PIECING TOGETHER THE GRIMM'S QUILT

by

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A THESIS

Presented to the Department of English
and the Honors College of the University of Oregon
for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts

June 1991

APPROVED: [redacted]

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An Abstract of the Thesis of

S. Toril J. Milbrath for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in the Department of English to be taken June 1991

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Approved: [redacted]
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Female passivity in Grimm's fairy tales has been compounded by the editing and fragmentation of the original text. Our twentieth century society, for the most part, has rejected many tales that depict women in positive, active roles. Although the traditional tales do portray women in stereotypical roles and plots, it is unfair to dismiss the Grimm's collection, when viewed in its entirety, as being entirely sexist. As a result of our society's editing, the original canon has been limited to about five standard tales from the collection of over 200 tales that the Grimm's originally published. The few tales that depict women with autonomy and intelligence have been edited out and are not the tales that show up on children's lists of well known tales. Sexism in fairy tales becomes a question of editing

and the values of the editors, rather then the intent of the original collectors.

I was about twelve when my grandmother decided that it was time for me to learn to sew. Our first project was a quilt. She told me that a good quilt was made out of scraps because then we were sewing together more than fabric--we were piecing together memories. Each square should generate unique memories--a particular day a shirt was worn, a party that a dress was made for--specific moments in time. The quilt would become a story in itself, made up of individual incidents and recollections. I followed my grandmother's advice, carefully selecting scraps to make a quilt that would tell of my own childhood. There is one piece, a square of purple velvet, that has reminded me of a particular story many times this year as I have been working on my thesis.

When I was younger, my friends and I would play a "let's pretend" game we called "Queen." One of us would be selected as the "Queen" and was given the royal robe--the best of our dress-up wardrobe--a purple velvet dress (I was usually disqualified for this role on account of my short hair). The Queen was the only designated role, leaving those of us not selected at a loss for a "good" part. Later, with the addition of another purple velvet dress, we incorporated Princess into our cast, expanding the "good" parts to two roles. The role of Princess actually had more status among us than the role of Queen. Getting dressed up was the most time consuming part of this game and the most

enjoyable. After that, the Queen and Princess sat on their thrones. We didn't go anywhere, we didn't do anything, we just sat. My sister was frequently selected as the Queen/Princess--she had long, thick hair that was a prerequisite for fulfilling our ideal of royal beauty. Even though she occupied a role that was the focus of our game, her memories are the same as mine. She says that she remembers, literally, being "all dressed up with no place to go." Recalling this game, my sister and I were surprised that an otherwise active and creative group of girls had developed such a bland game that didn't reflect our true personalities or allow any physical movement.

I realize now that we had perfectly mimicked the female roles that we had been presented with in Grimm's fairy tales. As children, we had been exposed to the picture book and Disney adaptations of the Grimm's fairy tales. We read and re-read stories about Snow White, Briar-rose, and Cinderella. Our subconscious acceptance of the fairy tale narrative dictated that our roles remain passive, like the princesses that we had read about, even with the lack of a male figure. As a result, our favorite part of the game was the dressing up, the only time that we were able to move. The role of Princess had more status for a similar reason. The Princess had the hope of a future: marriage and children. The Queen, who had already accomplished the two goals of women in fairy tales, was a role with no hope of

further development. We had learned the implicit socialization lessons in Grimm perfectly. As little girls we knew that exterior beauty, not activity, was important to being a Queen or Princess. We also recognized the limited positive roles for women in fairy tales; Princess and Queen were the only "good" parts.

My sister and I were not unique in our ability to pick out the socialization messages in Grimm's fairy tales. The attitudes present in Grimm's fairy tales have an effect on the tale's young reading/listening audience. Lenore Weitzman reached the following conclusion after studying the effects of literature upon childhood development: "Eight year old boys describe girls as clean, neat, quiet, gentle, and fearful while they describe adult women as unintelligent, ineffective, unadventurous and nasty."[1] Eight-year-old boys are not the only group that carry the underlying messages from the fairy tale world over to real life. The portrayal of these roles affect all children deeply and girls, in particular, associate with the women of these tales. Another study by Kate Pierce and Emily Edwards indicates that little girls also transfer images from the fairy tale world over to real life:

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1 Lenore J. Weitzman, Deborah Eifler, Elizabeth Hokada, and Catherine Ross, "Sex-Role Socialization in Picture Books for Pre-School Children," American Journal of Sociology 77 (1979): 1125.

> Utopias invented by the girls reinforced traditional sex characterizations as well, so that even in the most ideal worlds of fairylands there was little flexibility in what were considered appropriate roles for women and men.[2]

These children's perspectives of females are almost an exact description of the traditional female roles found in Grimm's fairy tales.

