the imposters' socks are bloody until the pigeons tell him. He does not even show anger when he figures out that the stepsisters tricked him. He simply goes back and tries again. He shows no emotion, save his determination to find his bride.

In the Irish version, the hero is actually the Prince of Omanyra. In the beginning of the story, he is in love with the heroine's eldest sister, Fair. Upon seeing the beauty of the youngest sister, Trembling, he falls in love with her. Trembling leaves her shoe at church accidentally, and the Prince searches for her. When he finds her, he marries her and they return to his land. When Fair comes to visit, she is so jealous that she pushes her sister into the sea so a whale will swallow her. Fair then goes to the now King, who asks her where his wife is. Fair says that she is his wife, and that her elder sister has left. The King puts a sword between them in bed and says that if it is truly his wife, the sword will become warm, otherwise it will stay cold. The next morning it was still cold. Meanwhile, Trembling was saved when a 'cowboy' saw the whale come ashore. She asked him to tell her husband what had happened, but Fair gave him a potion to forget. The next morning, upon realizing the King had found out she was not his wife, Fair again tried to push her sister into the sea. This time the cowboy managed to get the message to the King. The

King then goes and saves his wife and detains his sister-in-law. He then sends a message to her father to tell him what his daughter has done but leaves the matter of her life in his hands even though the father tells him to punish her as he wishes.

In this tale, the King of Omarya is the apparent hero. He is the one Trembling goes to find her happily ever after. He lives in a great land and his opinions are never questioned. Still, his actions are controversial. He is fickle with his love. Even though Fair turns into the villain, she is rightfully angry. He left her for her more attractive younger sister. Later, he does not fully recognize that Fair is pretending to be his wife. The tale makes no mention of Fair disguising herself so readers likely assumed that she simply tells him she is his wife. Although, he is suspicious, the King does not recognize that Fair, the woman he scorned, is not his wife, his supposed great love. He also does not punish the woman who repeatedly tries to kill his wife, but leaves that to her father. The King of Omarya is supposedly the ideal man, and yet he does very little that is heroic. It is the ‘cowboy’ who really saves the day and the father who serves justice. All the King really does is fall in love (twice) and then find his bride through the use of her shoe.<sup>6</sup>

### **Snow White**

In the three versions of Snow White discussed here, the Prince arrives at the end, falls in love with a dead body, and whisks her away to his kingdom. Someone else manages to wake her, and they live happily ever after. The ideal hero does very little in these tales. He is simply the man who falls in love and the means by which the heroine achieves a perfect life after her many sufferings. In the Grimm Brothers’ version, the young Prince comes to the dwarves’ home seeking shelter for the night. He sees the dead

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<sup>6</sup> D.L. Ashliman, *Fair, Brown, and Trembling*, <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0510a.html>, Source: Jeremiah Curtin, *Myths and Folk-Lore of Ireland* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1890), 37-48.

Snow White lying in a coffin of gold and is enchanted. The Prince then convinces the dwarves to give him the corpse so that he may cherish her. He takes her back to his castle, where he spends every waking moment with her. Every room he goes to he has his servants carry the coffin so that he will not have to part with her. One servant is so fed up with the weight he stands her upright and shoves her in the back with his hand. This causes the poisoned fruit to come out of her mouth, and Snow White rises. The Prince is overjoyed and they marry.

Yet the hero is nothing more than the guy who falls in love with Snow White's beauty. He cherishes her dead form, and that is it. He does not have anything else to do in the entire tale. His servants ultimately awaken her. Perhaps, it can be inferred that he is the one who intends to punish her mother at the end of the tale, and he devises the rather gruesome manner in which it is done. This, however, is only implied. No one takes credit for punishing the mother; she is merely punished for her evil actions. Snow White is probably not the mastermind, for she is not cruel or twisted. The readers do not know enough about the Prince to deduce whether he could have done it, so it is left unsaid.<sup>7</sup>

In the Scottish version of the tale, the King who loves Gold Tree marries her when her father wants to save her from his jealous wife. The King ends up loving his wife dearly. When, her mother Silver Tree comes and manages to kill her, he is devastated. He locks her body away in a room instead of burying her, for he feels she is too beautiful to part with. He then remarries. The new wife manages to take the poisoned ring off his love's finger, and he is once again overjoyed. Yet when the new wife offers to leave, the King says that there is no need and that he can have them both. When Silver

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<sup>7</sup> D.L. Ashliman, *Little Snow White*, [http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type\\_0709.html](http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type_0709.html). Source: *Kinder und Hausmarchen*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (Berlin, 1812), v.1, no. 53

