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March. 12th 2015

English Honours Essay

## A Grimm Reminder: Representations of Female Evil in the Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm

Although Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm wrote their fairy tales in the early 19th century, their stories have maintained their popularity and have been continuously adapted and reimagined. The importance of this popularity should not be underestimated: the analysis of the tales and their characters is essential to understand the potential to perpetuate negative female fairy tale archetypes. This essay will examine the ways three popular Grimm fairy tales construct evil women through a close reading of their characteristics, their roles, and their motivations. As readers, it is important to be suspicious of the rewards given at the closure of these tales. The fates of these older women perhaps indicate what is to befall the young heroines in the future; once their beauty is diminished, will they too become evil, undesirable, and jealous crones? Indeed, although there is no instance of marriage portrayed as happy in any of the three stories, the plots culminate in the marriage of the heroines to the handsome princes. If the examples in the stories are to be trusted, why should the audience believe the notion of "happily ever after?" Is the "reward" of marriage truly a reward at all? Or could marriage be an introduction into a life consumed by jealousy, competitiveness, and bitterness, perhaps as a result of no longer being desirable to men?

By examining three of the most well-known Grimm stories, the essay will address the pervasive portrayal of antagonistic women within fairy tale literature, and in turn, highlight the

potential impact of these representations on gender dynamics. Few scholars have examined the motivations behind the role of the female antagonist instead, the majority choose to focus on the role of the heroine. The focus of this essay expands on current feminist scholarship examining the role of the passive heroine and contrasts the heroine against the more active, dominant, and stimulating female villain. More specifically, this comparison serves to assist further analysis of the implications of the portrayal of feminine evil in relationships between female characters in the fairy tales, as well as their potential continued effect on modern readers and their own relationships. The paper will argue that evil women in fairy tales are not only used to destroy the important bonds between older women and younger women but also to reinforce the stereotypical feminine qualities sought in women, while warning against adopting characteristically male behaviour in order to continue the subjugation and domination of women. By equating old age, ugliness, and female collaboration with evil, the stories convey to women that should they survive into old age, they will either become evil or, like the heroines, be forced to confront challenges alone.

This essay focuses on female characters, specifically the female villains. I will closely examine the stepmother from "Cinderella," Dame Gothel of "Rapunzel," and finally, the Queen from "Little Snow White." The essay will begin with a paragraph highlighting the distinctions between the 1812 Grimm fairy tales and the 1819 version. A brief review of the literature surrounding the female villain in fairy tales and the ways in which this scholarship contributes to the argument at hand will follow the historical context. In the succeeding section a comparison of the traits of heroines and female villains will be made in order to demonstrate the binary the stories' create. Following the comparison of female characters traits in all three stories is a section regarding the competitive relationships between women in the fairy tales. This section

serves to highlight the construct of divine motherhood, in order to show how a deceased biological mother and an antagonistic adoptive mother affect the heroine's development. Section three consists of an analysis of the female villains' motivation, and discusses the detrimental effects of jealousy on the bonds between female characters within the stories. The final section again discusses the distinction between evil female characters and heroines, with focus on the magical double standard employed by the Brothers Grimm in order to punish the villains and absolve the heroines.

## Literature Review and History

The essay draws on translated copies of "Rapunzel," "Little Snow White," and "Cinderella" from the 2010 Canterbury Classics anthology *Grimm's Complete Fairy Tales*, drawn from the Grimm's reworked publication from 1819. In the earlier 1812 versions of many of the Brothers Grimm fairy tales, the role of evil women was often filled by the heroines' biological mothers. As Christy Williams argues that in the 1819 versions, "the Brothers Grimm changed mothers into stepmothers to make the violence perpetuated by the maternal villains in their tales more palatable" (9-10) to middle class readers. This change made the treatment of children by these motherly characters more palatable to readers, and allowed them to better express the troubling emotion of anger in regards to a parental figure (Williams 6). In stories such as "Hansel and Gretel" and more importantly "Little Snow White" the heroines' biological mothers were the original versions' villains.

With the stepmother suddenly becoming the target for all fear and anger, it becomes evident that the switch from evil mother characters in the original 1812 Grimm to evil stepmother figures in the 1819 version was intentional, and served the purpose of alienating the characters (and the readers) from the evil female in a maternal role. Barbara Almond argues that

humans are so dependent on their mothers from birth that accepting this reality allows mothers a great capacity for power, and evidently this power is exploited by the stepmother figures in the stories (22). The stepmother clearly serves as a faux mother figure in the Grimm fairy tales in an effort to make maternal violence and aggression more palatable to readers. This shift in focus from biological mothers to adoptive mothers may be explained more fully in context with the shift from peasant and folk audiences to a middle class readership, one that was less likely to embrace the wickedness of a maternal parent towards their child.

The heroine of each tale is excluded and isolated from all contact with positive female role models, the absence of her 'good' mother, and the presence of evil female forces working in conjunction against her. Susan Cahill's article examining fairy tale cinema asserts that jealousy is the main motivation for female evil in adaptations of the Grimm brothers' stories. Cahill analyzes Grimm fairy tales reimagined in two films, *Stardust* and *The Brothers Grimm,* noting that each film is based upon the tale of "Snow White" and that the films "stage confrontations between older threatening women and younger heroines. At stake in the confrontations in the films are beauty, longevity, and power for the older women… [and as a result] intergenerational female conflict is endemic in [them]" (3-4).  Marcia Lieberman discusses the issue of beauty among competing female characters within fairy tales and comments that in the inevitable competition between daughters or unrelated girls "the prettiest is invariably singled out and designated for reward, or first for punishment and later for reward. Beautiful girls are never ignored; they may be oppressed at first by wicked figures… but ultimately they are chosen for reward…the focus [is] on beauty as a girl's most valuable asset, perhaps her only valuable asset. Good-temper and meekness are so regularly associated with beauty, and ill temper with ugliness" (4).

The Grimm's fairy tales also discourage collaboration between women. Michael Mendelson has called attention to this phenomenon in his work when he states, "It is disturbing, then, to realize that within the corpus of *Grimms' Tales* the benefits of collective action are not extended to women… beyond a handful of problematic instances, female heroines in *Grimms'* are on their own, sometimes admirably independent" (1-2). Mendelson's theory cannot be overstated. Cinderella is abandoned by of both her biological parents, albeit through death, and is forced to function in a world devoid of positive female interaction. Cinderella is targeted and abused by both her adopted mother and her stepsisters and is only able to achieve success through marriage, when she is "saved" by the prince. Not only are the female heroines forced to undergo challenges alone, but the female villains are then condemned for using their strengths. Coincidentally, these strengths are typically (and positively) attributed to the male heroes in the tales. In these stories, fairy tale women seeking both collaboration and the active pursuit of their own futures are condemned and dismissed as aggressive and emotional. Nancy Veglahn addresses this issue, and the author notes that often women are contrasted to rational men as extremely emotional, and "female monsters created by male authors are angry women who use their anger in their quest for power" (9).

This essay will rely strongly on contributions from Jerilyn Fisher and Ellen S. Silber's article "Good and Bad Beyond Belief: Teaching Gender Lessons through Fairy Tales and Feminist Theory." The authors observe that "if Snow White's (or Rapunzel's or Cinderella's) stepmother were a 'good mother,' the young girl would have been far less motivated to flee the castle (or tower or home), and more important, she might not have fallen hypnotically into the prince's arms" (6). The idea that women are motivated by both the desire to escape the villains and pursue marriage to royalty is also addressed when Fisher and Silber declare "women who

have ambition, who show a desire for control and status, must attempt to secure their standing by misleading others. They can find agency only through fraud and manipulation. Meanwhile, the fairy-tale fathers' established authority, acquired from maleness alone, assures paternal figures control and status without their having to resort to deception" (8). The concept of stepmothers manipulating and competing with heroines for both status and men's attention has also been taken up by Michelle Ann Abate who notes the natural divisive binary within the story. Abate argues that the female characters "are not separate and distinct characters but rather competing forms of female identity imposed on women by patriarchal Western culture: the innocent, beautiful angel and the mean, ugly witch" (7).