One of the most influential sources of values, expectations, and cultural norms is found in the books read to, and by, children. In recent years, critics have called attention to the messages imparted to children through their literature, and in particular, Grimm's fairy tales. "Once upon a time . . . " is the classic beginning to a touchstone of children's literature, the fairy tale. These familiar words transport the reader and/or listener to an idyllic world of fantasy--a world where animals talk, good overcomes evil, and nothing is permanent, not even death. It is also a world of family, tradition, and nature. Fairy tales do not function only as entertainment for children; these stories also teach children about the world.

Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm did not intend to write a children's book that was to become "next to the Bible,

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[2] Kate Pierce and Emily D. Edwards, "Children's Construction of Fantasy Stories: Gender Differences and Conflict Resolution Strategies," Sex Roles 18 (1988): 402.

indeed the most widely distributed book in the world."[3] The collection of fairy tales originated exactly as Hamida Bosmajion notes:

> The touchstones of children's literature are shaped by the needs of their creators to write, paint, or draw a work that does not necessarily have the child reader in mind from the outset but later becomes meaningful to children.[4]

The Grimm's definitely did not have the child reader in mind when they began collecting tales. They had the nationalistic philosophy of Johann Gottfried Herder in mind. The Grimm's wanted to collect folk tales from all over Germany and write them down, while preserving the style of the oral tradition. They had a "need" to prevent the loss of the oral folk tradition of Germany, and they feared that unless a written record was created of this tradition, it would be forgotten. The popularity of the works was amazing. The brothers published three editions, editing and revising the tales. By the time they had prepared the third edition, it was apparent that the popularity of the book was not from scholarly interest, as the brothers had intended,

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3 Walter Scherf, "Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm: A Few Small Corrections to a Commonly Held Image," The Brothers Grimm and Folktale, ed. James McGlathery (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1988) 178.

4 Hamida Bosmajion, "Writing for Children About the Unthinkable," Children's Literature Annual of the Modern Language 17 (1989): 203.

but as a work of literature that was suitable for children. For over one hundred years it has held an important corner in the children's literature canon.

Of course, not all the comments about the collection were positive. Critics objected to the graphic depiction of violence and presentation of class controversies. In Vienna, the book was rejected as a work of superstition. A colleague of the Grimm's, the Romantic poet Clemens Brentano, was highly critical of the tales. He did not care for the "un-improved" stories and labelled them as being dull and primitive.[5] The tales do remain controversial, but for reasons that reflect our different era. While the nineteenth century objected to the class struggles and violence that the tales depicted, the twentieth century is concerned with the depiction of "sexist and racist attitudes and [the] socialization process which [places] great emphasis on passivity, industry, and self-sacrifice for girls and on activity, competition, and accumulation of wealth for boys."[6]

It is not uncommon to find children's literature being dismissed because it is directed towards an immature reading audience. The immaturity of the audience, I think, is a very valid reason for looking closely at what is actually

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5 Ruth Michaelis-Jena, The Brothers Grimm (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970) 171.

6 Jack Zipes, Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion (New York: Wildman Press, 1983) 46.

being read to children. Children's literature, and fairy tales in particular, are subtly socializing generations of children with ideas of appropriate behavior for women and men. Bruno Bettelheim believes that fairy tales are an important part of childhood because they direct a "child to discover his identity and calling and they also suggest what experiences are needed to develop his character further."[7] Female characters in these fairy tales, for the most part, are passive foils to the male characters. This passivity is projected through women's characters and actions, or more appropriately, lack of action. Jennifer Waelti-Walters argues that "the reading of fairy tales is one of the first steps in the maintenance of a misogynous, sex-roled stereotyped patriarchy."[8] Women who assume the role of martyr and submit are idealized while independent women are viewed with suspicion and punished.

Mothers, daughters, and old women promote the extremes of female behavior: meekness and acceptance or power and rejection. Women, for the most part, accept a passive plot space and wait. A teacher's experiences recount how ingrained these tales are upon children's minds. Perry Nodelman, in "Teaching a Unit of Fairy Tales," provides an

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7 Bruno Bettelheim, The Uses of Enchantment: the Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales (New York: Random House, 1977) 24.