Tree returns to try to kill her daughter again, it is the new wife who stops her, not the King. Throughout the tale, the King does virtually nothing. He loves his wife, but does not manage to save her from her own mother. The servants first hatch a plan to hide her, and then his new wife ultimately thwarts the villain. Gold Tree loves the King and wants to be with him; she does not care that he remarried. His new wife loves him enough to bring back his first love, be kind to her, and save her life. He is the ideal man who is apparently every woman's hero, except that he does not actually do anything in the tale.<sup>8</sup>

In the Italian version, the Prince appears at the very end. Only when Maria is rendered dead by the stepmother do the seven robbers put her in an ornate coffin and send her off to the kingdom. When he sees her, the Prince falls in love with the beautiful corpse. His mother ends up pulling off the poisoned ring, allowing Maria to wake up and marry the enchanted Prince. Once again, the hero of this tale does not perform any heroic action. The heroine is literally sent to him, and he is simply enthralled by her beauty. His mother is the only reason they manage to marry. Yet, he is still seen as the ideal hero who will lead Maria away from the pain she suffers at her stepmother's hand.

It is interesting to note that it is the robbers who do the most for Maria. They take her in and treat her well. They warn her against danger and mourn her death, yet they are not the heroes of the tale. She does not fall in love with one of the robbers and live happily ever after. Apparently this fate is only possible with an ideal man, and the robbers are certainly not ideal. They are not rich or royalty. The Prince must be the hero, even if he does not do anything heroic or even kind.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> D.L. Ashliman, *Gold-Tree and Silver-Tree*, <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0709.html>, Source: Joseph Jacobs, *Celtic Fairy Tales* (London: David Nutt, 1892), no. 11, 88-92.

<sup>9</sup> D.L. Ashliman, *Maria, the Wicked Stepmother, and the Seven Robbers*. <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0709.html>, Source: Laura Gonzenback, "Maria, die böse Stiefmutter und die

## Sleeping Beauty

The hero in Sleeping Beauty is probably the most ‘nuanced’ of the male figures in all the fairy tales discussed. In two of the versions, he has to fight for his princess. In the Italian version, even though his actions can be construed as controversial, he is still the perfect man. In this tale, the hero is a King. He happens to be out hunting when he passes a country mansion. Inside he sees this beautiful maiden and falls in love. He takes her in his arms and “gathers the first fruits of love.”<sup>10</sup> That is, he rapes her when she is unconscious. He then leaves her and returns home to his wife. Sleeping Beauty, whose name is Talia, gives birth to twins, Sun and Moon, nine months later. One of the children manages to dislodge the cursed flax from the heroine’s finger, and she awakens. The King remembers Talia and visits her. He is overjoyed at the sight of his new family, but still keeps them hidden away, for his wife is evil. But the Queen finds out about Talia and her husband and sets out to kill the children and their mother. In the end, the King hears Talia’s screams and rushes to help, and the Queen falls into her own trap and dies. Throughout the tale, the King is apparently perfect. Talia wakes up and loves him. She is not angry with him for raping and impregnating her. His wife, who does in fact have the right to be angry, ends up being portrayed as an evil villain, so the reader sympathizes with the King and his beloved. The King is obviously right in loving the beautiful Talia, and he was right to hide her from his evil wife who would have tried to kill her. He is then rewarded with his perfect family. Despite cheating on his wife, raping another

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sieben Rauber,” *Sicilianische Marchen, aus dem Volksmund gesammelt* (Leipzig: Verlag von Wilhelm Engelmann, 1870), vol. 1, no. 2, 407.

<sup>10</sup> D.L. Ashliman, *Sun, Moon, and Talia*. <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0410a.html>. Source: The Pentameron of Giambattista Basile, trans. Richard F. Burton (Privately printed 1893), day 5. tale 5, trans. D.L. Ashliman.



woman, and then forgetting her for nine months, the King is the hero. He is the man both Talia and the Queen want.

In the French version, the Prince is more active, at least initially. He hears a tale of hidden castle with a princess sleeping inside. He feels that he is up to the adventure of rescuing her, for “a young and amorous prince is always valiant.”<sup>11</sup> He bravely cuts through great trees, bushes, and shrubbery to reach the castle. Upon entering, “everything he saw might have frozen the most fearless person with horror. There reigned all over a most frightful silence; the image of death everywhere showed itself.”<sup>12</sup> But the Prince pushed on and finds a resplendent beauty, who awakes at his arrival. He declares his undying love for her and together they are happy. He, however, has to leave her at the castle to return to his parents’ home. He could not bring his love because he did not trust his ogress mother. After some time, his father dies and his son is declared King, at which time he brings his bride to his kingdom. But when it is time for him to leave on a journey, the King puts his mother in charge. The ogress tries to eat her grandchildren and the heroine, simply because that is what ogres do. In the end, the King returns just in time to see his mother almost eat his bride. Enraged, the ogress throws herself into her own trap and dies.