**Helpless Heroines versus Horrifying Villains**

In a vast number of the canonical fairy tale stories, there is a distinctive binary established among the female characters. The three tales examined here prove no exception. The antagonistic female characters in each story depict qualities that render them generally undesirable in comparison to the traditional definition of an attractive female: one who is not only kind, passive, and sweet, but possesses a remarkable beauty and even more remarkable sense of engrained helplessness. In contrast to these stereotypical heroines, the female villains simply do not measure up. Indeed, in "Little Snow White" a direct comparison is made between the two women, in which it is noted that even at the age of seven, Snow White was "more beautiful than the Queen herself" ("Little Snow" 187). Leiberman notes a bias in these stories "against the active, ambitious, 'pushy' woman… [The Grimms] establish a dichotomy between those women who are gentle, passive, and fair, and those who are active, wicked, and ugly. Women who are powerful and good are never human; those women who are human, and who have power or seek it, are nearly always portrayed as repulsive" (12). In this case, with the

exception of Cinderella's stepmother, the aggressive women are represented not only as repulsive and ugly, but as witch-like. The marked qualities between the good and bad female characters is often represented both in physical terms and in terms of the characters' roles.

In a sense, the heroines of the tales are almost worse off than the villainesses, due to their one dimensionality and passivity. The most visible common trait possessed by all three heroines is that of outstanding classical beauty. In each instance, the beauty of the heroine is the first quality that can be noted by the reader. The reader may not know anything else about these girls except that they have "magnificent long hair, fine as spun gold," ("Rapunzel" 45) are "as beautiful as the day ("Little Snow" 187), or that the other characters are "astonished at [their] beauty" ("Cinderella" 84).

As the fairy tale heroine has accomplished little to achieve her success, the onus of achievement lies squarely on her physical attributes. The pressure is magnified in comparison to the stepmother/witch figures. In comparison to the evil females, the beautiful heroine does little to be rewarded, and does "not have to do anything to merit being chosen; she does not have to show pluck, resourcefulness, or wit; she is chosen because she is beautiful" (Lieberman 5). With little exception, the older women are either ugly or unremarkable in physical appearance, with one concession: the Queen in "Little Snow White." However, the Queen is fixated on her aging beauty, and obsessed with being surpassed in beauty by the younger, prettier Snow White. Once these women marry, they lose the role of young, pure, and ultimately more desirable female. This outcome may be a consequence of the loss of purity in the act of marriage (and the consummation of that marriage), and the 19th century perception that men do not value non-virginal women. As such, these stories, and "Little Snow White" in particular, hint at the future

for these heroines if their sole virtue is physical beauty: they too will eventually struggle with being replaced by younger, more beautiful women, unless they die first.

In the Grimm's stories, a heroine's beauty is often her primary positive attribute and, as such, is typically the only reason her life is saved by the men. Cinderella's stepmother and stepsisters oppress Cinderella when they "took her pretty clothes away from her, put an old grey bed gown on her and, gave her wooden shoes" ("Cinderella" 81) almost in an effort to hide her beauty, but in the end Cinderella enjoys her happily ever after with the Prince after her appearance at the ball, where she was unrecognizable in her radiant beauty. Snow White's story results in a similar fate. Snow White's life is saved simply because as the hunter "was about to pierce Snow White's innocent heart….she was so beautiful the hunter had pity on her" ("Little Snow" 188). In this instance, Snow White uses none of the tools at her disposal to save her own life; she plays a passive role and is saved by her physical appearance. Even when Snow White is believed to be dead the dwarves treasure her beauty and "they had a transparent coffin of glass made, so that she could be seen from all sides…" and the prince "cannot live without seeing Snow White" so he requests her as a gift to "honor and prize her as my dearest possession" ("Little Snow" 192-93). If Snow White did not possess these positive physical attributes it is likely that the dwarves would not have constructed a clear coffin to gaze upon her beauty, the prince would not have stopped to save her from the casket, and perhaps even the hunter would not have hesitated to stab her. The heroine's survival rests solely on her beauty and reliance on men, and if they fail her, she will die.

In this sense, the importance of the heroine's combined traits of beauty and passivity becomes clear. Beauty is a measure of worthiness on the part of the young heroines, and without it they would be left with little. As relative possessions for male ownership, the heroines are not

required to demonstrate any notable characteristics other than their beauty. Alternatively, the villainous women are permitted some qualities similar to those of the men, but these specific qualities (drive, ambition, intelligence, aggression) are deemed negative when cast in the role of the stepmother/witch. These instances speak to the commoditization of female beauty, and the placing of physical attractiveness as the most important female asset in fairy tales, if not the only asset. With the knowledge that this asset will eventually fade, these fairy tales direct us to the sinister conclusion that these women will never be permitted to remain happy: their ultimate fate is likely to become the very villainous, older, unhappy women that they fear.

Often seen in conjunction with outstanding beauty, the traits of meekness and passivity follow closely behind in their prominence. Leiberman again remarks on the relationship between beauty and passivity, declaring that "the heroines are chosen for their beauty (en soi), not for anything they do (pour soi), they seem to exist passively until they are seen by the hero, or described to him. They wait, are chosen, and are rewarded" (5). Oftentimes the heroines make little progress as to their activity and independence; they rely on patriarchal family figures to survive initially, before being discovered by the prince or other male figures. Leiberman's article addresses Cinderella's role as a passive character who is unable (or unwilling) to take her destiny into her own hands. Leiberman explains that "after leaving her slipper at the ball she has nothing more to do but stay home and wait…Cinderella can remain quietly at home; the prince's servant will come to her house and will discover her identity" (8). In this instance, and in many others, the heroine meekly waits for the driven, active male hero to save her. Rapunzel's mother, as a good female, exhibits similar behaviour. She fixates on the idea of eating the enchantress's rampion and yet refuses to acquire some by her own means. Instead, Rapunzel's mother "longed for it, and had the greatest desire to eat some. This desire increased every day, and as she knew

she could not get any of it, she quite pined away, and looked pale and miserable" ("Rapunzel"

44). The good mother is constructed as unable to appease her own desires, and so her husband,

Rapunzel's father, is forced to steal some from the witch. Snow White, after being released by

the hunter flees for her life and comes upon the seven dwarves, who are so charmed by her

beauty that they decide if she "will take care of our house, cook, make the beds, wash, sew and

knit, and…will keep everything neat and clean" ("Little Snow" 188) she will be welcome to stay

with them. Not only do these male saviours desire a beautiful female to gaze upon, but they want

Snow White to fill the traditional female role of housewife and nurturer. At this point, Snow

White simply hides with the male dwarves, and uses them as protection as she waits for the

Queen to find her and harm her.

Unfortunately for the heroines, this passivity is often accompanied by a lack of wisdom

and common sense, which forces them to further rely on the male figures in the stories. Even

after being warned multiple times by the dwarves Snow White opens the door to the Queen

repeatedly, usually because beautiful objects, like stays and combs "pleased the girl so well that

she let herself be fooled, and opened the door" ("Little Snow" 191). This common theme is

repeated in "Rapunzel," in which the young and naïve heroine allows appearances to sway her

opinions without any other knowledge of the situation. Even though her prince is a force for

good, Rapunzel saw only "that he was young and handsome" before "she thought 'He will love

me more than Dame Gothel does;' and she said yes" ("Rapunzel" 45). These young heroines rely

on the male figures around them for a sense of security and purpose, and do not use their own

intelligence to ensure their safety. In lieu of intelligence, the heroines' focal trait of physical

attractiveness often becomes the safety net to ensure their futures or their survival. Christina

Bacchilega argues that this "narrative prescribes dependence; what it forbids, then, is

independence, the independence of a (childless) woman who as a sexual, psychological, and social subject would not be subordinate to men. This position is possible for women, but it is not articulated in these tales" and goes further to argue that "the heroine depends on someone else for her survival, cultivation, and identity. What these tales forbid – and thus never represent – is the independent, grown woman" (9). However, there are feminine representations of adulthood and independence in these fairy tales, but they are restricted to an evil role and are typically punished in the culmination of the tales. While these women may have been young, beautiful, and good once, they now play a role that emanates independence and a drive for success, but they are ultimately demonized and relegated to the characters of older, jealous witches, which keeps readers from empathizing with them.