8 Jennifer Waelti-Walters, Fairy Tales and the Female Imagination (Canada: Eden Press, 1982) 1.

outline for teaching fairy tales in the classroom. She describes the manner that the class determines the tales to discuss: "I ask the class to name fairy tales they all know. After much tossing out of suggestions that some of them reject we always end up with the exact same list."[9] Of the eight tales the children come up with, five are Grimm's fairy tales: "Little Red Riding Hood," "Cinderella," "Snow White," "Sleeping Beauty," and "Hansel and Gretel." It is important to note the fairy tales commonly known because they serve as "models [that] provide essential information for children's acquisition of sex-typed behavior and beliefs."[10] These tales, although popular, do not present strong female role models to children.

Female passivity in Grimm's fairy tales has been compounded by the editing and fragmentation of the original text. Our twentieth-century society, for the most part, has rejected many tales that depict women in positive, active roles. Waelti-Walters notes that "in every really famous tale the heroine is systematically deprived of affection, stimulation, pleasurable instruction and even

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9 Perry Nodelman "Teaching a Unit of Fairy Tales," Children's Literature Association Quarterly 7 (1982): 10.

10 Jerri Jauden Kropp and Charles F. Halverson, "Pre-School Children's Preferences and Recall for Stereotyped versus Non-stereotyped Stories," Sex Roles 9 (1983): .

companionship."[11] "Really famous" is an important distinction for the tales. Although the "really famous" tales do portray women in traditional roles and plots, it is unfair to dismiss the Grimm's collection, when viewed in its entirety, as being entirely sexist. As a result of our society's editing, the original canon has been limited to about five standard tales from the collection of over 200 tales which the Grimm's originally published. The few tales that depict women with autonomy and intelligence have been edited out and are not the tales that show up on children's lists of well known tales. Sexism in fairy tales becomes an editing phenomenon and the values of the editors, rather then the intent of the original collectors.

The traditional tales that children are exposed to present women in the same manner, again and again. Women's names change but their actions do not. The analysis of women and their traditional roles and plots provides a background against which to contrast the tales that portray women as having more autonomy. The traditional roles of women--daughter, mother, step-mother, and witch--are enhanced when the actions of nature, a feminine force in fairy tales, is also considered. In addition to the characterization of women, it is also important to study how women function in the plot. Their actions, as well as how they react, are important factors in portraying female

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11 Waelti-Walters 1.

passivity. Finally, it is important to look at the versions of fairy tales that are present in our society today to illustrate the editing process that has restricted the presentation of positive women in fairy tales.

Part of the enduring charm of the Grimm's fairy tales is the simple manner in which the tales are told. The Grimm's wanted to recapture the oral folk tradition on paper without detracting from the tales' simplicity by adding embellishments to the story. As a result, the characters in the tales are not intended to stand out as individuals. They serve in the typical capacity of the character. Characters are referred to by occupation, familial association, or when they are given a name, it is a common one, such as "Hans," or it is descriptive, like "Little Red-Cap." Women are described in the manner that they operate within a family--the only social structure that they are part of in the tales. The roles of mother, daughter, and step-mother are all inter-related. The two other feminine roles found in the tales, the witch and nature, are outside of this social schema. There is an implicit stratification of women, based upon the ideal woman. The ideals are the passive beautiful daughter and the benevolent removed mother. These two types portray the fulfillment of the ideals of womanhood: beauty and reproduction. The step-mother is not a natural mother and therefore has not performed the function of giving birth. She is, however,

beautiful, which allows her to be higher in the social hierarchy than the witch. The witch is the least "feminine" of all, she is childless and ugly. Interestingly, it is often the witch who possesses the most power, being removed from the restraints of a feminine role. Marcia Lieberman accurately notes, "being powerful is mainly associated with being unwomanly."[12] Outside of the standard feminine hierarchy is nature. Nature is tied to the feminine through its role of being a protector and nurturer for many of the protagonists. Nature is associated with the highest and the lowest, both daughter and witch.

"Hansel and Gretel" provides good example of the range of roles a female character can have in Grimm's fairy tales. Gretel is the obedient, dependent sister. She needs the protection and common sense of Hansel to survive. The mother has no compassion for her children. Although in this story she is directly related to the children, she is a more accurate portrayal of the step-mother stereotype. She is domineering and bullies the father into abandoning his children. The witch in the forest represents the smothering, murderous woman who is frequently found in fairy tales. She wants to eat the children she entices to her home. Nature enters the children's life in the form of a bird. A white bird leads the children to the witch's house,

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[12] Marcia Lieberman, "Someday My Prince Will Come," College English 34 (1972): 392.

a half-way point between their real home and the heart of the forest. Here nature serves as a protector. The bird ensures Hansel and Gretel's immediate survival in the forest by leading them to the witch's cottage. The bird also leads them to a small fortune that removes the children's dependence on their parents upon their return home. When the children free themselves from the witch's power, they also are freeing themselves from the power of their mother. The two older women have striking similarities: the mother wants to get rid of the children so she will have enough to eat, the witch in the forest captures the children for food. When Hansel and Gretel return home, after killing the witch, their mother has also died. A white duck takes them home to their father after Gretel steps in as a mediator between Hansel and nature.

