

ABSTRACT

Gender Roles in German Fairy Tales

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Wilhelm and Jakob Grimm first captivated the world with their collection of tales in *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. These stories have served as the basis for many of the stories we call fairy tales. They are told to countless children around the world and have been transformed into the feature length films we know and love. Fairy tales also act as a form of didactic literature that has been used in classrooms since the nineteenth century. In this thesis, I attempt to define this unique genre of literature, while also examining the different roles played by male and female characters and the ways that fairy tales have been utilized since the Grimm brothers.

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GENDER ROLES IN GERMAN FAIRY TALES

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments.....	ii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: What is a Fairy Tale?.....	3
Chapter 2: Women in Fairy Tales.....	14
Chapter 3: Men in Fairy Tales.....	25
Chapter 4: Fairy Tales Since the Grimms.....	37
Conclusion.....	50
Bibliography.....	51

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INTRODUCTION

Fairy tales are a part of almost every culture around the world. They have long captivated audiences with their stories of magical creatures, evil witches, and beautiful princesses. They teach children various morals and lessons in a way that is fun and exciting. After hearing a story, a person can almost instantaneously label it a fairy tale, perhaps without knowing why. In this thesis, I attempt to define fairy tales as a unique genre of literature. I have read and become familiar with several different scholars on the subject of fairy tales and summarized their research in my first chapter.

One of the most important aspects of a fairy tale is the characters. Max Lüthi, a scholar on fairy tales states that the, "Hero and heroine are the dominating central figures [of a fairy tale]. All others are defined with reference to them"¹. Fairy tales possess various kinds of human and non human characters. Their human characters, however, are very specific when it comes to gender. Women and men in fairy tales fit into very specific molds. These molds become even more specific when they define good and bad characters. For chapters two and three, I have examined several studies done by experts on these topics and have compiled their research to show how men and women are portrayed differently in fairy tales.

¹ Lüthi, Max, *The Fairy Tale as Art Form and Portrait of Man*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 134-135

Fairy tales did not start out as a form of children's literature. They have been transformed over time into the stories we know and love. Between their inception and the present day, fairy tales have gone through many changes. They have been used in homes and classrooms around the world to teach children moral and ethical values. They have been used as children's propaganda during dark times. They have also been used to create various other forms of art, such as paintings, plays, musicals, and movies. In my last chapter, I will examine the ways in which fairy tales have been transformed and utilized since the first edition of *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*.

CHAPTER ONE

WHAT IS A FAIRY TALE?

Fairy tales are a unique genre of literature. Almost every culture has its own characteristic set of stories used to convey different lessons and morals, but several other types of literature serve this same purpose. *A Bildungsroman*, for example, focuses on the coming of age and the morals developed by the protagonist. This form of literature is not referred to as a fairy tale because its focus is on the specific characters and their development, and mystical elements are not prominent. Parables are another example of didactic literature. At first glance parables and fairy tales seem remarkably similar. Both are typically told to teach an important lesson to a less experienced audience, typically children. Parables, however, contain only realistic human elements, and heavier, more abstract symbolism. When we hear the word “fairy tale”, our minds instantly flashback to numerous childhood memories. We think of the stories filled with beautiful princesses, evil witches, handsome princes, and intriguing magical creatures. Our minds are filled with images of the many Disney movies based on these beloved tales. We remember the details of the story and how we were

sometimes frightened, sad, or distraught, but we always knew everything would end with “and they lived happily ever after”

What makes fairy tales a unique genre? Is it the fact that they are told to children? Is it the moral which every reader or listener is supposed to learn? Or is it the happy ending? There are many different opinions concerning the proper definition of a fairy tale. Most scholars, however, can agree that fairy tales are descendants of ancient oral folk tales. Heidi Anne Heiner, a scholar on folk and fairy tales, states that the easiest way to define a fairy tale is “as a subgenre of folklore along with myths and legends”¹. Jack Zipes, a leading scholar on German fairy tales and their interpretation, agrees with this statement when he writes, “fairy tales have been in existence as oral folk tales for thousands of years and first became what we call literary fairy tales toward the end of the 17th century”². If this is indeed the case, then in order to define a fairy tale correctly, we must also correctly define a folk tale.

The origin of folk tales can be traced to epic poems and oral storytelling. The members of a community would gather late at night to listen to the storyteller speak about majestic events happening in a far away place. The original purpose

¹ “SurLaLune Fairy Tales,” Heidi Anne Heiner, accessed November 15, 2013, www.surlalunefairytales.com/introduction/ftdefinition.html

² Jack Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 2

of folk tales was to explain “natural occurrences such as the change of the seasons and shifts in the weather”³ Folk tales were told in an “oral narrative form cultivated by the common people to express the manner in which they perceived nature and their social order and their wish to satisfy their needs and wants”⁴ Each community altered a story to fit its own cultural norms This is why in today’s world we see so many different versions of the fairy tales we know and love All of these fairy tales can be traced back to one original tale that was modified hundreds of times to fit the needs of different cultures In this way, fairy tales are just folk tales that have been transcribed and rewritten hundreds of times In her book, *The Hard Facts of the Grimm’s Fairy Tales*, Maria Tatar, another scholar on folk and fairy tales, describes fairy tales as a sub-genre within folk tales Both fairy tales and folk tales are “narratives set in a fictional world where preternatural events and supernatural intervention are taken wholly for granted”⁵ Fairy tales and folk tales use the same story element of magic The only real difference is the underlying theme of the tale According to Tatar “a fairy tale can belong to a category of folk tales but it stands in contrast to a folk tale

³ Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tale and Myth*, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 10

⁴ Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell*, 7

⁵ Maria Tatar, *The Hard Facts of the Grimm’s Fairy Tales* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 33

which is sharply biased in favor of earthly realism”⁶ What we categorize as fairy tales or *Zaubermärchen* (magic tales) are actually just one type of folk tale

Jens Tismar, a German scholar on literary fairy tales or *Kunstmärchen*, was one of the first people to define a literary fairy tale Jack Zipes writes about Tismar’s definition of the literary fairy tale in his introduction to *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales* According to Zipes Tismar distinguishes fairy tales from folk tales using two main characteristics First, literary fairy tales are “written by a single identifiable author,” while folk tales have no author; they are passed down through the oral tradition Second, literary fairy tales are synthetic, artificial, and elaborate, whereas folk tales are simple and anonymous This simplicity derives from the fact that folk tales are told to large communities and need to be easy for listeners to understand⁷

Scholars have been attempting to determine clearly how literary fairy tales evolved from oral folk tales for hundreds of years This task is known to be difficult because there are few records showing how long oral storytelling traditions have existed Even when written records came into being, very few oral stories were written down It was assumed that the tale would continue from generation to generation through the medium of a storyteller There could be

⁶ Tatar, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms’ Fairy Tales*, 33

⁷ Jack Zipes, *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), xv

thousands of other folk tales which exist only in small, unknown communities around the world

The literary fairy tale tradition began in Europe with two Italian writers, Giovanni Francesco Straparola and Giambattista Basile. French writers then institutionalized the genre of literary fairy tales or *contes de fées* in the late seventeenth century. Aristocratic women developed the literary fairy tale in salons as a type of parlor entertainment. The form, themes, production, and reception of the tales were transformed and by 1690 the salon tale became so acceptable that men and women began publishing them⁸. These new fairy tales now addressed the concerns, tastes, and functions of French aristocracy and bourgeoisie⁹. These literary fairy tales did not replace the oral tradition. Instead, the oral tradition served as a means for aristocratic writers to obtain new stories¹⁰. Thus these new fairy tales can be seen as, “the bourgeoisification of the folk tale”¹¹.