Here at least, the Prince rescues the princess. Even though he does so after hearing a folk tale, at least he takes action. He is brave, handsome, and perfect. His doubts about his mother are proven correct, even though he had no reason to suspect her before then. Simply because she is an ogre, he thinks that she cannot be trusted. The

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<sup>11</sup> D.L. Ashliman, *The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood*, <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0410a.html>. Source: Andrew Lang, *The Blue Fairy Book* (London: Longmans, Green and Company, ca. 1889). Lang’s source: Charles Perrault, *Histoires ou contes du temps passé, avec des moralitez* (Paris 1697).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

Prince of course is always right in his presumptions. Still, there is a question as to why he leaves his kingdom in the power of his mother if he does not trust her, which is never addressed. His actions are never questioned. His mother is evil and in the wrong. She dies in the end, and he gets his perfect family.

In the German version of the tale, Briar Rose is the heroine. Her hero is the one prince not afraid of the hedge that surrounds her castle. He enters bravely, and all the thorns turn to roses for him. As he enters, all the animals and servants awake, until he reaches the princess. She awakes for him, and they live happily ever after. In this version, the Prince does nothing except say that he is not afraid. There are other princes who tried to cross the hedge but could not do so. But the hero did not have to fight, the thorns simply turned for him as if he was always perfect for the princess. Without any action or any struggle, he achieves his happily ever after.

### **Beauty and the Beast**

The Beauty and the Beast tales show the hero to have flaws and emotions. Of course, this is only possible in the 'beast' form. There is a sense that all of the flaws are washed away when he transforms into the proper, ideal Prince. In the three versions studied here, the father steals a gift for his beloved daughter from the Beast. He is allowed to return home if he brings his daughter to marry the Beast. The daughter ends up having to marry the Beast because she fears for her father's life. The Beast, although technically forcing her to marry him, treats her very well. He gives her everything she desires. She is also allowed to return to her father's home, and then in the various versions, when she returns to prove her love, the Beast becomes the perfect Prince.

In the German version, the Beast gives the father eight days to bring his daughter to him. The father tries to forget about the incident, but the Beast comes to collect his prize on the eighth day. The daughter agrees to go with him. After some time, the Beast allows her to see her family through a magic mirror. It is through this that she finds out that her father is ill. The Beast lets her go home on the condition that she return in eight days. The daughter sets out to help her father, but he dies, and she loses track of time in her grief. She returns much later, but finds the castle still and dark, and the beautiful gardens turned desolate. The Beast, however, is nowhere to be found. She sadly goes into the garden, and sees cabbage heads. When she pushes them aside, she sees her Beast laying dead. She quickly fetches water and pours it on him. The Beast wakes up and is transformed into a handsome Prince. They then marry and live happily ever after.

In this version, the Beast appears in some ways cold and obstinate. He forces a woman to marry him and then does not allow her to see her family for a long time. Even when she is permitted to leave, it is for a short time. Still, he is extremely kind to her and treats her very well. The heroine goes back to him even though she does not have to and brings him back to life. Still, he has to turn into the ideal Prince before the happy ending is achieved. The heroine could never have ended up forever with a Beast even if he treated her well; he had to turn into an ideal fairy tale hero before the conclusion. Also interesting to note, the handsome Prince does not do anything. He marries the daughter and lives on, but does not offer anything to the plot. The perfect prince does not need to have emotions or flaws; he is handsome and royal. <sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> D.L. Ashliman, *The Summer and Winter Garden*, <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0425c.html>, Source: Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, "Von dem Sommer-und Wintergarten." *Kinder-und Hausmarchen* (1812), vol. 1, no. 68

In the Swiss version of the tale, the beast is actually a white bear. After forcing the daughter to accompany him, he brings her back to his castle. Here he gives her everything, but has one rule. There are no lights anywhere after dark. After three years, her father slips matches to his daughter. When the heroine lights a match, she sees a handsome prince. He thanks her for redeeming him and says that they can now properly marry and live happily. The Prince does not say how he was made into a Bear nor is it clear why the Bear did not allow her to have light for so long if it was indeed to break a curse. The Bear, other than having one rule, was kind to the daughter. He let her visit her family despite knowing that the father was trying to help her break his rules. Yet, the story could not end like this. The Prince had to wake up and reclaim all his lands in order for him to be happy with the heroine. He had to be handsome and rich in order for the story to end, regardless of the fact that their relationship was based on the bear's interaction with the heroine.