Nature is very closely aligned with Gretel in this tale. It is Gretel who grasps how to work with the forces of nature. When confronted with an obstacle, Hansel looks for a tool from civilization, "I see no foot-plank, and no bridge"[13] Gretel sees the duck and announces, "If I ask her, she will help us over."[14] It is clear that Gretel, not Hansel, has power over nature. Hansel attempts to limit his sister's independence and power by trying to take Gretel

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13 Margaret Hunt, trans., The Complete Grimm's Fairy Tales, by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm (New York: Pantheon Books 1944): 93.

14 Grimm 93.

with him on the duck. Nature forces Gretel to remain independent, however: "'No,' replied Gretel, 'that will be too heavy for the little duck; she shall take us across, one after the other'"[15] The "limitations" of nature protect Gretel's autonomy. Gretel, with her understanding of nature, is able to ensure that they return home safely. These characters, mother, step-mother, daughter, witch, and nature are used in different combinations in fairy tales.

Fairy tales clearly set up what every young girl should be. Daughters/sisters/princesses are obedient, kind, and beautiful. Snow White, Briar Rose, and Cinderella are portrayed as the feminine ideal. They undergo hardship without complaining and are rewarded at the conclusion of the tale by marrying a prince who delivers each girl from a form of exclusion from life. If girls are proud or independent, they must be humbled. Traditional fairy tales contain a warning for "unfeminine" little girls:

> There once was a little girl who was so obstinate and inquisitive, and when her parents told her to do anything, she did not obey them, so how could she fare well?[16]

Part of "faring well" is marrying well. The girl that shows reluctance to marry is disrupting the natural course

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15 Grimm 93.

16 Grimm 208.

of her life. In order to correct this behavior, the girl must be humiliated into accepting her role as wife. The daughter in "The Skillful Huntsman," balks at marrying a "one-eyed and hideous man"[17] who has lied about his accomplishments in order to marry into the royal family. She is making the morally right decision, the man is as wicked on the inside as he is ugly on the outside. Her father, the king, reacts by telling her that:

> if she would not marry him she should take off her royal garments and wear peasant's clothing, and go forth, and that she should go to a potter, and begin a trade in earthen vessels.[18]

The king further degrades his daughter by instructing peasants to break her pottery and forcing her to cook for all that show up at her home. She is forced, in her humbling, to provide the duties of a wife without the respect given to the position when they are performed in alliance with a man. "King Thrushbeard" uses a similar humbling technique for a woman who rejects the proposal of a man. She, too, is forced to go through the shame of selling wares, having her merchandise destroyed, and finally, attending the elaborate wedding of her would-be husband before she is accepted as a worthy bride. In "The Six

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17 Grimm 512.

18 Grimm 512.

Servants," a woman believes that she has married below her station. She rationalizes this punishment by blaming herself: "I have deserved this for my haughtiness and pride."[19] When the true royal nature of her husband is revealed, he justifies cruelly deceiving her by saying: "I suffered so much for you that you, too, had to suffer for me."[20] His "suffering" entailed having his friends perform tasks for him, but he never had to endure mental abuse through intentional humiliation.

Mothers in fairy tales are defined solely by their relationship with their children. A childless queen, in "The Donkey," makes a chilling statement that illustrates how closely her self-esteem is linked to her capacity to be a mother: "I am like a field on which nothing grows."[21] In an agriculturally oriented culture, a barren field is a symbol of loss, waste, and futility. Although both the king and queen want children, it is the woman who labels herself as barren.

The ideal mother in a fairy tale is a dead mother. The perfect mother is usually dead at the beginning of the tale or dies shortly after fulfilling her wish of having a child. She completes the role of a woman by delivering a child and is no longer necessary to the tale and must die. Once dead,

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19 Grimm 607.

20 Grimm 607.

21 Grimm 632.

she is able to remain a positive force in her child's life. She spiritually re-enters her child's life through nature or as a ghost.