In these tales, evil women are the only independent actors. While their motives may be questionable, their actions reveal their desire for power. Cinderella's stepmother antagonizes her stepdaughter solely to promote her biological daughters' well-being and success, and her daughters do the same. While "they mocked her and emptied her peas and lentils into the ashes" ("Cinderella" 81) and ordered to her jump through hoops to prevent her from attending the ball, the stepsisters and stepmother promote their biological family over her in an attempt to marry the prince. This desire for social advancement results in a horrific punishment that discourages this type of self-promotion and ambition. In the final scene, the stepsisters "for their wickedness and falsehood, […] were punished with blindness as long as they lived" ("Cinderella" 86), a punishment that is arguably too harsh for the crime committed. The Queen in "Little Snow White" is penalized in much the same way. While initially the Queen orders the hunter to take Snow White to the forest to kill her, she soon realizes that Snow White's beauty has influenced the man into letting her escape. This knowledge drives the envy and bitterness in the Queen's

heart, but also motivates her to take action of her own. She is striving to be the most successful woman in the story, based on the quality often deemed most important for women: beauty. Although her motives are vain, her drive for success is undeniable. In several separate instances the Queen adopted a magical disguise and in "this disguise, she went over the seven mountains to the seven dwarfs" ("Little Snow" 190). Although her efforts are thwarted the villainess demonstrates a remarkably single-minded determination to achieve her goal: "she trembled and shook with rage. 'Snow White shall die,' she cried, 'even if it costs me my life! ("Little Snow" 191) Michelle Ann Abate notes that "the Queen's selection of staylaces, a comb, and an apple with which to murder Snow White embody appropriately feminine items. All these objects reflect the importance placed on women's physical appearance as well as their role of feeding, nurturing, and caring for others" (13). Even as the Queen demonstrates initiative and a desire for power (traditionally masculine traits) she is still anchored by these typically feminine items in her quest for success. In the conclusion of the tale, the Queen has used her intelligence and "cunningly made" ("Little Snow" 192) magical props in an effort to destroy Snow White and in doing so, condemned herself to a gruesome punishment similar to that of Cinderella's stepsisters.

Interestingly enough, Rapunzel's adoptive mother, Dame Gothel, escapes corporal punishment at the conclusion of the story, and is largely dismissed as a fairy tale villainess. Dame Gothel's motives remain somewhat unclear, but perhaps her escape from punishment stems from her behaviour throughout the tale. While the enchantress does ensure that Rapunzel is locked away from civilization, "shut into a tower, which lay in a forest, and had neither stairs nor door" ("Rapunzel" 45), her actions do not prompt the initial conflict in the story. It is only after Rapunzel's mother pines for Dame Gothel's rampion and her husband is caught stealing the plant that the enchantress declares "steal my rampion like a thief! You shall suffer for it"

("Rapunzel" 44) and as her penance demands "you must give me the child which your wife will bring into the world; it shall be well treated, and I will care for it like a mother" ("Rapunzel" 45). These terms are highly unreasonable, but they were not unprovoked and they are foolishly agreed upon by Rapunzel's parents. While Rapunzel's father "in his terror consented to everything" (Rapunzel 45), Dame Gothel neither hints at nor explicitly tells Rapunzel's parents how she will punish their thievery. Dame Gothel remains relatively harmless throughout the tale, particularly in comparison to the attempted filicide and murder in the other stories. When Rapunzel attempts to escape, Dame Gothel counters this betrayal by only cutting Rapunzel's long hair and taking "poor Rapunzel into a desert where she had to live in great grief and misery" ("Rapunzel" 46). The enchantress does not even physically harm the prince, in fact "in his despair he leapt down from the tower. He escaped with his life, but the thorns into which he fell pierced his eyes" ("Rapunzel" 46). While the author's prose implies otherwise, the only harm resulted from the prince's own actions, rather than hers. This is in sharp contrast to Cinderella's stepsisters, who were "for their wickedness and falsehood…were punished with blindness" ("Cinderella" 86). Interestingly enough, this statement is made in the passive voice, perhaps implying that either they themselves were responsible for their blinding, or no one was to blame.

Evil, violent women are far more likely than non-violent women to have an unhappy ending in these stories. The evil woman in "Rapunzel," is, surprisingly, not punished, which reinforces the notion that punitive measures are only taken against female characters who demonstrate a sense of independence and a desire for power typically reserved for men. Dame Gothel is an example of an evil woman who, while actively seeking outcomes that are self-serving, displays remarkably passive behaviour for a villainess, as her behaviour does not directly or physically harm the heroine and hero. Dame Gothel is partially redeemed in the eyes

of the readership, both for her passivity and her lack of direct attack against the heroine. While

the Queen in "Little Snow White," possesses the typical heroine trait of beauty, she is

nevertheless condemned at the close of the story as her "evil" qualities still outbalance any good

qualities she may possess. Ultimately, in the case of the Queen there is no rehabilitation due to

her violence directed against a younger, purer, and wholly innocent woman.

Rapunzel, however, is swiftly punished for demonstrating ingenuity and intelligence

when she escapes from the tower. It is Rapunzel's idea to weave a ladder to escape, rather than

the prince's idea, as she instructs him "bring with you a skein of silk every time that you come,

and I will weave a ladder with it" ("Rapunzel" 46), but unlike most of her male fairy tale

counterparts, Rapunzel fails in her task and is caught. As Bacchilega's theory of fairy tale social

norms indicates, the heroine is ideologically constructed as innocent and persecuted (3) and

Rapunzel's actions fall markedly outside of this construct, resulting in her swift punishment. In

this instance Rapunzel is simply reprimanded, while the older women are vilified because their

behaviour mimics the traditionally masculine role and makes them a competitor for men. The

case of Cinderella's father, one of the only non-heroic men present in these stories, establishes a

dynamic regarding the anxiety around aggressive women. Cinderella's stepmother embodies the

role of a powerful, driven woman who successfully dominates her husband, which results in

Cinderella not seeking his help.  With the exception of Cinderella's father, the men in the stories

typically possess qualities quite similar to those of the female villains, and yet readers are not

meant to think of them as villainous.

The male heroes tend to be substantially more aggressive, dominant, and active than any

of the heroines. In the cases of the heroes, such as Cinderella's prince seeking her out after he

finds her shoe and Snow White's prince (accidentally) dislodging the apple in her throat, the

onus of action lies directly on the men. Cinderella's prince is intelligent, persistent, and direct; to find Cinderella after the ball, he "used a stratagem, and had caused the whole staircase to be smeared with pitch, and there, when she ran down, had the maiden's left slipper which remained sticking" ("Cinderella" 85). Snow White's prince is much the same. He comes upon Snow White in her glass casket and boldly says to the dwarves, "let me have the coffin, I will give you whatever you want for it" ("Little Snow" 193). Even in "Rapunzel," arguably the story that portrays the most active female, the prince still outshines her in each of these dominant, typically male, qualities. While Rapunzel formulates the plan, the prince is the one who initially seeks her out "to talk to her quite like a friend, and told her that his heart had been so stirred that it let him had no rest, and he had been forced to see her" ("Rapunzel" 45). In each of these instances the princes see what they desire and aggressively pursue it. These men are portrayed positively to the reader, while the villainous women demonstrating the same qualities are not afforded the same luxury.