In the Italian version, the heroine, Zelina, agrees to go with the Beast in fear of her father's life. When the Beast proposes though, she refuses. He is kind to her and treats her well, but she finds him too ugly. He proposes once more and is turned down again. The third time, he tells her that her father is fated to die and is very ill. He shows her the father lying on his deathbed through a magic mirror. Struck with grief, she tells him she will marry him as long as he saves her father. As soon as she consents, he is transformed. He is the King of Oranges and was cursed by a witch to be a monster until a beautiful woman agreed to marry him. This is where the tale ends. It is not clear whether the King manages to save the father, but apparently, this does not matter. The monster needed the dying father as a ploy to get a bride. Although it does not explicitly say that

the beauty marries him, it is clear that she will. She liked the monster just fine, and only had an issue with his looks. Now, he is perfect for her. He is handsome royalty, and she would not want more. He fits the role of the ideal man.

Men in fairy tales do not need to do anything. They are ideal because of who they are. Royalty means that they are handsome, brave, and good. Their actions are not judged singularly, even if they are disgusting. Overall, he is perfect, and that is all that matters. Monarchs, for centuries, tried to uphold a version of this exact ideal. Ordained by God, they were automatically superior by birth. They were always right and never contested, even when many Kings proved to be less than ideal rulers. History, however, shows that society would not put up with this false image. Nations revolted, and for the most part, democratic ideas have been victorious. Yet, the fairy tale hero is still the same. As fairy tales move into the twentieth century, the 'ideal' man did not change. He was still the same infallible Prince.

## Chapter 4: Fairy Tales in Contemporary Times

In the twentieth century, with the advent of filmmaking, fairy tales appeared in a new medium. Although many filmmakers, such as James Stuart Blackton, Emile Cohl, and Winsor McCay, adapted fairy tales into talking pictures, it was not until Walt Disney produced such films that fairy tales became widely popular movies. Jack Zipes, a film studies scholar, notes that the fairy tale has “not only been conceived and exploited to manipulate children and adults, it has also been changed in innovative ways to instill hope in its youthful and mature audiences so that no matter how bad their lives are, they can still believe that they can live happily ever after.”<sup>1</sup> Putting fairy tales in the broader historical context of the twentieth century, Zipes argues that the popularity of such films as Disney’s *Snow White* (1937) had much to do with the overall feelings of the era. The film allowed viewers to momentarily forget the Great Depression, the rise of fascism, and other worldly horrors and, at least for an hour or two, focus on happy endings and the triumph of good in the world.<sup>2</sup> Thus the ideals set by fairy tales were not only intended to educate (or manipulate) children, but also to reach adults. The ideals they expressed, moreover, continued to include gender relations, which remained astonishingly traditional.

Disney instituted very few major plot changes in the fairy tales he adapted to film, probably because he and his directors generally subscribed to their ideological content, including “clear-cut gender roles that associated women with domesticity and men with action and power.” Thus in terms of the plot itself, “the structure involved the introduction of the major protagonist, who soon gets into trouble and must be rescued or

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<sup>1</sup> Jack Zipes, *Happily Ever After: Fairy Tales, Children, and the Culture Industry*. (New York: Routledge, 1997), 6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

must rescue himself, depending on the sex. Females do not rescue themselves in Disney films, but they do sing.”<sup>3</sup> As Kay Stone notes, of the tales Disney chose to adapt, all “had passive, pretty heroines, and all three had female villains, thus strongly reinforcing the already popular stereotype of the innocent beauty victimized by the wicked villainess.”<sup>4</sup> It is clear that Disney did not intend to alter the gender roles that were inherited from earlier centuries. Three of the four fairy tales discussed above appeared in film adaptations prior to the 1970s feminist revolution. Still today, these versions, with their outdated gender dynamics, remain the most popular among American, arguably global, audiences.

The characters themselves do not change in the Disney versions. The gender roles of the docile female and heroic male remain the same, and they present similar personalities on film as in storybooks. Males are still very two dimensional, with no flaws or emotions. They do ‘act’ more in the modern versions than earlier, but still lack any vivid personality. Female characters are still either perfect or evil. Zipes writes that,

The disenfranchised or oppressed heroine must be rescued by a daring prince. Heterosexual happiness and marriage are always the ultimate goals of the story. There is no character development because all characters must be recognizable as types that remain unchanged throughout the film. Good cannot become evil, nor can evil become good. The world is viewed...as a dichotomy, and only the good will inherit the earth.<sup>5</sup>

In other words, the gender archetypes of previous centuries remain and are adapted into animated musicals. Although these may seem like light fare, the effect that these Disney tales have on the audience and the wider society is significant. According to Zipes,

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>71</sup> Kay Stone, “Things Walt Disney Never Told Us,” in *Women and Folklore*, by Clare R. Ferrer (Texas Press, 1975), 44.