The dreaded step-mother is the most consistent female role in all of Grimm's fairy tales. The most notorious is the step-mother of Snow White: "She was a beautiful woman, but proud and haughty, and she could not bear that anyone else should surpass her in beauty."[22] She is, without fail, cruel, unloving, and self-serving. As the outsider in the family circle, she resents the natural bond between her husband and his children. She tries to disrupt the harmony in the family by persecuting her step-children.[23]

Step-mothers are also the most modern of the characters. They illustrate their own knowledge of their tenuous female power in a male world. Their power is directly related to their ability to attract a powerful man. The only means to do this, in the tales, is through their beauty--something they realize is not permanent. They demonstrate the fears that women continue to have into the twentieth century--the loss of their power. Snow White's step-mother realizes that her beauty is what gives her power and is afraid of what will become of her when she is no longer beautiful. Once her beauty fades, so does her power

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22 Grimm 249.

23 Maria Tatar, The Hard Facts of Grimm's Fairy Tales (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987) 142.

in a man's world. She is envious of Snow White because Snow White's yet unachieved beauty will be a direct challenge to her own power because beauty is used to control men. As Snow White matures and becomes more beautiful, she may be able to influence her father more, coming between her step-mother and father.

The role of the witch is the lowest on this social hierarchy. Witches are ugly, childless, and powerful, which are all characteristics that arouse suspicion when found in a woman. A witch lives outside of society in forests or on high hills. She cannot escape the scrutiny of society, however:

> There was once upon a time a very old woman, who lived with her flock of geese in a remote clearing in the mountains, and there had a little house . . . people did not like to meet her if they could help it, and took by preference a round-about way, and when a father with his boys passed her, he whispered to them, "Beware of the old woman. She has claws beneath her gloves; she is a witch."[24]

Conventional society tries to avoid these women, yet continues to whisper and speculate about them. Men especially, are sensitive to the presence of a witch. A father does not warn his children, he warns his "boys." Men unite themselves against the power of witches. Another tale robs a woman of the role of mother on the basis of her

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[24] Grimm 725.

power:

> There was once an enchantress, who had three sons who loved each other as brothers, but the old woman did not trust them and thought they wanted to steal her power from her.[25]

The family relationship unites the brothers but fails to unite them with their mother. She is obviously a mother, but is depicted as being outside of that function, she is an "enchantress." She is more concerned with maintaining her power than being a mother.

It is through witches that nature is directly aligned with women, both in positive and negative roles. Witches are often representations of the natural world that surrounds them. A forest is freed of enchanting forces by destroying the witch that resides within it. The forest remains a dangerous place for all men who enter until two men discover the witch, seize her, "bound her, and laid her on the fire, and when she was burnt, the forest opened of its own accord, and was light and clear."[26] Ridding the forest of the witch rids the forest of its oppressive powers. "Mother Holle" is another tale that clearly depicts the connection between women and nature. An industrious girl inadvertently finds herself in a land of

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[25] Grimm 798.

[26] Grimm 310.

natural abundance: "she was in a lovely meadow where the sun was shining and many thousands of flowers were growing."[27] She finds bread baking and a tree "covered with apples" that "fell like rain."[28] She finally finds a woman--ugly, childless, and powerful--who entreats her to work for her: "Only you must take care to make my bed well, and shake it thoroughly till the feathers fly--for then there is snow on the earth."[29] Although this woman is a witch, she is a benevolent witch, as demonstrated by the abundance of agriculture. Mother Holle may be barren, but her land is not. Mother Holle is directly tied to natural forces and by working for her, the young girl also becomes part of the earth's natural forces.

Most of the time, though, nature is not directly personified in an actual character, but feminine characteristics are alluded to. In the preface to one of the editions of fairy tales, Wilhelm Grimm elaborates on the role of nature:

> As in myths that tell of a golden age, all of nature is alive; the sun, the moon, and the stars are approachable, give presents, and can even be woven into rich gowns . . . birds (doves are the most beloved and the most helpful), plants and stones all speak and know just how to express their sympathy; even blood can call out and say

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27 Grimm 133.

28 Grimm 134.

29 Grimm 134.

things.[30]

In this passage, Wilhelm portrays nature in the female role of helper. He describes nature as "sympathetic," "beloved," and "approachable." These are very similar to the characteristics given to the role of the princess/daughter. An important difference is that nature does not endure the humiliation and suffering a princess endures while helping others. When nature is recognized for its strength and feminintiy, it becomes important as a positive portrayal of feminine characteristics in the Grimm's fairy tales.

Nature is an important presence in all of the folk tales. Either through animal helpers or a refuge found in the forest, nature comes in contact with the protagonist. A bird is frequently a symbol in many of the tales for nature's intervention and assistance in human life. The clever daughter in "Fitcher's Bird" takes on the form of a bird to escape from the wizard's home. In "Cinderella," birds perched on a tree growing out of Cinderella's mother's grave provide her with dresses to go to the ball. This unifies the spirit of Cinderella's mother, in the form of the juniper tree that grows on her grave, with nature. Nature in "Cinderella" also serves as a moral force by revealing the dishonesty of Cinderella's sisters:

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[30] Wilhelm Grimm as quoted in Tatar 207.