It was not until after the invention of the printing press that the genre known as literary fairy tales came into existence. Literary fairy tales gained

⁸ Zipes, *Fairy Tale As Myth*, 30-33

⁹ Zipes, *Fairy Tales As Myth*, 333

¹⁰ Zipes, *Fairy Tales As Myth*, 335

¹¹ Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell*, 40

popularity during “the transitional period from feudalism to early capitalism”¹²

This is because oral story telling depends more on “active participation” while printed works are “individual and collective products of fantasy”¹³ With the collapse of feudalism, people were no longer living in close quarters The tradition of oral folk tales began to die when people no longer gathered together to listen to the community storyteller Two German brothers, Wilhelm and Jakob Grimm, noticed this transition and began collecting oral folk tales “to establish national cultural identity by uncovering the pure tales of their so-called people”¹⁴

At the beginning of the 19th century when folk tales were no longer playing a vital role in day-to-day adult life, the Grimm brothers began collecting tales The Grimms wanted to capture in print an understanding of the German folk traditions, language, and customs before these traditions died out The Grimms were writing mainly for academic purposes, not for children¹⁵ Contrary to popular belief, the Grimm brothers did not have one specific method for collecting fairy tales Their primary method of collection was visiting peasants in

¹² Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell*, 10

¹³ Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell*, 14

¹⁴ Jack Zipes, *The Great Fairy Tale Tradition: From Straparola and Basile to the Brothers Grimm* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 2000), 60

¹⁵ Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell*, 40

the countryside. Most of these peasants were elderly women, who grew up listening to these fascinating tales. They also collected tales by inviting storytellers to their house and having them tell their tales aloud. Most of the storytellers were middle class or upper middle class women who were familiar with both oral and literary sources. They were experienced raconteurs. The Grimms also copied and edited tales from books and magazines¹⁶

The Brothers Grimm published their first two volumes of 156 tales titled *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* in 1812 and 1815. Their goal was to “to create an ideal type of the literary fairy tale, one that was intended to be as close to the oral tradition as possible while incorporating stylistic, formal and substantial thematic changes to appeal to a growing middle-class audience”¹⁷. In the second edition published in 1819, Wilhelm Grimm made the tales more proper and amenable to the bourgeois audiences by eliminating erotic and sexual elements like premarital sex, incest and pregnancy. They also added numerous Christian references, emphasized specific role models for male and female protagonists, and included many quaint expressions that would appeal to their bourgeois audience. While the Grimms intended for the collection to be an educational manual, an *Erziehungsbuch*, these revisions made the collection more appealing and proper

¹⁶ Jack Zipes, “*The Enchanted Forest of the Brothers Grimm*,” *Germanic Review* 622 (1987): 66

¹⁷ Tatar, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms’ Tales*, 40

for children¹⁸ These revisions drastically changed the tone of the stories and thus created the genre we now call fairy tales

Another puzzling question surrounding fairy tales is this: why are these stories called “fairy tales”? The name “fairy tales” implies that these stories will contain material about fairies using magic and frolicking through the forest While this is sometimes the case, most of the time fairy tales have nothing to do with fairies The origin of the term fairy tale can be traced to the female French writer who referred to their stories as “contes de fées” This term was then translated into English as “fairy tales” The French stories then became very popular, a fact which led people to call similar stories, like those by the Grimm Brothers, by the same name¹⁹

The origin of fairy tales is seen in the oral narratives that have existed for centuries These folk tales have specific characteristics that make them unique These traits transitioned into the fairy tale genre when the folk tales were written down Scholars often wonder how fairy tales descending from many different folk tales share so many common motifs There are two different theories behind this phenomenon The first theory, monogenesis, suggests that all of the folk tales we know and love came from one central folk tale People migrated to this location and heard this grand folk tale, and, over a long period of time, the tale

¹⁸ Zipes, “*The Enchanted Forrest of the Brothers Grimm*,” 69

¹⁹ Heiner

evolved into the hundreds of different stories that we know today. This definition is an extreme definition because it assumes that people have no creative ability and simply derive their stories from someone else. Scholars have expanded upon this theory by stating that all fairy tales could have originated from one specific geographical location. Nineteenth-century German monogenesis scholars identified India as the location which likely created folktales²⁰. The second contrasting theory, polygenesis, states that folktales were made up in many different locations around the world. It assumes that the similarities between folktales are due to the fact that humans create folk tales, and all humans have the same psyche²¹.

Wilhelm Grimm agreed with the theory of polygenesis. Over a century ago he wrote about the stories collected by himself and his brother. He noticed that most of the stories contained reoccurring themes and motifs. He considered these themes to be “situations so simple and natural that they can be found everywhere”²². In other words, people across the universe all endure and conquer similar struggles. To help others learn from these struggles we make up folk tales. Our similar struggles lead to similar folk tales.

²⁰ Tatar, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Tales*, 64

²¹ Tatar, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Tales*, 64

²² Tatar, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Tales*, 65

The main trait of a folk tale is that it is related to the “ontological situation and dreams of the narrators and their audiences”²³ We see this trait continued in fairy tale literature There are hundreds of different versions of Cinderella The theme of the story is always the same, but the relationships between the characters, the setting, and the situations presented to the readers are very diverse All of them relate to the culture for which they were altered Another trait that is specific to fairy tales is the setting A fairy tale is “a story that happens in the past tense, and a story that is not tied to any specifics”²⁴ Fairy tales are always portraying an event that has already occurred, so that the readers of the story can learn a lesson from the past events They are not tied to any specifics because they are always molded to appeal to many different groups of people²⁵ Another common characteristic of fairy tales is idealism The mood is always “optative-announcing what might be”²⁶ Fairy tales always “portray worlds that are better than our own They are supposed to show us how far we have strayed”²⁷

²³ Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell*, 33

²⁴ Lane, Marcia, *Picturing a Rose: A Way of Looking at Fairy Tales*, (New York: HW Wilson, 1993),Page 5

²⁵ Heiner

²⁶ Warner, Marina, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994), XX

²⁷ Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell*, 3

This trait is especially prevalent in the revised Grimm fairy tales because in order to appeal to the bourgeoisie, the Grimm brothers added many Christian elements and idealized views of men and women. Fairy tales are also defined by their characters and how the characters relate to each other. Fairy tales always have one young central protagonist who typically enters the story to escape a broken home. The hero experiences an even worse situation outside of the home and is in need of a wish²⁸. The main plot of the fairy tale is devoted to the hardships, struggles, and near death experiences of the protagonist²⁹. The other characters in the story are defined by how they related are to the protagonist. They are always forced to choose between good and evil³⁰.