<sup>72</sup> Zipes, *Happily Ever After*, 93.

Disney's films were never intended solely for children but were meant to captivate the "child" in all the viewers. If one can discern an attitude toward children in the films, it is that they are to be swept away as objects by the delightful and erotic images. This sweeping away is an envelopment that involves loss of identity; that is, children as viewers are to lose themselves in the oedipal wishes that are depicted on the screen. The process of viewing involves infantilization because each frame regulates the drives and wishes of the viewer according to rigid sexist and racist notions that emanate from the nineteenth century and are recalled in the film with nostalgia.<sup>6</sup>

Clearly the popularity and mass appeal of Disney's fairy tales include the acceptance of gender ideals developed in a distant era. Disney's first film release was *Snow White*, during the Great Depression. In an era of desperate poverty and a resurgence of manual labor, the seven dwarves made the film relevant to the times. Yet, the happy ending—with the heroine marrying a rich Prince and solving all her problems--perpetuates the idea that maybe a fairy tale ending is possible for viewers as well. This may have been a 'feel good' movie to uplift millions during the Depression, but the hope it gave was based on an ideal that has been around for centuries. Even following the feminist movements of the 1970s and 1980s, fairy tales continue to resonate throughout western culture. This suggests that these tales not only reflect, but also indoctrinate outdated ideas about the roles of women and men in society. My reading of the three fairy tales filmed by Disney before the 1960s reveals these deep continuities in gender roles.

### **Snow White and the Seven Dwarves (1937)**

Walt Disney's film adaptation of the classic fairy tale was released in 1937. Despite being produced during the Great Depression, *Snow White* went on to gross \$8.5 million. This was the highest grossing film of the time, until *Gone With the Wind*

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 94.



surpassed it a few years later. It was the first film Disney ever produced, and managed to cinch his future market.<sup>7</sup>

In the film version of *Snow White*, the heroine is left with her stepmother in their castle. She is forced to do menial labor because her stepmother is not fond of her. Every morning, the vain Queen asks her magic mirror who is the fairest of them all. The mirror always responded the Queen until one morning, it replies that Snow White was the fairest. The Queen was so jealous she told her huntsmen to take Snow White into the forest and kill her. As proof she wanted her heart in a jeweled case. The huntsmen, however, felt mercy because the girl was so sweet and innocent and set her free. She ran until she reached the home of the Seven Dwarves. They took her in, and she cooked and cleaned for them. Back at the castle, the Queen once again questioned her mirror, which replied that it was still Snow White. Enraged, the Queen turned herself into an old hag and went to Snow White to kill her. Snow White, naïve and perfect as she was, took a bite from the poisoned apple the hag gave her and fell over dead. The dwarves put her in a beautiful casket in the jungle. A prince, passing by, was so enchanted by her beauty that he kissed her. The first kiss of love broke the curse, and she awoke. The Prince took her back to his palace, and they lived happily ever after.

Similar to earlier version, Disney's Snow White is beautiful and naïve. She loves animals and never complains when she has to work. In addition, she sings throughout the day despite being cut off from friends and family and the target of a hateful stepmother. Her voice is silenced, however, when once again, despite being warned by the dwarves to be cautious, Snow White believes the old hag and eats the poisoned apple. The

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<sup>74</sup> Disney Archives, "Snow White and the Seven Dwarves," <http://disney.go.com/vault/archives/movies/snow/snow.html>.

stepmother is completely vain and evil. She is so caught up in being the most beautiful woman in the land that she resorts to murder. Snow White, of course, does not have to do anything since she is born perfectly beautiful. The Queen, in trying to achieve this ideal, falls short and turns into the villain. The Prince comes in at the end and kisses the princess awake so they can ride off unto the sunset. He has no emotions or motive. He falls in love with a beautiful corpse and saves the day in the process. He does not work toward anything, develop any clever plan, nor show any emotion. His only purpose is to solve the heroine's problems.<sup>8</sup> Thus, except for the singing and for bringing the tale to life on film, Disney does not alter the basic plot and characters from the century's old story.