Turn and peep, turn and peep,
There's blood within the shoe,
The shoe is too small for her,
The true bride waits for you.[31]

Final justice is served when the wicked sisters are punished by nature by having birds peck out their eyes: "And thus, for their wickedness and falsehood, they were punished with blindness for the all of their days."[32] A bird in "The Robber Bridegroom" warns the unwary bride of her husband's true nature: "Turn back, turn back, young maiden dear, 'Tis a murderer's house you enter here."[33] "The Robber Bridegroom" also has an interesting juxtaposition between nature and civilization. The bridegroom uses signs of civilization to lead his bride into the forest and into danger: "I will strew ashes in order that you may find your way through the forest."[34] The girl relies upon plants, a natural force to lead her out of the forest and into safety: "The wind had blown away the strewn ashes, but the peas and lentils had sprouted and grown up, and showed them the way in the moonlight."[35]

When women are aligned with nature, it gives them

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31 Grimm 126.

32 Grimm 128.

33 Grimm 201.

34 Grimm 210.

35 Grimm 202.

power. The beauty of nature combined with the beauty of a virtuous woman will make that woman irresistible. In "The Singing Soaring Lark," the sun gives a girl a casket to be opened when "[she is] in sorest need."[36] When the girl opens the casket, she finds "a dress as brilliant as the sun itself."[37] The dress provides a means for the girl to release her enchanted lover from a spell. In "Allereiraugh," a woman relies upon nature as a means of salvation. First she requests:

> three dresses, one as golden as the sun, one as silvery as the moon, and one as bright as the stars; besides this I wish for a mantle of a thousand different kinds of fur and peltry joined together, and one of every kind of animal in your kingdom must give a piece of his skin for it.[38]

In effect, the girl shields herself in nature. By doing this, she is able to escape her incestuous father and also win the admiration of a prince. The girl finds safety by wrapping herself up in the natural world. Maria Tatar provides further insight into this relationship between women and nature: "beauty, symbolized by the gowns, yokes the cosmic and the domestic in that it is the joint product

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36 Grimm 402.

37 Grimm 403.

38 Grimm 327.

of nature and human labors (spinning and weaving)."[39] Although many women wear garments that are tied to natural forces, men, in these tales, never willingly protect themselves in garments fashioned after, or by, nature. It is a uniquely feminine trait that combining natural and feminine beauty creates a power that can override the desires of men.

Nature also serves to take the protagonist outside of the traditionally male realm of the city and civilization. In this environment, solutions can be found. Jack Zipes believes that the forest "is the place where society's conventions no longer hold true. It is the source of natural right, thus the starting place where wrongs can be righted."[40] In the forest, moral righteousness prevails. The unjust are punished while the just find protection and salvation. In the fantasy world of fairy tales, no place is more fantastic than the forest. It is here that silent women are found sewing in treetops, tending enchanted deer, living with ugly old women. Roni Natov describes the forest as "the seat of fantasy, the uncivilized place where the imagination runs free, as in the world of dreams."[41] It is

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39 Tatar 118.

40 Jack Zipes, "The Enchanted Forest of the Brothers Grimm: New Modes of Approaching Grimm's Fairy Tales," Germanic Review (1987): 66.

41 Roni Natov, "The Dwarf Inside of Us," The Lion and the Unicorn 1 (1977): 74.

in the forest that the powers of the feminine are the strongest.

The strength of the feminine and the fantastic elements found in the forest explain the permissiveness in roles that can be found there. Men are able to take on "feminine" roles without affecting their masculinity. The dwarves in "Snow White" maintain a cottage. The youngest brother in "The Twelve Swans" is told that since he is

> the youngest and weakest, [he] shall stay at home and keep house, [the] others will go out and fetch food. Then they went into the forest and shot hares, wild deer, birds and pigeons, and whatever there was to eat this they took to Benjamin, who had to dress it for them in order that they might appease their hunger. They lived together ten years in the little hut and the time did not appear long to them.[42]

Not only is Benjamin allowed to act in a role that is not traditional, he and his brothers are comfortable with the arrangement. In "The Worn Out Dancing Shoes" women act independently and the behavior is stopped. It is important to note that both Benjamin and the dwarves have taken on these feminine roles in the forest; the women in "The Worn-Out Dancing Shoes" are still within the confines of society. In the forest, there is a wider range of acceptance because "it is the place where society's conventions no longer hold

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[42] Grimm 60.

true"[43]. The structured urban setting requires that each gender behaves in an "appropriate" manner.