The heroes occupy the role of fearless saviour and savvy man of action. The Grimms' tales highlight these characteristics as positive in the heroes, reinforcing this evaluation with the reward of the happy ending, in which the hero saves and obtains the love of the princess, while portraying these very same qualities as negative when embodied by women. As Merja Makinen argues, stories such as "Cinderella" are known for the "vaunting of feminine passivity and rejection of feminine activity as wicked or monstrous" (155). This ideal creates a binary in which active roles are evil and heroines are relegated to victims. Bacchilega confirms this theory by outlining that the "actions" of the heroines are simply to "undergo trials and endure hostility (rather than accomplish tasks and seek competition)" (4). When these traditionally masculine traits like dominance and aggression are assigned to the evil women in the fairy tales, it

encourages the association of these traits in women with negativity or evil, which serves to further alienate female to female relationships within the stories. What Marcia Leiberman states is correct: "The moral value of activity thus becomes sex-linked… What is praiseworthy in males, however, is rejected in females; the counter-part of the energetic, aspiring boy is the scheming, ambitious woman" (11-12), and this attitude is pervasive in the fairy tales produced by the Grimm Brothers.

**The Importance of Motherhood**

Traditionally, motherhood plays an integral part in the fairy tale dynamic. The absence of a biological mother is an essential aspect of the life of the Grimm's fairy tale heroines. The contrast of the good heroine/bad stepmother is an essential aspect of the fairy tale notion of motherhood. In her article "An Introduction to the "Innocent Persecuted Heroine" Fairy Tale," Cristina Bacchilega states that the fairy tale "inscribes not only variable social norms but conflicting ones; gender is understood within the frameworks of class and social order; and the heroine's innocence and persecution are ideologically constructed" (3). Bacchilega's theory, applied to the Grimm's stories, indicates the conflicting nature of this dynamic of fairy tale femininity, speaks to the unrealistic model of female purity, and addresses the impact societal ideologies had on the construction of fairy tale women.

In both "Cinderella" and "Little Snow White" the early death of a biological mother has a major effect on the lives of the young heroines. In these two tales in particular, the physical absence of a biological mother is also accompanied by a missing or emotionally distant father figure, and an evil, neglectful stepmother. In these stories, the father figure is physically absent, as in "Little Snow White," or emotionally distant from the heroine, as is the case in "Cinderella." The dynamic of the Cinderella story is strangely unbalanced in this way. The blame and "villain"

title is laid in whole on the part of the evil stepmother, and the father's role in Cinderella's life is entirely glossed over and referenced only briefly. Cinderella's father refers to her as "a stunted little kitchen-wench which my late wife left behind" ("Cinderella" 86) and yet the story completely overlooks his role in allowing his new wife to abuse his only biological offspring. "Every imaginable injury" undergone by Cinderella could not have gone unnoticed by her father, as they were daily occurrences ("Cinderella" 82). This attitude indicates either a complete ignorance on the part of Cinderella's father or an unwillingness to defend his daughter against the new matriarch of the household. Cinderella's father blatantly ignores the mistreatment of his daughter, and yet nowhere in the story is her father assigned blame for allowing for the continued abuse of Cinderella at the hands of his wife and her stepsisters. The tale perpetuates the long-engrained misconception that men are, without criticism, expected to not raise or even care about their own children.

Cinderella's stepmother's actions are in accordance with the views of certain evolutionary psychologists who believe that stepparents do not feel the same amount of love as genetic parents and sometimes grow to dislike or hatred and that stepmothers treating "the children of their husbands' first marriages badly – [is] in part because [stepmothers wish] to preserve the patrimony for their own children, in part because they resented the idea of becoming enslaved to a previous wife's children" (Abate 13). Evolutionary psychology does not offer the only reason for stepmothers' cruelty in the tales: these women are often cast in an obligatory caretaker role as a result of their husbands' lack of involvement in child rearing. It stands to reason then, that with parental responsibility being thrust in its entirety upon the stepmother, a resentment of both the paternal figure and, in turn, his offspring, may form. Jerilyn Fisher and Ellen S. Silber note the parental neglect and disinterest experienced at the hands of fathers in

their article. The authors acknowledge the characteristic presence of the weak father figure and states that "The fairy tale father, oblivious to his child's misery, never intercedes; nor is he reproached for being inattentive…the prince delivers the heroine from women's wrath. His power to save her and her utter dependence on him seem key to their imagined future happiness" (2). As demonstrated by the events in "Cinderella," the lack of a strong, loving father figure only contributes to the disparity in gender relations, and Cinderella is forced to rely entirely on her stepmother as the only physically present female role model in the story, and on the prince as the saviour of her life and happiness.

While the evil stepmother character dominates the "Cinderella" story, Cinderella's biological mother plays an essential role in the heroine's development. Cinderella herself strives to remain morally upright, and "every day the maiden went out to her mother's grave, and wept, and she remained pious and good" ("Cinderella" 81), and indeed it is only through the absence of Cinderella's biological mother that Cinderella is reminded to maintain her decency, particularly in the face of the abuse she suffers at the hands of her stepmother and stepsisters. Her mother's final words induces her to be good: "dear child, remain pious and good, and then our dear God will always protect you, and I will look down on you from heaven and be near you" ("Cinderella" 1). In essence, Cinderella's mother tells her that heavenly love is conditional; this counsel elevates her biological mother to a divine symbol, one connected with God and firmly on the side of good, but also makes both her and God's love seem conditional, likely to be withdrawn, leaving Cinderella unprotected if she misbehaves.

Cinderella's mother continues to play the part of the role model from whom Cinderella takes her cues, but she is not physically present in the tale, and is only mentioned in passing, in the first few sentences of the story. Fisher and Silber acknowledge that although Cinderella's

mother leaves behind loving words and maintains a magical presence through nature (Fisher and Silber 3), the "good mother is completely eclipsed by the entrance of her vile antithesis, the renowned witch or stepmother" (good and bad beyond belief), which demonstrates the influence held by the stepmother. By constructing the dichotomy of physically present, bad parents and unattainably good, spiritual parents (i.e. Cinderella's biological mother and God) the tale puts the heroine in a bind: she cannot be sure that any authority figures, living or dead, will love her. In the physical world, little can be done by the heroine to achieve the love she craves from the stepmother figure and the passive paternal figure, but in the spiritual world, a kind of conditional love is offered from above. This type of conditional love offered by the words of Cinderella's pious and good mother sets a clear precedent for the type of pure, divine-emulating behaviour that will allow the young women in the stories to receive love. To enforce this narrative, the stories also construct a physical manifestation of the bad behaviour being warned against in the form of the stepmother/witch figure. The stories even go so far as to inflict corporal punishments upon these representative "bad" women when and if they do venture from the piety and goodness that is so desired of women at this time. Although the heroines are conditioned to strive for marriage (and destined for love due to their beauty), the good mother figures that have achieved their goal of marriage have died and the only other women in the stories are evil, which again hints at the future of the heroine, even if she follows her biological mother's example.