### **Cinderella (1950)**

Disney's *Cinderella* was released in 1950, and became one of the highest grossing films of the year, at over \$4 million. It also earned a couple of Oscar nominations.<sup>9</sup> The film hit movie theaters five years after the end of World War II, as families were settling down in new suburban neighborhoods and mothers were busy raising the children that comprised the baby boom. While Americans were thrilled that the war had ended, and with an Allied victory, many women must have found the sudden plunge into domestic labor, frequent childbearing and childcare in relatively isolated homes difficult. Men were away at work all day, and wives were supposed to focus on their needs when they arrived home ready for dinner and cocktail. No doubt when they married, many women

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<sup>75</sup> Walt Disney, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, (Burbank, Calif.: Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2001), dvd.

<sup>76</sup> The Walt Disney Family Museum, "Walt's Masterworks: Cinderella," <http://disney.go.com/disneyatoz/familymuseum/collection/masterworks/cinderella/index.html>.

thought their prince had come; but a few years later, they may have dreamed of escaping to a castle with servants and a husband with little to do but dote on the love of his life.

In recreating this fairy tale for postwar audiences, Disney once again retained the basic story line and central characters. Cinderella is the only daughter of a widowed aristocrat. He remarries a woman by the name of Lady Tremaine, who has two ugly daughters, called Drizilla and Anastasia. All goes well until the father dies. The wicked stepmother then has Cinderella do all the menial labor in the house. Her ugly stepsisters, jealous of Cinderella's remarkable beauty, mock her as she works. Cinderella never complains though. Instead, she makes friends with—and, of course, sings to—the mice and the birds. She is far too kind to speak badly of her family. Soon word arrives that the King is holding a grand ball to find a bride for his son, the Prince. Cinderella wishes to go and asks for permission. Her stepmother says she may attend if she finishes all her chores and finds a suitable dress. She rushes to finish all the work in the house. Her mice friends collect the discarded sash and beads of the stepsisters to produce a dress for Cinderella. When she arrives ready to go, the stepsisters rip out their belongings from her dress, and leave her there. Cinderella runs away crying. Her fairy godmother then magically appears and saves the day. She creates a suitable dress and a horse and carriage for the heroine. Her only warning is that she must return as the clock strikes twelve. Cinderella goes to the ball, wearing a beautiful blue gown with glass slippers, and no one recognizes her. The Prince falls in love with her at first sight, and they dance for hours. When the clock strikes twelve, however, she runs off leaving a slipper behind. The Prince sets out to search the lands for his love, and finally finds Cinderella.

Cinderella is the ideal good girl in the story. She does all the work and never complains. Instead, she faces cruelty and mockery every way she turns. Her only friends are animals, but she accepts that. Cinderella shows no desire to save herself. If her mice are clever enough to help her make a dress, it can be presumed they can help her escape oppression, but instead she stays. Indeed, Disney has her sing light, uplifting songs to while away the time and to entertain her animal friends. Even her fairy godmother does not help her escape the horrid living situation, but merely grants her wish to attend the ball. When Snow White appears, she is of course the most beautiful maiden in the land and the Prince falls in love with her. She is perfect. And she wins her Prince even though she returns home without telling him her name.

The evil stepmother and stepsisters are also archetypal characters. They are ugly and jealous. Although, in the film, they do not physically harm themselves in order to fit the feminine ideal, they are still envious of Cinderella's beauty and cannot deal with her as competition. They are not only ugly, but also horrid people. It is not as though, to make up for a lack of beauty, they develop fantastic personalities or a sense of humor. Instead, they are evil. They make their stepsister suffer, and only her Prince can come and take her away. The Prince is like the prince in every other Cinderella story. He is at the ball and falls in love and then must search the lands with a glass slipper. He does nothing else and shows no emotion. His role in the film is shorter than that of the other characters, yet he is still the unequivocal hero. He is the ideal man, handsome and rich, ready to whisk Cinderella away to his castle.<sup>10</sup>

### **Sleeping Beauty (1959)**

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<sup>77</sup> Walt Disney, *Cinderella* (Burbank, CA : Walt Disney Home Entertainment, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2005).

Disney's *Sleeping Beauty*, was one of his most lavish and expensive cinematic productions to date, with a budget exceeding \$6 million. It was not a huge box office hit during its initial release in 1959, but it was re-released in 1970, 1979, 1986, and 2008 and became extremely popular over the course of time.<sup>11</sup> It is unclear as to why the film was not a hit from its conception, just that its popularity grew over time.