Fairy tales are a unique genre of literature with a diverse origin. Their origin can be traced back to the beginning of time through the oral tradition of storytelling. The original oral tales have evolved into thousands of different tales that are told around the world every day. While the stories may change to reflect different cultures, they all share common themes and motifs, because similar triumphs and tribulations are experienced by people from every corner of the globe.

²⁸ Tatar, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Tales*, 73

²⁹ Tatar, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Tales*, 71

³⁰ Tatar, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Tales*, 61

CHAPTER 2

FEMALES ROLES IN FAIRY TALES

Women play a very important role in fairy tales. When young children hear the word “fairy tale”, their minds are immediately drawn to an image of a woman. They think of a beautiful princess waiting for her prince to come and save the day, or an evil witch who has a vindictive plot to kill the princess, or a wicked stepmother who mistreats her stepdaughter. There are a few traits that are common to all female characters. However, female characters tend to have very polarized roles in fairy tales. Most fairy tales have a female protagonist and a female antagonist.

One of the common traits among all female characters is the use of water. Ruth Bottigheimer, a leading scholar on Grimms’ Fairy Tales, writes about how in the Grimms’ “dualistic world fire belongs to men, and its opposite, water (or at least certain kinds of water), appertains exclusively to women”¹. It is interesting that the Grimm brothers chose to segregate the uses of these elements.

¹ Bottigheimer, Ruth, *Grimms’ Bad Girls and Bold Boys: The Moral & Social Vision of the Tales*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 29

Bottigheimer points out that, women who attempt to use fire will always get burned, while men can use fire and remain not burned² The most direct contact that women can have with fire is through domesticity A woman may use a stove to cook, “but it is the peasant himself who sits and pokes the fire”³ This gender segregation brings to light a lot of interesting questions; such as why did the Grimm brothers segregated the uses of fire and water? It has been suggested that this segregation has something to do with ideal gender roles at the time Women are allowed to use water because water is something that is used frequently in the home It can be used for cooking, cleaning, washing, gardening, and healing All of these tasks were seen as women’s work Water is also easy to control and when left uncontrolled does not do as much damage as fire I believe that the Grimms gave women the power to use water because they thought fire was too powerful for a woman to control Water is also “an integral component of the history of creation”⁴ The Grimm brothers could have given women dominion over water because they are the ones who bring life into the world Women also use water for magical purposes as well In *Cinderella (Aschenputtel)* Cinderella plants a tree on her mother’s grave The tree grows and gives Cinderella

² Bottigheimer, 28

³ Bottigheimer, 28

⁴ Bottigheimer, 30

beautiful ball gowns because Cinderella waters it with her tears. Here she is shown using water for gardening purposes, as well as magical ones.

In a fairy tale the protagonist is, almost always, a young, beautiful girl who is perfect in just about every way imaginable. She lives with her family who typically mistreat her terribly, and hopes one day to meet a nice man who will make her his wife. The female protagonists show almost no aptitude for decision-making or critical-thinking. They simply sit around and hope that one day something magnificent will happen. This passivity troubles many modern readers at first. After all, our society teaches women to be high achievers and think for themselves. However, when fairy tales were written, the roles of women were very different. During the late seventeenth and eighteenth-century, women were raised to be housewives. When a young woman was of marrying age, she was expected after marrying, to leave her family and join her husband. One of the main lessons taught by fairy tales is that a woman should leave her home and join her husband. *Beauty and the Beast*, for example, tells a story about Belle who makes the decision to leave her home and stay with the Beast, a very difficult task for her. Fairy tales show daughters leaving the home as experiencing “powerful and contradictory passions”⁵. These tales help teach

⁵ Warner, 276

young girls that leaving their family home is tough, but it is something all women must do, even princesses

Another common trait in female characters is obedience. Female protagonists often do not make their own decisions. They are often shown making the decisions that have already been made for them, such as leaving the family to get married, choosing a man of a certain social status, or attending a ball. This trait is a creation of the Grimm brothers. Females in earlier writings are shown to be more independent thinkers. This is probably because the original tellers of the tales were women who wanted to make their own decisions but had always done what they were told. The Grimm brothers rewrote these tales to make women “more polite, well-spoken, or even silent”⁶. The Grimm brothers added this trait because obedience was a much sought after trait among the bourgeoisie in both women and children. In her work on literary fairy tale themes, Ruth Bottigheimer found that “as the editing progressed, virtue spoke up less and less”⁷.

While obedience and silence were ideal qualities in a woman, they were also a mechanism for survival. In several tales “the heroine loses her voice at

⁶ Warner, 281

⁷ Warner, 394

betrothal, marriage, or childbirth”⁸ This is probably symbolic of women losing their personal power when they become dependent on a man. Silence makes a woman extremely vulnerable. According to Bottigheimer “speechlessness coincides with the revelation of the young woman’s vulnerability”⁹ When a woman is unable to speak, she is unable to defend herself. She cannot tell someone that she is hurt; she cannot express feelings of joy, and she cannot ask for help. Vulnerability may have made women even more appealing to men because vulnerable women are easier to control. A woman who cannot stand up for herself can easily be manipulated. During this time men were the primary decision makers and expected women to agree with their every word. It was a well-known fact that “silence could be a stratagem of survival for women”¹⁰ If a woman spoke out against her husband, she faced the possibility of physical abuse or abandonment. Fairy tales portray female figures as silent and obedient in order to teach women how to survive.