**Relationships, Rivalry, and Collaboration**

None of the heroines in "Little Snow White," "Cinderella," and "Rapunzel" are in supportive relationships with other women and there is a marked lack of positive female figures with whom the heroines are even able to form healthy relationships. This section will discuss and contrast the varying types of female relationships in the three fairy tales. In none of the stories

does "the daughter find friendship or support from any other girl or woman once her original mother dies" (Fisher and Silber 11). In fact, the only collaborative or significant female relationships are *within* a group of female villains, as is the case in "Cinderella." The stepmother and stepsisters only collaborate against Cinderella with the ultimate hope of marrying one of the stepsisters to the prince. Upon hearing that they were invited to the Prince's ball, the stepsisters call to Cinderella, each demanding, "comb our hair for us, brush our shoes and fasten our buckles, for we are going to the festival at the King's palace"; meanwhile, Cinderella's stepmother slyly constructs impossible, time-sensitive tasks to complete before Cinderella will be permitted to attend ("Cinderella" 82). The heroine's stepsisters and stepmother collaborate to force Cinderella to complete numerous impossible tasks in an effort to prevent her from attending the festival. Not once in their evil ministrations do they acknowledge that only one of the stepsisters will be able to marry the Prince, and thus leave the other sister behind. Ultimately, each stepsister's goal will be in competition with her sister's. Their evil is single-minded and directed towards a common, selfish goal, one that will ultimately tear them apart. That the stepsisters do not acknowledge this fact is the only reason they are able to collaborate successfully against Cinderella.

The absence of collaboration is indeed harmful to the women within the stories, and the stories result in the punishment of female characters for their collaboration. As Mendelson points out "the absence of female collaboration in *Grimms' Fairy Tales* serves to substantiate the notion that there is something somehow threatening in the very idea of women working together" (2). The result of Cinderella's stepsisters forming an alliance, results in first one of each of their eyes being pecked out and "then the pigeons pecked out the other eye of each. And thus, for their wickedness and falsehood, they were punished with blindness as long as they lived"

("Cinderella" 86). The ending of "Cinderella" serves to substantiate this notion, as the female

characters who collaborate with one another are punished in violent, brutal ways and the heroine

is married off to the prince, again without any semblance of a female support system in evidence.

The contrast between biological mothers and stepmothers serves to "other" and alienate

the adoptive female parents in an effort to set these characters up as evil and unnatural. In

essence, these three Grimm's tales serve to provide two opposing female models, with little room

for deviation. These models are constructed as the evil, unnatural stepmother in contrast to the

benevolent, essentially flawless, biological mother. While the stepmother figures are typically

punished for their evil in unforgivable ways, interestingly enough, in the story of "Rapunzel,"

Dame Gothel escapes such harsh censure. Arguably, this escape is a result of her character never

*directly* inflicting violence on the heroine, and as such, she is considered a character that treads

the line between unforgivable and simply passively evil.

Throughout "Rapunzel" Dame Gothel's actions mark her as a villain but are not

irredeemable, resulting in her escape from punishment, unlike her fellow villainous counterparts.

Dame Gothel initially is furious at Rapunzel's father for his theft of her property, accuses him of

being a thief, and tells him "you shall suffer for it." However, after hearing his pleas, she quite

quickly "allowed her anger to be softened" and does not physically attack him; she seeks out his

daughter for her own ("Rapunzel 44).  Even following her adoptive daughter's betrayal with the

prince, Dame Gothel rather passively "took poor Rapunzel into a desert where she had to live in

great and misery," instead of killing or even attacking her. As for her punishment of the prince,

the enchantress only "gazed at him with wicked and venomous looks" ("Rapunzel" 46). Indeed,

it is by his own volition that the prince "in his despair, leapt down from the tower" blinding

himself on thorns ("Rapunzel" 46). These actions highlight the comparative passivity of Dame

Gothel, in sharp contrast to the female villains in the other stories, and against the story's own statement that she was "so pitiless" ("Rapunzel" 46).

In the 1812 version, "Little Snow White" (then called Sneewittchen or Schneeweisschen) follows the exact same format as the 1819 version, with the important omission of this sentence: "And as soon as the child was born, the queen died" ("Little Snow" 187). The Grimms also alter the sentence "the queen was the most beautiful in all the land, and very prideful of her beauty" ("Sneewittchen (Schneeweisschen)" ch.53) to "a year had passed the King took another wife. She was a beautiful woman, but she was proud and haughty" ("Little Snow" 187). These small changes make a large difference in the importance of mothers. While the other two stories make few changes, the changes in "Little Snow White" are important to note as they demonstrate the middle class anxiety surrounding biological mothers' aggressive feelings towards their children. Alternatively, in "Cinderella" and "Rapunzel" the heroines' biological mothers either die early in the story or do not play a role in their child's life due to other circumstances.

Even in this initial fleeting description, Snow White's stepmother is constructed as haughty and untouchable, hardly the nurturing, caring female that one imagines in a mother figure. In "Little Snow White," the king's new wife is "proud and haughty, and she could not bear that anyone else should surpass her in beauty" ("Little Snow" 187). In the story, Snow White's stepmother not only seeks Snow White's death, but also wants to eat her organs. When the huntsman returned with the boar's organs Snow White's stepmother devours the organs, and believes she has eaten Snow White's lungs and liver ("Little Snow" 189) which is a universal taboo in all (or nearly all) human societies. Michelle Ann Abate notes that "the Queen's decision to consume the internal organs of the young girl is commonly seen as further evidence of her inhumanity" (10) which makes it evident that the act of cannibalism serves to alienate the

stepmother from the realm of humanity and further the process of othering her character in the text. Williams discusses the theories of Warner and Tatar, who believe that "female villains are anti-mothers, functioning as consumers rather than nurturers" (10), which is followed quite literally in the cannibalistic intentions of Snow White's stepmother.

As is the case with many good mother archetypes in the fairy tale realm, Rapunzel's mother has very few defining characteristics and the story describes little about her. The good mother in Rapunzel's tale has no personality or motivation, save her stereotypical desire to have a child, and a certain religiosity in praying to God for a child to come to her ("Rapunzel" 44). Rapunzel's mother is quite uninteresting and very passive in her short introduction. She "hoped that God was about to grant her desire" in having a child and once her hope is fulfilled, her own foolish actions result in her child being taken ("Rapunzel" 44). Rapunzel's mother rather shallowly desires to eat Dame Gothel's rampion, and once this second wish is fulfilled, she simply desires more. While her desires may appear selfish, her character is undeniably labelled as "good" through her affiliation with religion and God, as well as her absolute passivity. Additionally, although her desires may seem to demonstrate a lack of self-control, Rapunzel's mother is redeemed as a good woman in the reader's eyes, as her desire is the result of woman's supposedly fundamental feminine goal: to bear a child. Ultimately, after she fulfills the role of passive catalyst to the story; she is never spoken of again and again takes second place to the more active villain. Although each fairy tale constructs the notion of 'happily ever after' as the ultimate goal, the representation of Rapunzel's parents' marriage leaves much to be desired, literally. Neither husband nor wife seem particularly happy in their marriage; they both wish for more, whether it be a child or rampion to eat, and this results in their rather unhappy (and brief) presence in the story. In both "Cinderella" and "Little Snow White" there is no evidence of any

loving or positive interactions between the married mother and father, or father and stepmother. The stories do not expand on their respective relationships in any way.

Evidently, in sharp contrast to the aggressive hyperactivity of the evil stepmother characters, these so-called "good mothers" also rarely appear, and if present they tend to assume a passive role. With the lack of a positive female presence, the heroines are typically exposed to the "fiercely competitive, vicious, and pathological mother" (i.e. the evil stepmother) who then becomes the only existing representation of female adulthood. Fisher and Silber address this very issue, arguing that for young women "be [they] protagonist or reader - emulating the witch…would surely incur severe social criticism, a fate unequivocally represented by the stepmother's demise…the dutiful daughter assumes instead the passive, feminine identity of the first queen" (4-5). Cinderella embodies this phenomenon most vividly as she strives to emulate her mother, evidenced in the first paragraph when she weeps at her mother's grave, is reminded of her mother's goodness, and as a result, "remained pious and good" ("Cinderella" 81). The inherent dichotomy of the female characters in these fairy tales introduces a distinct competitiveness to the relationships between these women.

**Marriage as Motivation**

The transition from evil mothers to evil stepmothers allows the story to effectively separate the heroine from the villainess through the use of non-biological female competition and jealousy. In these texts, the fairy tale women are seemingly only able to form significant relationships or attachments with either their own children or men. The stories perpetuate the notion that only a woman's husband and children are willing to care for her. This ideology creates an obligation for the women in these stories to single-mindedly pursue marriage and children, and constructs the idea that other women are a natural, competitive enemy.