Disney did not change his formula; he developed the basic plot and characters that were familiar to readers of the fairy tale and added color, costumes and music. Princess Aurora is born to King Stefan and Queen Leah and is betrothed as a child to Prince Phillip, the son of King Hubert. She is blessed as a child by fairies to be extremely beautiful. However an evil fairy, Maleficent, curses her to die at the age of sixteen by a spindle wheel. The good fairies weaken the curse to just an enchanted sleep. Still, fearing for her life, they take her to the woods and raise her as her aunts. They rename her Briar Rose, and she grows to be extremely beautiful, but never seems to notice her appearance. She just wants to fall in love. One day, while walking in the forest, the now mature and handsome Prince Phillip passes by. They instantly fall in love. She, however, leaves before catching his name. The aunts decide to take her back to the kingdom to speak to her parents and the family of the betrothed. When she arrives, however, Maleficent lures her away to a room with a spindle. She touches it and falls asleep. The fairies give her a red rose and enchant the entire kingdom to sleep. Meanwhile Maleficent captures Phillip to prevent him from kissing Aurora and awakening her. The good fairies come and rescue him, however. They also give him a sword and shield that he can use to get to his love. He battles his way to the Princess and kisses her awake so that they may live happily ever after.

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<sup>78</sup> Disney Archives, *Sleeping Beauty*, <http://disney.go.com/vault/archives/movies/sleeping/sleeping/html>.

Princess Aurora is the ideal heroine. She is beautiful but not vain. She is kind and friendly with the animals. And of course, she sings to them in the Disney version. She only wants love. Yet, upon arriving at the castle, she is lured away and touches the spindle. It is odd that she does not seem to know about the threat to her life. After all, she leaves her parents behind to grow up in the forest due to the threat. Still, she falls into the trap. It is either naïveté or stupidity. The fairy tale does not allow her to rescue herself. Instead she falls asleep. Her Prince, however, is given a more active role by Disney than the men in any other fairy tale. He falls in love with a peasant girl and goes to his father to tell him. It turns out that his love is also his betrothed, but he does not know this and still follows his heart. He also valiantly goes to rescue the sleeping beauty. Despite the enhanced role, most of the actual heroics are accomplished by the fairies. They truly save the day by fixing the curse, rescuing the Prince, and giving him the means to win. The Prince would not have been able to do any of this himself. Yet, he is still the ideal hero, the one who is needed in order to save the day. The fairies may have done everything else, but only a kiss from a handsome man could wake her up. The tale would not function without making the Prince the unequivocal hero, whether he deserves the title or not.<sup>12</sup>

Walt Disney's version of these three fairy tales managed arguably to make the tales even more popular than before. He sanitized them to suit a wider audience. The stepsisters do not cut off their heels or toes to fit their feet into a glass slipper in his version. There were still concerns, however, that some of the films were too risqué. Upon the release of *Snow White* in England, it was deemed too scary for children, and anyone

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<sup>79</sup> Walt Disney, *Sleeping Beauty* (Burbank, CA : Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment , Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2008).

under the age of sixteen had to be accompanied by an adult.<sup>13</sup> Still, the addition of songs and the cartoon characters, made the films child-friendly. The songs, although fun and catchy, also served to reinforce the gender ideals. One of the most famous songs in *Snow White*, “Some Day My Prince Will Come,” include the lyrics: “Some day my prince will come, some day we’ll meet again, and away to his castle we’ll go, to be happy forever I know.”<sup>14</sup> The innocent renditions of the songs made them seem harmless, yet the song encourages girls to be passive and await their Prince Charming rather than actively seek to shape their own lives.

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<sup>80</sup> Disney Archives, “Snow White”

<sup>81</sup> Disney, Snow White and the Seven Dwarves

## Conclusion

It is difficult, possibly impossible, to understand the powerful influence fairy tales have had in shaping societies throughout history. It is not easy to gauge how much they affect children or adults even today. Still, it is clear that they are simply stories told to pass the time without any larger meaning. In the last century, since the advent of film, millions of movies have come and gone, and very few have stood the test of time, even fewer are still relevant. The Disney fairy tales, however, are still deemed ‘classics.’ Children watch them in public libraries and living rooms around the country. The stories, though ancient, have found a place in our modern lexicon. A genre that has managed to survive for centuries, which is still relevant today, cannot be simply written off as children’s tales. They have to be given their due.

Of course in some ways the story of Cinderella has changed though time. In the older versions, the stepsisters physically harm themselves to fit a standard. The newer, Disney version does not reveal the same masochism, but it does retain the same ideal of beauty. Cinderella is beautiful, while her stepsisters are ugly. It is as simple as that. If the girl is ugly, she is also evil. The most beautiful girl is also the kindest and most docile. Any show of ‘proactive’ feeling, and the heroine is automatically evil. There is no ambiguity, no relativity, in fairy tales. There is no gray area. Women are either ideal or evil. If they are ideal, they are also helpless and in need of a prince. If they are evil, they think for themselves, but are hags who will suffer or die in the end.