Obedience is also seen with implied demand as well. According to Bottigheimer, implicit prohibitions “are regularly honored by women and

⁸ Bottigheimer, 76

⁹ Bottigheimer, 77

¹⁰ Warner, 395

contravened with impunity by men”¹¹ It is interesting that women will always obey implied demands, while men are free to ignore them This is probably related to Wilhelm Grimm’s image of the ideal woman as someone who knows what is expected of her and also does what she is told It is important to note that in Grimms’ fairy tales, before dying or mysteriously disappearing, the biological mother of the protagonist is always silent¹² The biological mother of the protagonist is presumed to be good She never speaks out of turn or disobeys her husband During this time period, she would have been the ideal woman By making the mother of the protagonist silent, the Grimm brothers are reinforcing their idea of the ideal woman

There are a few occasions in the Grimms’ fairy tales where women are allowed to break their silence According to Ruth Bottigheimer’s study on speaking verbs in Grimms’ fairy tales, women are allowed to speak when the verb “*answer*” (*antworten*) is used Bottigheimer’s study points out that the verb *antworten* is used for both men and women, but “a clear pattern emerges of the female voice as responsive to the male voice, for it appears more often in good girls’ mouths than in their suitors”¹³

¹¹ Bottigheimer, 88

¹² Bottigheimer, 53

¹³ Bottigheimer, 54-55

Female disobedience is portrayed in a much different light. The trait of female disobedience can be traced back to Genesis with God's punishing Eve for eating the forbidden fruit. In fairy tales when a woman disobeys a man, she is portrayed very negatively, no matter how extravagant the man's demands. In *Little Red Riding Hood*, for example, the emphasis is placed on Red Riding Hood's disobeying her mother's orders. We hear about her being eaten by a wolf disguised as her grandmother, but we are led to believe that this punishment is appropriate because the little girl was disobedient. This story would have been used in classrooms around Germany to teach young children the consequences of disobedience.

One of the most common traits in a female protagonist is beauty. This is another puzzling trait for modern readers. Today we are taught "don't judge a book by its cover; it's what inside that counts." We know that we are supposed to learn to look past a person's external features and learn to love that person for his or her heart and mind. In fairy tale times, however, being beautiful was very important. During this time women had very few options for careers. Most were expected to get married and raise children. It was also quite common for marriages to be arranged. When choosing a future wife, most men looked for a woman they thought was beautiful. In fact, "being unlovely in the marriage

economy of the time”¹⁴ was brutal Max Lüthi also points out that people designated as beautiful are often described using “cosmic metaphors,” which compare them to “the sun or the moon, with gold or with silver”¹⁵ He attributes this fact to ancient times when beauty was associated with “the humanization of the gods”¹⁶ Referring to a heroine as beautiful could imply that she is a godly, virtuous woman The beauty of female heroines generally represents the idealism that fairy tales portray

Transfiguration is a common element in many Grimm fairy tales Typically, a woman is transfigured in order to escape from horrible living conditions In these situations a man sees her in both her transfigured and untransfigured form and falls in love with her The element of transfiguration is placed in these fairy tales in order to show young girls that “only a true lover will be able to see past the disfigurement to the real beauty of the person beneath the outer”¹⁷

The female antagonist is typically an elderly, ugly woman who is vindictive and jealous of the much younger protagonist Many people wonder why there are

¹⁴ Warner, 288

¹⁵ Lüthi, 1

¹⁶ Lüthi, 1

¹⁷ Warner, 354

so many female antagonists? In fact, female villains outnumber animal-like villains. According to Marina Warner, a leading scholar on fairy tale characters “children are more thrilled than disgusted by the wolf who gobbles up Red Riding Hood, whereas they are repelled by the witch who fattens up Hansel to eat him”¹⁸. In other words, when children are told of an animal-like villain, they are interested to learn about a new and exciting creature. A female villain makes the lessons being taught and the presence of evil much more real. One might also question the decision of a female villain but not that of a male villain. To answer this question we must look at the original tellers of fairy tales. The original tellers of fairy tales were women who claimed “to know their material from an eye witness”¹⁹. This information makes the character of an evil witch or stepmother much more believable. According to Warner men are “expected to find women flighty, rapacious, self-seeking, cruel, and lustful, but if women say such things about themselves, then the matter is settled”²⁰. Women can testify to the evils of other women because they have experienced them first hand.

In early versions of Grimms’ fairy tales, female antagonists were outspoken. They were not silent like their protagonist counterparts. Initially,

¹⁸ Warner, 202

¹⁹ Warner, 209

²⁰ Warner, 209

Wilhelm Grimm portrayed these characters in direct contrast with each other, so that his readers would know that silence is ideal. However, as he revised the tales, female antagonists began to speak less and less. In her study on speech patterns in *Cinderella*, Bottigheimer notes that Cinderella's stepsisters and stepmother have more speaking parts than Cinderella. Most of Cinderella's speech comes through indirect speech, while the speech of the mother and the stepsisters is much more direct. As the tale was revised, the stepmother and stepsisters were given more indirect speaking parts, and Cinderella was given even less indirect speech, while the father and prince were given more direct speech²¹

Women antagonists in fairy tales come in many different shapes and sizes. One of the most common ways a female adversary is portrayed is as an evil stepmother. The absence of mothers is most commonly seen in the Grimm's fairy tales. Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm eliminated mothers in most of the early versions of their fairy tales. This is because Wilhelm wanted to make sure the tales were appropriate for the bourgeois audience and contained "his Christian fervour"²². He did not want anyone, especially children, to believe that a mother could do such evil things to her own flesh and blood. The Grimms made sure that the tales

²¹ Bottigheimer, 59

²² Warner, 211

were not nearly as harsh as their original counterparts. In the original version of *Hansel and Gretel*, for example, “both parents had proposed the abandonment of their children.” In the Grimms’ version, Wilhelm “turned the mother into a wicked stepmother”²³. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, stepmothers were very common. When a new wife entered a household, she was often “in competition with the surviving offspring of the earlier marriage”²⁴.

Another possible reason for the frequent occurrence of the evil stepmother comes from the tellers of the tales. Many of the people interviewed by Wilhelm and Jakob Grimm were elderly women. Since stepmothers were very common during this time period, most of these women would have been exposed to a stepmother. These experiences could have ranged from having a stepmother as a child, to knowing someone who was a stepmother, to being a stepmother. The tellers of these tales could have been recounting their past experiences with stepmothers and adding some of these evil traits to the characters in their stories²⁵.

²³ Warner, 211

²⁴ Warner, 213

²⁵ Warner, 203

CHAPTER 3

MALE ROLES IN FAIRY TALES

Men in fairy tales are accurately portrayed for the time period. They have control over almost every aspect of their female family members. They are seen as perfect. Everything they say or do is seen as right. Unlike female characters, men play various roles in fairy tales. Sometimes they are the protagonists, the hero of the story, while other times they are the objects of the female protagonist's desire, and sometime they are background characters, barely making a difference in the outcome.