The lack of any positive attributes, including biological motherhood, serves as a way to further villainize the stepmother character, and leaves her with a complete lack of empathic qualities. In the three fairy tales examined here, the Grimm brothers highlight the negative relationships between heroines and stepmothers through hostility and jealousy on the part of the older women. This representation of stepmothers as envious of youthful beauty, combined with a sense of apathy or lack of love towards the heroine renders the stepmother figure as entirely unsympathetic. In "Little Snow White," the Queen develops her hatred for the young girl solely through envy of her youth and beauty. The Queen's jealousy of Snow White is mentioned several times in the first paragraphs alone. Upon learning of Snow White's blossoming beauty, "the Queen was shocked, and turned yellow and green with envy…whenever she looked at Snow White, her heart heaved in her breast, she hated the girl so much" ("Little Snow" 188); her jealousy only continues to grow 'higher and higher in her heart like a weed, so she had no peace day or night" ("Little Snow" 188). These descriptions paint a vivid portrait of a vain and bitter woman, willing to perform any action to eliminate her younger competition. According to Abate's description of Gilbert and Gubar's theory, in this patriarchal society "women's social value and personal power emanate from their beauty" (9) and therefore conceding the title of fairest of them all "constitutes not simply a threat to her ego but also a threat to her influence, agency, and even socioeconomic means of survival" (9). The idea of fading fertility and beauty being encompassed by youthful beauty echoes in the tale of "Cinderella." Cinderella's stepmother desires the success of her own daughters who, while they are "beautiful and fair of face" are also "vile and black of heart" ("Cinderella" 81). Cinderella's stepmother is also motivated by jealousy, but her jealousy stems from perceived losses in her daughters' lives rather than her own. In essence, both stories depict female evil as old and ugly, and contrasts this evil

with the pure, innocent heroine who possesses the traits of youth and beauty. This situation allows the only two female archetypes to be pitted against one another as natural enemies, and promotes distrust and competition amongst female characters. The stories' conflation of the traits "old" and "evil" promote the idea that the heroines will be either doomed to death, or become evil and competitive even in their happily ever after.

Dame Gothel proves again to be the exception to this rule. Her motivation stems from her desire to have a child of her own, and she demands of Rapunzel's father, "give me the child which your wife will bring into the world; it shall be well treated, and I will care for it like a mother" ("Rapunzel" 45). The enchantress, perhaps in a misguided effort to ensure Rapunzel's purity and goodness, locks her in the tower "separated…from the world" (46). It may be of note that Dame Gothel seeks to conceal Rapunzel away from society, an action that clearly endeavors to hide Rapunzel's beauty, although the motivation remains relatively convoluted. However, when Dame Gothel's desire to conceal Rapunzel's beauty is flouted by the Prince, her first instinct is to destroy her beauty. The enchantress "clutched Rapunzel's beautiful tresses, wrapped them twice round her left hand, seized a pair of scissors with the right, and snip!" ("Rapunzel" 46). In this sense, Rapunzel's adoptive mother too succumbs to the desire to destroy the younger woman's physical appearance.

In "Cinderella," the stepmother character derives her motivation to abuse Cinderella from a desire to promote her own daughters' success, which supports the notion of ambivalent parenting. Abate discusses this theory in terms of biology, and in regards to the Grimms' tales, as involving "emotional indifference" and hypothesizes that the disinterest of the stepmothers often turns to hatred or dislike "in part because they wished to preserve the patrimony for their own children, in part because they resented the idea of becoming enslaved to a previous wife's

children …more or less a fact of life in the era that gave shape to the tales recorded in Grimms'
collection" (13). In both "Little Snow White" and "Cinderella," the desire to promote one's own
genes plays a large part in the motivation of these women, and ultimately leads to the all-
consuming jealousy characteristic of the evil stepmother characters. The repetition of the
jealousy motivator, even in more current Grimm adaptions acknowledges the constant pressure
for women to exercise their sole power by maintaining their youth and extending their beauty as
long as possible. Cahill argues that jealousy as a repeated motivation highlights the discomfort
centered around the "maintenance of beauty through artificial means and the position of the older
women within such a beauty economy. The [tales] also often echo a conservative impulse to
erase and destroy the older, and often more powerful, women in favor of youth and beauty" (4).
The divisive binary between the female characters is solidified through the attempted
maintenance of these patriarchal standards of female power. The anxiety surrounding older
women and beauty extends to a concern about "women who attempt to take control of their own
image and representation, and such desire is presented as dangerous and ultimately self-
destructive" (Cahill 10). For instance, in "Little Snow White," the Queen showcases the desire to
take control by using magic in an effort to maintain her beauty and suppress the growing beauty
of Snow White.

The repetition of older women's jealousy of younger women explains the older women's
violence in fairy tales and promotes a culture of distrust and resentment between women in the
Grimm brothers' fairy tales. By setting up older and younger female characters as natural
enemies through ambivalent parenting and vindictive jealousy, the stories more easily represent
older women or stepmothers as evil. The stepmother figure is constructed as monstrous through
her seeming lack of desire to mother the beautiful, vulnerable heroine. Without this socially

engrained expectation that good women will want to nurture young women, the stepmothers are relegated to the role of villains and represented as monstrous beings who serve to alienate the heroines and prevent them from forming bonds with other women in the stories. As such, the young women in the stories are left without positive female role models, reinforcing a dependence on male figures and an absence of female bonding.

**The Dichotomy of Magic**

The three Grimm's stories make a clear distinction between two separate types of magic. The stories' assigning of a specific type of magic to each respective type of character serves to create an aura of natural goodness around the heroines, and further blacken the characters of the villains. The stories are incredibly selective about the type of magic used by the heroines. Each time these women use magic, their powers are inextricably linked with healing, nature, and yet again, passivity. The heroines typically do not seek out the magic: it simply finds them and helps them when they need it. In contrast, the female villains are associated with a far darker type of magic. Their methods include poison and knowledge of the so-called dark arts, leading to their fearsome renown. The fairy tales subtly link this dark magic to dread and notions of hell, as a way to inspire terror even in the absence of the actual use of magic, as is the case with Dame Gothel. The careful separation of magical abilities aligns each type of female character at opposite ends of the magical spectrum, with almost no connection between them at all.

As previously noted, the female villains in the stories often possess magical abilities or are conflated with witches, which is another aspect of the text that polarizes the young and old female characters. Each of the tales portrays some sort of magical abilities on the part of the women, but never the men. In two of the three stories, the sorcery possessed by the women is represented as evil and used for harm against other women. Dame Gothel from "Rapunzel" "had

great power and was dreaded ("Rapunzel" 44), while the Queen from "Little Snow White" made a poisonous comb to kill Snow White "with the help of witchcraft, which she understood" ("Little Snow" 191). Annette Schimmelpfennig observes that in "Little Snow White" the Grimm brothers never use the word "witch" to describe the Queen but argues that "she can clearly be identified as one because of her magic mirror and her dark intentions, i.e. to pamper her own vanity and so replace Snow White, her stepdaughter, as 'the fairest of all' …by poisoning her" (par. 8). The tales makes clear that magic and witchcraft are undoubtedly evil in nature, and goes further by linking witchcraft solely to female characters.