The treatment of men, even outside of the forest, is very different than the treatment women receive when they are in corresponding roles. Qualities that are not acceptable in women are virtues in men. Marie Von Frantz asserts that: "curious inquisitiveness . . . is not so often punished in myths about heroes, though it often attracts destruction onto the heroine."[44] "The Devil's Sooty Brother" describes a man's struggle and surrender to temptation while watching some pots:

> he would have given anything to look inside them, if the Devil had not so particularly forbidden him; at last, he could no longer restrain himself, slightly raised the lid of the first kettle and peered in.[23]

This behavior is very similar to the girl in "Our Lady's Child." There a young girl is left alone in Heaven with the orders not to open the thirteenth door:

> Each day she opened one of them, until she had made the round of the twelve . . . Then the forbidden door alone remained, and she felt a great desire to know what could be hidden behind

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43 Zipes "Enchanted Forest" 66.

44 Marie Louise Von Frantz, The Problems of the Feminine in Fairy Tales (Switzerland: Spring Publications, 1972) 168.

23 Grimm 463.

> it . . . the desire in her heart was not stilled, but gnawed there and tormented her, and let her have no rest . . . She sought out the key, and when she had got in her hand, she put it in the lock, and when she had put it in, and turned it round as well.[24]

Natural curiosity overcomes both characters' orders not to peek. After each character has given in to their curiosity, each is treated differently. The man is not reprimanded for peeking; in fact, he is rewarded. He is able to punish the men in the pots--men who had mistreated him previously. He is then sent out into the world with no consequences of disobeying the devil and not admitting to having looked. In contrast, the girl is questioned about looking into the forbidden room but denies it. She is thrown out of heaven and loses her voice. The Virgin Mary repeatedly visits the girl to encourage her to confess her sin. When she doesn't, the Virgin further punishes her by taking away her children. The girl, apparently, would rather die than to admit to her double sin--first opening the door, and second, lying to the Virgin Mary. When she is about to be burned, she confesses. At this point, her voice is restored, her children are returned, and Mary delivers her a moral lesson: "He who repents his sin and acknowledges it is forgiven."[25] Men are never given a moralizing lesson. The comparison between

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[24] Grimm 24.

[25] Grimm 29.

these two tales indicates that men are encouraged to explore on their own and women are expected to take orders.

Unlike women who are allowed to venture out only to run errands or to complete a task, men are allowed to travel freely for the pleasure of seeing the world. The ability and encouragement to travel is shown in the tale of "The Two Brothers." A father's sons tell him:

> "We have now finished learning and we must prove ourselves in the world, so allow us to go away and travel." Then said the old man joyfully, "You talk like brave huntsmen, that which you desire has been my wish; go forth, all will go well with you."[26]

The boys' desire to travel is connected with their desire to "prove" themselves. The father is pleased and extends his blessing to his children. This situation is very different from the one encountered by the daughter who "set out secretly and went forth into the wide world to search for her brothers and set them free, let it cost what it might."[27] The daughter must sneak out, against her parents wishes. She leaves, not for her own fulfillment, but to "search for her brothers and set them free." Ultimately she maims herself by cutting off her little finger in order to free her brothers from enchantment. The daughter pays for

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[26] Grimm 292.

[27] Grimm 138.

venturing out into the world alone by self-mutilation. The boys are rewarded rather than physically punished for leaving home.

When all of these roles are brought together, they model behaviors that are dangerous examples for children. The roles are important because children, as they mature, prefer information that is consistent with their own gender.[28] Children see women isolated from others, rather than existing in a community. Men are frequently seen travelling together or helping each other out. These shared experiences build a sense of camaraderie among men. Weitzman points out that:

> One rarely sees only girls working or playing together. Although in reality women spend much of their time with other women, picture books imply that women cannot exist without men. The role of most of the girls is defined primarily in relation to that of the boys and men in their lives.[29]

Women within a family, instead of supporting each other, become each others harshest critics. Women criticize because they are in competition with each other. The ball in "Cinderella" is the ultimate arena for female competition. The ball is a beauty contest--the winner becomes the prince's prize. Cinderella's step-mother and

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[28] Kropp 261.

[29] Weitzman 1135.

step-sisters ridicule her for wanting to attend the ball: "'You go, Cinderella! Covered in dust and dirt as you are, and [you] would go to the festival? You have no clothes and shoes, and yet [you] would dance?'"[30] Ultimately, they refuse to bring her with them because she would embarass them: "'You cannot go with us, for you have no clothes and can not dance, we should be ashamed of you!'"[31] The sisters try to enhance their chances of "winning" by keeping Cinderella, a competitor, at home.