Men in fairy tales are most often portrayed as figures of authority, specifically heroes. In his book, *The Fairytale as Art Form and Portrait of Man*, Max Lüthi, a well-known scholar on German fairy tales, defines the main characteristics that make up a male hero. He begins this definition by stating very simply that a hero "departs from home"¹. This event usually occurs in the beginning of the story, while the rest of the story chronicles his journey. This

¹ Lüthi, 136

recurring event shows that heroes are those who work toward the greater good for all people, not just those they know and love. It also portrays the hero as someone with courage. A scared young boy does not leave home because he wants to; he leaves because he is courageous and doing what is right. Leaving home also helps a hero develop a much broader world perspective. According to Lüthi the next characteristic is the fact that “the fairytale hero is not one who returns to his point of origin”². This is what separates a fairy tale hero from an epic hero. In an epic poem, the hero always has a grand homecoming where he is welcomed with open arms. Fairy tale heroes do not return home; they always find their place in the great, unknown world. This trait is part of the ideal worldview that the Grimm brothers wanted their young readers to see. Men during this time were expected to leave their families, get married, and find their own way in the world. By ensuring that the hero does not return home, the Grimms instill in their young readers the idea of how a man of great honor is supposed to behave. They also calm any doubts a young boy may have by showing him that everything will turn out fine.

A fairy tale hero always takes action. According to Lüthi he “is a traveler, a doer. He is not a ponderer, an investigator, or a philosopher”³. A hero must

² Lüthi, 136

³ Lüthi, 140

always do something in order to become a hero. He cannot simply sit around and think of a solution to a problem; he must put his thoughts into actions. This trait is highly sought after in men. During this time men were expected to be the sole providers for their families. The only way to provide for a family was by producing something, whether that was a physical product or an abstract idea. Many men can think of different solutions to a problem, but few men can put their solutions into practice. By showing young boys that a hero must always take action, the Grimm brothers exemplify another desirable trait in men.

The next trait of a fairy tale hero is that he “does not know what means he can use to overcome the difficulties which he encounters”⁴. A fairy tale hero is not blessed with any specific traits or skills. He is just like any other ordinary human being. His heroic deeds are a result of determination, bravery, and wit. This characteristic is another example of the Grimm brothers’ inclination to insert idealism into their fairy tales. Children learn that they need no special skills or natural talent to accomplish great things. All they need to do is be the best they can be, like the hero.

Another trait that heroes possess is patience. Patient heroes are the ones “who gather the strength and power unto themselves which allows them to be

⁴ Lüthi, 137

transformed into helpers, rescuers, and disenchanters”⁵ Heroes who have the patience to learn about themselves, observe their surroundings, and think through problems are always successful in fairy tales. These heroes exemplify the virtue of patience. Wilhelm Grimm inserted this personality trait into all male heroes to ensure that children learned the importance of patience. This was a part of his “Christianization” of fairy tales.

A fairy tale hero also works together with others. He is “dependent upon help and helpers, and normally such help is also available to him”⁶. A hero never accomplishes anything single handedly. He always has someone or something to help him along the way. He may face the final challenge alone, but the skills he has learned from his helpers will be put to the test. This trait emphasizes the idea that man should never be alone. Men often think that asking for help is a sign of weakness or inability. By giving the hero faithful companions who aid him on his journey, the Grimms are telling young boys that it is acceptable to ask for help. Heroic deeds are not the work of a single individual but the work of several people and a hero.

Male characters who are not portrayed as heroes are typically background characters. They do not play a pivotal role in the story, and they are rarely the antagonists. It is hypothesized that men are not portrayed as antagonistic.

⁵ Lüthi, 142

⁶ Lüthi, 150

because the Grimm brothers wanted young children to view men as people who are just and trustworthy. Wilhelm and Jakob rarely portray fathers in a negative light because they did not want children to see their own fathers in a negative light. In stories where fathers play a limited role, like *Cinderella* for example, the female characters still respect everything the father says. Even when he is absent, they honor his wishes.

Male figures are also seen in animal or beast-like figures. In her article *Beauties vs Beasts in the Grimms' Tales*, Maria Tatar points out that men sometimes take the form of, "animal-grooms who make life unpleasant for many a female protagonist...but these beasts invariably turn out to be handsome young princes in disguise and generally prove to be perfect gentlemen"⁷. This idea of animals transforming into men is another example of fairy tales attempting to portray a truly idealistic world. During this time, people did not marry for love. Marriages were frequently arranged. Young girls who were entering into an arranged marriage often knew nothing about their future spouse. This made entering into marriage a truly terrifying experience. The animal represents the scary future spouse who is, as yet, unknown. The transformation of the animal into a gentleman shows girls that their future spouse will eventually

⁷ Maria Tatar, "Beauties vs Beasts in the Grimms' Tales," in *The Brothers Grimm and Folktale*, ed. James M. McGlathery et al. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 133.

turn into the handsome, chivalrous man for whom they have long waited. Fairy tales also show the man and woman falling in love because romantic love was the ideal, but not necessarily the norm⁸

One of the common themes among male characters in fairy tales is the use of fire. In one of her studies on fairy tales, Ruth Bottigheimer explores the uses of fire and water. Her study proves that women are frequently mentioned using water, while men almost exclusively use fire. According to Bottigheimer, literary fairy tales stress “the positive attributes of fire”, and “the tales show men using fire to consume evil and to remove enchantments from people and objects”⁹. Fairy tales constantly show men fighting for a noble cause. These male heroes use fire as a weapon. They are able to control fire, an element that brings life but is also destructive when not contained properly. The use of fire to rid the world of evil can be traced to witch burnings, which would have been recent history for the Grimm Brothers¹⁰. Bottigheimer also discovered another unique quality involving men and fire. In her careful reading of the tales, she discovered “that with rare exceptions, men in *Grimms’ Tales* are themselves uniquely

⁸ Tartar, “Beauties vs Beasts in the Grimms’ Tales” 135

⁹ Bottigheimer, 26

¹⁰ Bottigheimer, 28

exempt from death by fire”¹¹ She also points out that “not a single woman enjoys a similar immunity to flame”¹² It is intriguing that the Grimms would purposely make their male heroes immune to death by fire Were they trying to show that men have dominance over the natural elements? Or were they symbolically trying to show that men are superior to women based on their immunity? The only question that remains is why the Grimms made the use of fire strictly masculine Some scholars theorize that this designation reflects the “household practice in the Germanies of an earlier day”¹³ Men were in charge of lighting the fire and keeping it tame, while the women were in charge of cooking on the fire Bottigheimer believes that the Grimm brothers made fire masculine for narrative purposes She states that “ashes are useless for a girl” and also points out that fire provides the degradation for the fairy tale heroine Cinderella¹⁴

Obedience is a trait that is very gender specific in fairy tales In general, all fairy tale characters are expected to be obedient, but their obedience and disobedience are portrayed in very different lights In fairy tales, men are given far fewer direct orders than women In her study on male and female