The older and newer versions of Snow White are remarkably similar. The beautiful girl is hunted by a maternal figure, poisoned to ‘die,’ and only awakens for the Prince. In the older versions, it is a new wife, a servant, or a mother who manages to



awaken the heroine. In the Disney version, it is the Prince who rescues the heroine by kissing her awake. This gives the Prince a lot more to do than ever before. For the most part, the hero was considered perfect even when he did not perform any heroics. Now, at least he takes some action, even if still does not have much of a personality. Male heroes in fairy tales remain two-dimensional. They are simply the ones who come in to save the day. Thus the ideal man is portrayed as heroic and stoic; he rescues his maiden but does not show the emotions that are allowed in the female world.

The Walt Disney Corporation has expanded the repertoire of fairy tales in recent years and the roles available to men. In *Aladdin* and the *Lion King*, male heroes not only have personality, but even hubris. The female characters, however, are still for the most part, the “victim.” *Beauty and the Beast* was produced in 1991, and it portrayed the Prince as shallow which led to his curse. Belle fell in love with the Beast for who he was and not the egotistical and handsome Gaston. In the end, however, the Beast turns back into the handsome prince so that the happy ending can still happen.<sup>1</sup> Disney’s version of this tale is unique because it tries to change the gender norms. Unlike his adaptations of the other fairy tales examined in this paper, *Beauty and the Beast* becomes a tale about human beings and human emotions. Belle is still ideally good, and the Beast ends up as the ideal, handsome Prince; but for most of the story, viewers can relate to them. They are vulnerable, feel pain, and show emotions. This is also one of Disney’s most successful animated features. It was also one of the most financially rewarding in motion picture history at the time, with domestic box office revenues exceeding \$120 million. It is also the only animated picture to date to have been nominated for a Best Picture

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<sup>82</sup>Roger Allers, *Beauty and the Beast*. Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2002

Academy Award.<sup>2</sup> While the tale is leaps and bounds ahead of earlier examples of the fairy tale genre, it still manages to maintain the beauty ideal at the end.

In the last few decades, there has been recognition by feminists and others of the detrimental effect fairy tales have on our perception of gender in society. Not only has the study of fairy tales become exceedingly popular, more and more people have taken to rewriting these stories to reflect a more modern outlook. In 1985, a collection of short stories entitled Rapunzel's Revenge: Fairytales for Feminists was released. Although none of these tales became mainstream favorites, they are fascinating reads. Among them, is a version of Cinderella in which the heroine wants to start up her own business and, in the end, turns down the Prince's offer of marriage so that she can achieve her life long dream.<sup>3</sup> *Shrek*, released in 2001, earned over \$400,000,000 worldwide, spawned two equally successful sequels, and earned the first ever Academy Award for Best Animated Film. It also led the wave of parodies of fairy tales that have come out at least once a year since. In an article published on May 10, 2007 in Time magazine, a journalist discusses *Shrek* in relation to the fairy tale tradition. The writer claims that "this is a welcome change from generations of hokey fairy tales with stultifying lessons: Be nice and wait for your prince; be obedient and don't stray off the path; bad people are just plain evil and ugly and deserve no mercy."<sup>4</sup> The article goes on to say that "it's a relief to parents of girls, with Disney's princess legacy in their rearview mirrors...for parents who'd rather their daughters dream of soccer balls than royal balls."<sup>5</sup> The author turns nostalgic in the end and wonders if there is no place in modern society for stories that have been

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<sup>83</sup> Disney Archives, "Beauty and the Beast," <http://disney.go.com/vault/achives/movies/beauty/beauty.html>.

<sup>84</sup> Rapunzel's Revenge: Fairytales for Feminists, (Dublin: Attic, 1985)

<sup>85</sup> James Poniewozik, "Is Shrek Bad For Kids?" *Time*, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1619573-1,00.html>, 10 May 2007

<sup>86</sup> Poniewozik, "Is Shrek Bad For Kids?"

with us through the ages. Are we willing to live in a world where our children do not know the story of Snow White or Cinderella?

Although this journalist makes a valid point, it is important to note the necessity of change. Fairy tales should not be eradicated from our lives. They have survived for a millennia and hold a special place in the childhoods of most people even today. Fairy tales do not need to be forgotten, but rather they must be modified and modernized. Instead of parodies that merely laugh at the clichés of these ancient tales, perhaps storytellers—whether in print, film or webcasts—need to create short tales for children about real humans who fall in love and become successful because they were smart enough to earn it.