In many fairy tales, the Grimm brothers' included, the role of the stepmother is often conflated with the role of witch/sorceress. Often this figure is a warped version of the maternal figure and a faux mother figure: "[T]he role of the mother as the child's nurturer and guardian is perverted. Instead of nurturing the children the witch feeds on them and reveals a preference for cannibalism. This aspect further emphasises her inhuman character" (Schimmelpfennig par. 8). According to Barbara Almond, even outside of fairy tales "stepmothers have come to represent all the things we fear, most terribly, about motherhood going wrong… the idea of an unnatural mother is, literally, monstrous. So we make the stepmother the target for all these fears—she can carry the can for bad motherhood" (22). The transition from an evil, biological mother figure to a fully othered, witch-like, 'replacement' stepmother not only makes the tales more palatable, but also makes the heroines easier to empathize with and functions as a way to fully alienate the heroine from any positive female relationships.

The evil females in many fairy tales, including Dame Gothel and Snow White's stepmother, possess a magic that is portrayed as sinister and against the natural order of the world. The Queen in "Little Snow White" uses her sorcery to create poisonous objects in an

effort to kill Snow White, while Dame Gothel clearly inspires fear in the land with her magical abilities. In the case of the Queen, the taboo of killing a child is only elevated when combined with the unnaturalness of magic. The unnatural aspects of these powers are equated with evil and, as such, witchcraft. In contrast, Nancy Veglahn examines the aspects of monstrous women in heroic fantasy, and notes several issues which makes significant contributions in regards to the Grimms' fairy tales. The villainesses in the three tales are strongly governed by their emotions. In the case of the Queen in Snow White "her heart heaved in her breast, she hated the girl so much" and these women direct their anger towards younger, female characters, mostly in magical ways ("Little Snow White" 188). These intense feelings are echoed by Dame Gothel who, after cutting off Rapunzel's hair in a fit of rage, "gazed at [the prince] with wicked and venomous looks" and delights in vindictively announcing Rapunzel's absence ("Rapunzel" 46). In the span of a few sentences, Dame Gothel transitions from a docile caretaker to an aggressive and vindictive villain, revealing the instability of her emotions.

As much as the presence of turbulent and violent emotions constitutes the witchy stepmother figures in the stories, so does the seductive nature long suspected of evil female figures. Stemming from the biblical story of Eve succumbing to seduction and in turn seducing Adam, nineteenth-century female sexuality was often negatively equated with both knowledge and seduction. "Rapunzel" is particularly engaging as it presents a nuanced villain who is not quite as evil as the villains in the other stories. In the tale of Rapunzel, the heroine's adoptive mother is already well known as she had "great power and was dreaded by all the world" (Rapunzel 44). Rapunzel's stepmother, Dame Gothel, possesses an otherworldly magic and wields a power that separates her from the other characters in the tale, particularly Rapunzel's biological mother.

Dame Gothel's world-renowned reputation is quite different from the other female villains. Although "Rapunzel" does not specifically state the reason why the world fears her, her ability to strike terror into people's hearts is quite evident. Interestingly enough, Dame Gothel is the only female villain of the three stories whose true irredeemable evil is never explicitly shown. Each of the other women actively prove their evil nature, while, as noted earlier, Dame Gothel demonstrates only a fraction of their directed malevolence. The story asks the reader to take Dame Gothel's evil nature at face value, rather than showing her as truly evil. It is only Dame Gothel's worldliness and reputation that cast her as evil. In essence, she possesses an international reputation for wickedness, and it is her worldly knowledge that casts her in the role of villain, without condemning her to true punishment like the other characters.

While female sexuality remained a relatively taboo topic (particularly in the middle-class 1819 version) "Rapunzel," specifically, highlights this taboo. Rapunzel herself is quite clearly sexually active, as even in the 1819 story, the Prince "should come to her every evening" ("Rapunzel" 46), but the topic of sexuality is not directly addressed. In the 1812 version however, the Grimms were far more explicit. The Prince and Rapunzel "lived in fun and joy for some time" and continued to do so until Rapunzel asks the enchantress, "'but say to me Frau Goethel, [why] my clothes-lets are becoming so tight to me and will not fit any more'"; clearly Rapunzel is pregnant ("Rapunzel" ch.12). This event makes a distinction between how women are represented in the story. The binary is established through knowledge. Rapunzel escapes condemnation for her sexuality simply because she is ignorant of what it means. The enchantress, however, is established as evil through her knowledge of what Rapunzel's tighter clothing means. In one sentence, Rapunzel is established as pure despite her pregnancy, while

the Dame Gothel is constructed as "bad" due to her knowledge of sexuality and apparent lack of innocence.

Seduction and sexual knowledge go hand-in-hand with the treachery that is an integral aspect of the Grimms' fairy tale villainesses. Veglahn's article also observes the differences in men's and women's evil, since "women often seem to be motivated by personal pique rather than by larger schemes of universal darkness" (10). In "Rapunzel" while it is not so much trickery as it is blackmail, Dame Gothel forces Rapunzel's parents to give her their child for her own, and in "Little Snow White" the Queen uses poison in an attempt to slyly execute Snow White, presumably without punishment. Cinderella's stepmother is far more blatant in her attempts to attack Cinderella, and it is evident that Cinderella's father cares little about her well-being. When Cinderella's stepmother first marries into the family, she and her daughters immediately focus their abuse on the young heroine. Now begins a "bad time for the poor stepchild" during which the newcomers forced her to "do hard work from morning till night, get up before daybreak, carry water, light fires, cook and wash. Besides this, the sisters did her every imaginable injury" ("Cinderella" 81). Cinderella's stepmother even promises Cinderella the opportunity to attend the Prince's ball and then denies her, a clear method of establishing hope and then crushing it with no intention of following through on her promise ("Cinderella" 82). Evidently, the stepmother and her daughters do not fear punishment, and were very willing to impose this treachery upon their new family member.

This treacherous nature is often the only way for female villains in the fairy tales to exert some manner of control over their own lives. The contrast between good women and bad women in the Grimms' stories is highlighted through control, and the ways in which evil females' attempts to control their environment to produce the results they desire is construed as evil.

These stepmother figures are often those who seek power or control of their surroundings which, in Fisher and Silber's view, forces them to practice duplicity and treachery. Fisher and Silber argue that lies and treachery on the part of the witch/stepmother is in an effort "not to take over the seat of power but to move closer to the male figures, be they kings or simply fathers," (8). While "these fairy-tale women defraud and betray children's trust in their quest to appeal to men" (Fisher and Silber 8), this is not the case in all three of the fairy tales. "Cinderella," largely ignores the actions of the father figure, and the villain's treacherous motivation stems from a desire to promote her daughters over another woman's offspring. Even after Cinderella completes her impossible tasks, her stepmother says "you can not go with us, for you have no clothes and cannot dance; we should be ashamed of you" and she "hurried away with her two proud daughters" ("Cinderella 83). This lends credence to the notion of competition amongst women in the tales, even after death. The stepmother figures are constructed as evil due to their desire for their daughters compete with the biological mother's offspring. Fisher and Silber also note that "within the context of patriarchal power, female duplicity in the tales does not simply represent women's moral limitations…but rather results when women and mothers in particular are not allowed direct access to power under patriarchy" (10). These evil women seek out power for themselves in the form of superior beauty, the promotion of offspring, and the possession of younger women.

In contrast to the villainous women's magic, the heroine's magic powers emerge as an ability for a spiritual closeness with nature. Interestingly enough, in this case there are several important exceptions to the rule of unnatural magic. It appears as though magic, when paired with nature, is able to become a force for good. This positive, and apparently natural force becomes an aspect of the good mother rather than the evil stepmother or witch. Particular

instances in "Cinderella" show clear signs of magical qualities. When Cinderella is crying in despair over her mother's grave, she "wept so much that the tears fell down on it and watered it. And it grew, however, and became a handsome tree" ("Cinderella" 82). The spirit of her good, pious mother reaches from beyond the grave in order to provide Cinderella with magical influences. This magical growth and rebirth is echoed in "Rapunzel," when she heals the Prince's blindness. This event parallels Cinderella's experience, but instead of producing growth, Rapunzel's "tears wetted his eyes and they grew clear again, and he could see with them as before" ("Rapunzel" 46), and serve to magically heal disabilities.