¹¹ Bottigheimer, 27

¹² Bottigheimer, 28

¹³ Bottigheimer, 29

¹⁴ Bottigheimer, 29

prohibitions, Ruth Bottigheimer states that prohibitions given to men “tend to be morally or ethically diluted or altogether absent”¹⁵ Wilhelm and Jakob Grimm altered prohibitions from several tales to ensure that the prohibitions were not direct In fact, Wilhelm Grimm made many male acts of disobedience “into an unwitting act which is rewarded”¹⁶ She also points out that male characters typically are allowed “three to five offenses,”¹⁷ while female characters typically only have one offense There are two types of authority in a fairy tale, good and bad When male characters obey a good authority they “enjoy the boon of exoneration as well as the trickster’s capacity to escape”¹⁸ Men who disobey direct orders from an authority figure are always portrayed as clever and avoid consequences using this cleverness When disobeying a bad authority, men are often rewarded for their nobility¹⁹ Considerable debate centers on why the Grimm brothers would allow their male characters to be disobedient The current theory states that it is “necessary for boys to break interdictions in order to

¹⁵ Bottigheimer, 92

¹⁶ Bottigheimer, 93

¹⁷ Bottigheimer, 92

¹⁸ Bottigheimer, 84

¹⁹ Bottigheimer, 89

mature”²⁰ As a part of growing up boys, must learn that it is sometimes necessary to break rules They must also learn when it is necessary to rise up against unjust authority These are all a part of becoming a man

In general, men in fairy tales speak much more than females The silence of women and the outspokenness of men can be traced back to the social conventions during the time period as well as Wilhelm Grimm’s own personal convictions about women and speech This trait is very prevalent in the fairy tale *Hansel and Gretel* In *Hansel and Gretel* readers are presented with two young protagonists At first glance one might think that the two would be seen as equals because they are on the same quest After reading the tale closely, readers will discover that “Hansel speaks not only more often than Gretel, but also at greater length”²¹ His first words to her are in fact, “Quiet, Gretel”²²

In her study on speech patterns and fairy tales, Ruth Bottigheimer notices some interesting trends involving the speech patterns of men in fairy tales One of the first trends noticed by Bottigheimer is the use of the verb *ask (fragen)* Questions in the Grimms’ fairy tales are generally introduced by the verb *said (sagen)* or *spoke (sprachen)* This is especially true when women ask questions

²⁰ Bottigheimer, 93

²¹ Bottigheimer, 52

²² Bottigheimer, 52

When men ask questions, however, the verb *ask* is seen more frequently

According to Bottigheimer the verb *ask* is used to designate questions posed “by an acknowledged authority figure or by a character already known to be wicked or who will turn out to be wicked or disastrous in the course of the tale”²³ The authority figures to whom Bottigheimer is referring are godly figures such as saints, Christ, or the Virgin Mary, or noblemen such as a king, or a prince, or a father. The verb *ask* is only used by women when the woman is evil.

Bottigheimer also noted in her study that the word *spoke* “is primarily for acknowledged authority figures”²⁴ who are almost always male. There is very little difference between the verbs *spoke* (*sprachen*) and *said* (*sagen*) grammatically. In today’s language they can be used almost interchangeably. Wilhelm Grimm, however, did not see them this way. He reserved the use of *spoke* for authority figures. According to Bottigheimer, “*sprechen* places more emphasis on the act of speaking itself, the use of *sagen* emphasizes the content of the utterance”²⁵. By segregating his verb usage, Wilhelm Grimm made sure that emphasis was placed on the fact that a man was speaking. The content of his speech may be useless, but everyone should listen to it because he is a man.

²³ Bottigheimer, 54

²⁴ Bottigheimer, 55

²⁵ Bottigheimer, 55

These verb usage patterns are very important in determining how men are portrayed in fairy tales. The patterns are regular, but not rigorously implemented, a fact that shows that “they represent unconscious expressions of Wilhelm Grimm’s deeply held convictions”²⁶. Men in fairy tales are sometimes silent. This silence, however, is very different from the silence of females. For both genders silence is seen as something that can be seen as either a punishment or a part of redemption. With female redemption the silence is usually inflicted on the heroine and lasts for a period of several years. Male redemptive silence is typically “brief and attenuated”²⁷. Men also typically enter into redemptive silence on a voluntary basis²⁸. It is also viewed as noble, whereas female silence is seen more as necessary or punitive. Another difference between male and female silence is seen in the type of characters upon whom silence is imposed. Females of all classes can be deprived of speech for redemptive purposes. With males silence is only imposed on those from lower social classes²⁹. Men from higher social classes are never silent unless they make the decision to be silent.

Male characters are isolated much less than female characters. When comparing the isolation of men and women, Bottigheimer notes that for men “the

²⁶ Bottigheimer, 55

²⁷ Bottigheimer, 76

²⁸ Bottigheimer, 76

²⁹ Bottigheimer, 76

duration of their stay is notably brief in comparison to the years-long exiles of girls and women”³⁰ Men who are isolated in fairy tales tend to seek out their isolation They typically isolate themselves for the purpose of hiding When they have completed the task of hiding, they are free to leave their isolation

Bottigheimer also points out that “isolation for a fairy tale boy or man seems antithetical to the basic terms of male existence”³¹ Male isolation is portrayed as opposite of ideal as a part of Wilhelm Grimm’s Christianization of his fairy tales In the Bible, God says, “It is not good that man should be alone”³² Wilhelm Grimm wanted to instill this value in his readers By making sure that his male characters are only seen in isolation for short, self-inflicted periods of time, male readers learn that they need companionship

Male characters in fairy tales are always portrayed as the ideal person They are either the hero of the story, or a background character, and almost never the antagonist Wilhelm and Jakob Grimm chose to portray men in this way in order to ensure that their young male readers became idealistic male adults, and their young female readers learned to respect and honor men

³⁰ Botigheimer, 105

³¹ Bottigheimer, 107

³² Genesis 2:18 (New King James Version)

CHAPTER 4

FAIRY TALES SINCE THE GRIMM BROTHERS

Fairy tales have evolved significantly since the time of Wilhelm and Jakob Grimm. They have been used in many different ways and transformed into many different forms of art. After their inception, fairy tales were used in classrooms to teach young children proper behavior and morals. They were also used as propaganda during the Nazi era in Germany. Their biggest impact on modern day society has come from being transformed into full-length feature films, which have in turn generated a massive business empire and many loyal fans.

The Grimm Brothers' fairy tales first appeared in Prussian elementary school syllabi around 1850¹. Schools tended to avoid selecting "tales that incorporated fantasy" and instead chose tales "that could serve as a basis for discussion of family life, comradely relationship, and the relationship between master and servant or host and guest"². Many scholars assume that fairy tales are used in the classroom because children's "minds are open to influence and

¹ Bottigheimer, 21

² Bottigheimer, 21

instruction through what they experience and read”³ In a typical lesson the teacher would give the children a small amount of background information on the story, read them the story, and ask them questions about the virtues displayed by the different characters⁴ In the United States fairy tales were shunned in most classrooms, probably because educators felt that the original versions were too violent for young children⁵ The German fairy tales were demystified and debunked during the 1970’s These revised versions are still used today

The use of fairy tales as a teaching device was especially common during the Nazi era The Nazis recognized the importance of fairy tales In fact, they created several policies regarding fairy tales that emphasized the general awareness about the cultural impact on children and adults⁶ During this time period writers from many different backgrounds were writing fairy tales that embodied their own ideals The Nazis banned the publication of these tales and typically arrested their authors Most the writers were forced to flee Germany Great value was placed on the Grimms’ tales because they were seen as a part

³ Bottigheimer, 22

⁴ Bottigheimer, 22

⁵ Bottigheimer, 23

⁶ Zipes, Jack, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group), 138

of German culture. According to Zipes the Nazis saw them as a way “to uphold the racist and nationalist supremacy of the German people”⁷

After getting rid of the authors that opposed their ideas, the Nazis edited the popular Grimms’ tales to display Nazi ideals. For example, in *Little Red Riding Hood*, Little Red Riding Hood is seen wearing a cloak embroidered with a swastika and is saved from the big bad wolf by a man wearing an SS uniform; Snow White’s father is portrayed as the leader of an army advancing on an eastern enemy; Cinderella’s stepsisters are rejected by the prince because of their alien blood, while Cinderella is chosen because of her purity of blood⁸

The most common form of fairy tales seen today is in the form of movies, specifically movies made by The Walt Disney Corporation. Walt Disney was awarded a special Oscar for his first fairy tale film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, and film critics consider this film as significant as DW Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation*⁹. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* led to the creation of several other

⁷ Zipes, Jack, *The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World*, 132

⁸ Allan Hall, “Nazi fairy tale paints Hitler as Little Red Riding Hood’s saviour,” *The Telegraph*, April 15, 2010, accessed March 10, 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/history/world-war-two/7594061/Nazi-fairy-tales-paint-Hitler-as-Little-Red-Riding-Hoods-saviour.html>

⁹ Tracey Mollet, ““With a smile and a song...”: Walt Disney and the Birth of the American Fairy Tale,” *Marvels & Tales* 27, no 1 (2013): 109

fairy tale films and has made Disney a household name. Initially, scholars had a hard time with the Walt Disney film adaptations. Tracey Mollet, a scholar on the Disneyfication of fairy tales, has determined that these films are, “crucial to the construction of modern American society through [their] contribution to the formation of a new United States’ nationalism”¹⁰. In a way, they are the American version of fairy tales and Walt Disney is the American equivalent of the Grimm brothers.

According to Mollet, Walt Disney “transformed the fairy tale of *Snow White* to relay new ideas about the American Dream of success to the American people”¹¹. When *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* first appeared on screen, American movie attendance was averaging 60-75 million people per week¹². Like Wilhelm and Jakob Grimm, Walt Disney inserted modern elements of idealism into his fairy tales. He hoped that people would see these films and want to emulate the characters they saw on screen. He also used *Snow White* to “[infuse] hope and positivity into a society struggling with the Depression”¹³. In

¹⁰ Mollet, 110

¹¹ Mollet, 111

¹² Mollet, 112

¹³ Mollet, 111

this way, Walt Disney's films can be seen as a way to unite the American people, just like the Grimms' fairy tales had been used to unite Germans

Disney's fairy tales can be grouped into three different categories. The first category consists of the fairy tale films that were made between 1930 and 1960. These films are what most people consider to be classic Disney films. They are also the films that most closely resemble the themes and traits the Grimm brothers inserted into their fairy tales. The second category consists of the fairy tale films made between 1989 and 1998. These films contain much more progressive ideas and show female heroines who are strong and ready to take on the world. The last category consists of fairy tale films made between 2010 and 2013. These films are even more progressive than the previous two categories and show women who can survive without the assistance of a man.

The classical Disney fairy tale films are *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Cinderella*, and *Sleeping Beauty*. All three of these tales have female protagonists who share many common traits. They also have similar female villains and male characters that play more of a background role. In these three films, our female protagonists are all young, beautiful girls who are obedient and nearly silent. Most speak only when spoken to or when conversing with their animal or magical friends. They obey all direct orders given to them, no matter how ridiculous. They are also punished for their disobedience. For example, after being warned to not let strangers into the house, Snow White eats a poisonous

apple given to her by her evil stepmother in disguise. She is forced into an eternal sleep and is only awakened when her true love kisses her. These girls show almost no individuality or free thought. Their character traits are very similar to those inserted into the Grimms' fairy tales. This shows that Walt Disney agreed with the Grimm brothers' views on ideal traits found in women. He wanted his female characters to be beautiful, silent, and obedient. All of these women are also shown taking care of a household. This reflects the time period when they were made. During this time period, women were thought of as mothers who stayed at home and took care of the house. Disney inserted this element into his fairy tale films to ensure that all young girls would learn about what was expected of them.

The villains in these films are evil, older women, two of whom are the protagonists' stepmothers. These women are all envious of the beautiful protagonist and are seen attempting to destroy her prospects of marriage. They speak out of turn and are always portrayed as vindictive. They will go to great lengths to get rid of the protagonist, including murder. These traits can be seen in the Grimms' tales as well. It is a well-known fact that the Grimm brothers inserted stepmothers into their fairy tales in order to ensure that children did not learn to resent their own mothers. Female antagonists were also quite common because many of the tellers of these tales were women telling tales of the evil things that women do. The female villains are seen as jealous because they are no longer

beautiful like the protagonist. They are attempting to ensure their own security by getting rid of a possible threat. Walt Disney probably borrowed these characteristics from the Grimms' fairy tales, as they do not reflect the common views of older women. Several studies have shown that stepmothers frequently complain about their stepchildren, resenting them because they have heard from these fairy tales about an evil stepmother¹⁴

In these tales men play a very limited role. They are always the object of the protagonist's affection. They are typically not seen until the end of the film, where they come to rescue the protagonist from peril. They do very little speaking and sometimes are not even given a proper name. This is very different from the men seen in the Grimm brothers' fairy tales. Men in these tales have all the power. They have several speaking parts and typically give orders to all the female characters. Disney probably excluded the role of the males because he was condensing these fairy tales for film. He most likely thought that children would be more drawn to the image of a woman in a beautiful gown than a man riding around on a horse.