Arguably, Cinderella has magical qualities of her own, in addition to her ability to fertilize trees with her tears, such as communicating with animals and potentially her mother's spirit, but these undeniably magical qualities do not classify her as a witch. In her desire to attend the festival, Cinderella calls on the birds to help and "two white pigeons came in by the kitchen window, and afterwards the turtledoves, and at last all the birds beneath the sky came whirring and crowding in" ("Cinderella" 82). While the presence of any magical ability in the other Grimms' tales appears to mark females as witches, Cinderella escapes this categorization and is portrayed as a "good" woman who takes after her mother: sweet, hardworking, and not witchlike in any sense. In Cinderella's case, her magic is rather passive, and she never directs it towards any person on her own. In addition, Cinderella's abilities stem from a connection with nature; her tears grow a tree and birds follow her command. Nevertheless, Cinderella's natural magic is violent and aggressive in its own sense, particularly with the final punishment of the sisters, in which the birds peck out the eyes of her stepsisters.

Again, the evil women are punished for their duplicity and evil natures, while the good women are able to wield similar tools without censure. Cristina Bacchilega confronts this

phenomenon in her work: "[T]here is no fear or surprise when the folktale hero encounters the otherworld, receives magical gifts, holds conversations with animals, experiences miraculous transformations. The numinous is artfully made to appear natural" (4). Clearly, when the story downplays magical aspects as a natural occurrence these aspects become positive rather than evil. This treatment conforms to the "women as nature" metaphor, which is reinforced by the ways in which "descriptions of these heroines' exceptional beauty call upon nature as a source of comparison" (Bacchilega 6), as in the case of Snow White, who had features as "white as snow, as red as blood, and as black as ebony wood ("Little Snow" 187). Cinderella specifically embodies the features that classify women as evil in both "Little Snow White" and "Rapunzel," but she is saved from this classification because not only is Cinderella youthful and beautiful, she follows in the steps of her pious biological mother.

While both types of fairy tale women practice magic, the stories illustrate the villainous women as evil, so therefore their magic must also be evil and worthy of punishment while the heroines are allowed to escape condemnation even though they also have magical abilities. Although Cinderella is not labelled as an evil female for her magic use, the stepmother characters in both "Little Snow White" and "Rapunzel" do not escape this classification. The qualities these women possess such as magic, lack of (or less) beauty, and lack of youth brand them as witches within the tales, even if the authors never use the word. Annette Schimmelpfennig states that while there is no agreed upon definition of witches "like every legendary figure, real or imagined, the witch is attributed a certain set of characteristics which distinguishes her from others and makes her identifiable" (par. 2). Schimmelpfennig notes definitions of witches that include being old, being seduced by the devil, and being predestined for witchcraft in conjunction with simply being female (par. 2). Schimmelpfennig also discusses the traditional

duality of magic and the link to nature, stating that "the witch's magic is equated with black magic that is used to harm others…this is opposed to the so-called white magic, which for example was believed to restore health with herbal medicine among others" (par. 2). The influence of the Church had a strong effect on the portrayal of witches, and what constituted witchcraft, including sexuality. The church labelled witches as inherently seductive beings, as they were thought to "fornicate with the devil and precipitate the demoralization of society" (Schimmelpfennig par. 3). Witches were also "believed to be the devil's helpers, have intercourse with him and are often shown as inhuman," so Schimmelpfennig argues that "this definition can as well be applied to the witch as horror film monster, but also to the witch in fairy tales" (par. 14). In both "Cinderella" and "Little Snow White," a seductive older woman takes over the heroine's family by marrying the patriarch of the family and attempting to remove the heroine. The fate of the stepmother and seductress in "Little Snow White" is particularly punitive, as "she was forced to put on the red-hot shoes, and dance until she dropped down dead" ("Little Snow" 194).

The Grimms' stories' conclusions reflect a desire to physically punish the wrongdoings and perceived evil of the witchy, villainous women. Indeed, the wicked Queen's death "appears as a stylised version of the known witch-burning." (Schimmelpfennig par. 8). Michelle Ann Abate discusses the idea of "Little Snow White" acting as a conduit for adult fantasies about filicide and argues that "the need for the evil Queen, who acts on those taboo desires, to be not simply rebuked but horrifically punished is all the more important. Her fate of being forced to dance to her death in shoes made of hot iron embodies a death so terrible that it forms a powerful preventive" (20). The duality in these actions should not be misconstrued. It speaks volumes about the nature of the so-called good Snow White that she allowed this terrible execution to

occur, particularly at her wedding. While the heroines are portrayed as pure, innocent, and good, it is interesting to note their general acceptance of violent and horrific punishment. The good women accept these violent punishments as a necessary censure for venturing from the path of the archetypal good woman. In fact, "Little Snow White" portrays a casualness about the punishment that is surprising in contrast with the apparent innocence of the heroines. Within two sentences, "pigeons pecked out one eye of each of them…and then the pigeons pecked out the other eye of each" ("Cinderella" 86), and the stepsisters are punished for their bullying with a permanent disability. This nonchalant attitude towards violent punishment is evident in "Cinderella" as well. For the "good" characters, it seems accepted practice for the evil characters to receive the punishment they apparently deserve.

**Conclusion**

There is plenty of scholarship about female heroines. The analysis of villainous fairy tale women has remained neglected for decades. Scholarship examining these evil female characters is necessary for a comprehensive analysis of the Grimms' fairy tales in order to understand the ways in which these characters force traditional nineteenth-century archetypes on a contemporary audience. This essay's analysis of the representation and construction of these evil women creates the potential to understand the roles and, more importantly, the motivation and meaning behind the representations of their behaviour.

This essay has analyzed the scope of the behaviour of female villains in three iconic fairy tales. By comparing the traits highlighted in both the evil villainesses and the good, innocent heroines, I have pointed out that the Grimm brothers hold the women to standards of extreme beauty and passivity they cannot obtain. In essence, the women in these stories, both good and bad, serve to glorify both the biological mother figure and the innocent young heroine and cast

the older stepmother figure as an evil, witchy woman who deserves no empathy. The stories act as cautionary tales, warning women to not take up masculine traits, which perpetuates the women's subjugation, all the while alienating young women from older women through the tropes of jealousy and competition for these men. The fairy tales make beauty and passivity women's sole positive traits. The consequences of aging are dire in this context. If these heroines serve no further purpose than physical beauty, then they too will be replaced, die, or become evil after their own marriage. In essence, the Grimm's tales set all female characters up for failure but continue to use the villainous women to set an example of the negative consequences of not fulfilling the role of a sweet, passive, and ultimately innocent "good" woman. Within these three well-known stories, there is no real evidence as to the validity of happily ever after. No woman in the stories reaps the so-called reward of a happy marriage, which demonstrates that is futile for young women to conform, if there is no such thing as a happy marriage to reward their passivity and beauty. Through this analysis, whether they are evil or good, the women in the Grimm's fairy tales will eventually become what they are meant to fear most, either old witches or dead mothers.

The potential impact of the negative portrayal of female relationships and the idealization of female passivity on young readers, and perhaps readers in general, would benefit from further literary criticism and sociological analysis. The Grimm brothers' stories are still popular, and that popularity invites further study on the effect of the stories on contemporary readers and on gender relations. Perhaps a critical analysis of the reasons behind the popularity of stories with unequal gender relations, in comparison to the less popular but more egalitarian Grimm stories, would assist in our understanding of contemporary society's interests. These stories have the potential to reinforce negative archetypes on the young women of today through the multitude of

re-imaginings and film adaptations in modern society. Disney adaptations of the stories are popular long after they are released and while they may create less passive heroines, they reproduce the villainous women faithfully, except perhaps to construct them as more beautiful as well as more evil, teaching a new generation that women that they will be punished for collaborating and are destined, if they survive, to become horrible villains.

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