The next group of fairy tale films comes from the time period known as the "Disney Renaissance." The films in this category are: *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin*, *Pocahontas*, and *Mulan*. These films are not all based on fairy tales collected by the Grimm brothers, but Disney, like the Grimm

¹⁴ Warner, 237

brothers, collected folk tales from cultures around the world. The heroines in these films are vastly different from their classical counterparts. They are seen as free thinkers, with a great desire to make a difference, and a thirst for knowledge. They can also be seen as a defiant group of heroines. The first trait that sets these characters apart from the classical characters is their love of knowledge. Belle, from *Beauty and the Beast*, is always seen with her nose stuck in a book, striving to learn more about the world around her. In *The Little Mermaid* Ariel is frequently seen examining objects from the human world. This thirst for knowledge shows viewers how much women's roles have changed since the production of the classical films. Instead of sitting at home and taking care of the household, women are now encouraged to go out and obtain as much knowledge as possible. These characters also make their own decisions. They are seen making good and bad decisions throughout each of their films. The decisions they make often defy the wishes of an authority figure. For example, Mulan chooses to masquerade as a man and take her place in the Chinese army. She is not only defying her father's wishes, but also the law of the land. This decision appears bad at first, but eventually leads to her being made into a national hero. Jasmine, from *Aladdin*, blatantly defies her father's orders when she professes her love for Aladdin, a common boy. Allowing female characters to make their own decisions is another way that Disney shows how much female stereotypes have changed since the 1960s. These women are free to make their

own decisions, good or bad, and they must always face the consequences of their decisions. Three of these heroines, Mulan, Belle, and Pocahontas, are willing to sacrifice their lives for a man. These acts show that women are capable of heroic acts just like men and that they understand the consequences of their decisions.

Men play a much bigger role in these films than they did in the classical era. In these films men are seen as protagonists alongside the female heroine, antagonists, and supporting characters. One is even the title character of his film, *Aladdin*. By portraying men in various ways, Disney is showing how the role of men has evolved along with the role of women. They are still heroes, but they are no longer knights in shining armor. They are the leaders of armies, princes put under a spell by an evil witch, street rats struggling to find food, and princes unhappy with their royal role. These roles give men much more personality when compared to their classical counterparts. Men are also seen as the antagonists in these tales. They are antagonists as individuals as well as in the form of an army. By placing men in various roles instead of one, viewers learn that men are capable of many different things. They can be heroes who save a single person, or an entire nation. They can also be the evil villains, who oppress an entire nation of people.

The third group of fairy tale films were produced in the 21st century. They are: *Tangled*, *Brave*, and *Frozen*. These films are even more progressive than the Renaissance films. These films show not only how drastically the roles of men and women have changed over time, but also show how the definition of an American fairy tale has changed. Two of these films, *Frozen* and *Brave*, do not have a true antagonist. Both films chronicle the story of a female heroine on a quest. They are fighting against a force of nature that is out of control. This force of nature is not in itself evil, it is only evil when it is out of control. This teaches viewers that when things go wrong, there is not always a person to blame. All three of these films also show a female heroine who does not fall in love instantaneously. In *Tangled* Rapunzel's main goal is to see floating lanterns, and Merida from *Brave* successfully resists her mother's attempts to marry her to an eligible prince. *Frozen* makes fun of the idea of falling in love instantaneously, by showing Anna, one of the film's heroines, getting engaged on the same day she meets a man. Later in the film, her sister and her eventual love interest tell her that she cannot fall in love with a man she just met. In this film Disney is mocking its earlier films that show a female heroine falling in love at first sight. They are showing their young viewers that love is not instantaneous; it takes time to develop.

These films also portray the relationships between characters very differently from previous films. In these films we see men and women working

together to accomplish a common goal. They are both seen equally contributing their unique talents to the quest at hand. This presentation shows that men and women both have unique qualities that are useful in all situations. *Brave* is a unique film because it chronicles the relationship of a mother and her daughter. *Brave* is the first film where there is an extreme tension between a mother and a daughter. In older films the stepmother typically played this role. Throughout the film we see Merida and her mother constantly in conflict with each other. Eventually, they work together to return everything to normal. We see that even though mothers and daughters fight, they love each other and will always work through their problems.

Frozen, the most recent film, has one unique quality that sets it apart from the rest of the Disney fairy tale films. In the film Anna's heart is accidentally frozen by her sister. She finds out that the only way to thaw a frozen heart is through an act of true love. Anna believes that a kiss from her fiancé of one day, Hans, will thaw her heart. Kristoff, her companion on her quest, rushes her back to her kingdom. When she arrives, Hans refuses to kiss her because he did not truly love her. Kristoff rushes back to Anna in order to perform an act of true love. Meanwhile, Hans is plotting to kill Anna's sister Elsa. Anna sees him and rushes to save her sister. She is successful, but freezes to death in the process. Moments later Anna begins to thaw. Viewers realize that Anna's act of sacrificing herself for her sister is an act of true love. This moment is significant because it is

the first time a Disney fairy tale film has shown true love that is not romantic love between a man and a woman. Viewers learn from this that there are many different types of true love. Love can be between family members, friends, and lovers.

Disney's fairy tale film adaptations share many things in common with their literary counterparts. In the tales taken from the Grimm brothers, we see similarities in many ways. In earlier adaptations we see characters similar to those found in the Grimms' tales. In later adaptations we see characters that embody the idealistic traits of the time. This element shows that even though the tales have been drastically altered to fit into modern day ideas, they still embody the spirit of the Grimm brothers.

Conclusion

Fairy tales are a genre of literature that is familiar to almost all types of people. Examining the many different fairy tales has allowed me to clearly distinguish a fairy tale from a parable or a *Bildungsroman*. A fairy tale is a work of literature that embodies the ideal traits in its characters; it is full of magic and morals and is meant to teach its readers a lesson. Examining fairy tales and the research surrounding them has also allowed me to distinguish the different ways in which men and women are portrayed. Men and women are portrayed very differently in the original Grimm brothers' tales. Women are silent, beautiful, and obedient. Men are heroes who go out and make the world a better place. These traits were all seen as ideal during the Grimm brothers' time. These stories have been used in the home and the classroom. They have been used to teach things about good and evil. Examining the film adaptation of fairy tales has allowed me to see how the United States used the Grimm brothers' ideas and methods to form their own American fairy tales. Disney fairy tale films also showcase the ideal traits of the time period.

Fairy tales are a well-known part of literature, often discussed, but not always clearly defined. It is important to define a fairy tale clearly and the characters within it, so that we can maximize their teaching value. It is also important to examine how other cultures transform fairy tales in order to learn what values and characteristics are important to those cultures.

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