The relationships between opposite sexes is also skewed. Women are depicted as willing to sacrifice everything--their lives, their autonomy, their children, their pride--in order to please, free, or save the significant men in their lives. Men are never shown as willing to make equal sacrifices. A father will mutilate his own daughter rather than go with a devil,[32] he will send his daughter into the forest rather than risk being eaten by a lion[33].

Women are shown as being dishonest in order to get men to do what they desire. The daughter in "The Princess' Golden Ball" easily makes a promise that she has no intention of keeping in order to get the end she wants: the

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30 Grimm 122.

31 Grimm 123.

32 "The Girl With No Hands"

33 "The Singing, Soaring Lark"

retrieval of her ball. When it is time to follow through on her word, she balks. Her father must force her to behave honorably and keep her word. The miller's daughter in "Rumplestiltskin" promises her first born child to the dwarf if he will spin the straw into gold for her. The daughter creates a double deception. She allows the prince to believe that she has a rare talent for spinning straw into gold and also allows the dwarf to believe that she will give up her child in exchange for his services. When the dwarf returns to collect his payment, again the woman breaks her promise.

Only in their relations with nature are women equal, or even, superior to men. Women understand the natural world, and like Gretel, women can hear the voices of nature. In "Little Brother and Little Sister" it is the girl who can hear the messages in the enchanted streams and protect her brother. In "Fundevogel" and "Sweet Heart Roland," it is the girl who has the power to transform her lover and herself into natural forms--a rose bush, a duck, a pond--in order to protect themselves. Men cannot commune directly with nature. Men need an intermediary. They must come across an old woman who will show them the way out of the forest or animal helpers who will assist them.

The roles define the social realm of each of the sexes; the plot outlines the life experiences that each sex can expect. Simone de Beauvoir accurately re-counts the

traditional plots for each of the sexes in the following quote:

> In song and in story the young man is seen departing adventurously in search of a woman; she is locked in a tower, a palace, a garden, a cave, she is chained to a rock, a captive, sound asleep; she waits. [34]

Many of the plots of Grimm's fairy tales center on a transition of one of the characters. This transition can be the result of a journey, the bestowal of a gift, or a combination of both. In both cases, feminine and masculine roles receive very different treatment. Teresa de Lauretis' analysis of narrative plot spaces describes the plots of traditional fairy tales perfectly. Women are:

> inscribed in hero narratives, in someone else's story, not their own; so they are figures or markers of positions--places and topoi--through which the hero and his story move to their destination.[35]

These are passive plot spaces. Women facilitate the story of the prince, or their brothers, or their fathers, or a beast, but not their own story.

The tale "Little Briar-rose" depicts the classic male

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[34] H. M. Parshley, trans., The Second Sex, by Simone de Beauvior (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978) 291.

[35] Teresa de Lauretis, Alice Doesn't (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984) 109.

and female plot spaces in Grimm's fairy tales. The narrative depends upon a source of action to keep the plot moving. Fairy tales traditionally rely upon the motif of a journey. Male journeys are outward, conquering journeys while female journeys typically take them inside themselves for greater self-knowledge. Marianne Hirsch sums up this situation in the following passage:

> Excluded from active participation in culture, the fictional heroine is thrown back on herself. The intense inwardness that results allows her to aspire and develop spiritually, emotionally, and morally, but often at the expense of other aspects of selfhood.[36]

Rarely is a woman portrayed as taking a "masculine" journey where she conquers something or someone. The intersection of these two separate passages, the inward female and the outward male journeys, is depicted in the following passage from "Little Briar-rose":

> Then [the prince] went on still farther, and all was so quiet that a breath could be heard, and at last he came to a tower, and opened the door into the little room where Briar-rose was sleeping. There she lay, so beautiful that he could not turn his eyes away; and he stooped down and gave her a kiss. But as soon as he kissed her, Briar-rose opened her eyes and awoke, and looked at him quite

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36 Marianne Hirsch, "Spiritual Bildung: The Beautiful Soul as Paradigm," The Voyage In" Fictions of Female Development, eds. Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland (Hanover: University Press of New England for Dartmouth College, 1983) 23-24.

> sweetly.[37]

The prince crosses into Briar-rose's passive space and makes her a part of his active space, "then they went down together."[38] At this point, Briar-rose becomes a part of the prince's story.

A literal study of this tale shows that throughout the story, the spaces physically occupied by Briar-rose and the prince are very different. Briar-rose is in a small space, while the prince occupies unlimited space. By her own volition, Briar-rose has removed herself to a "little room" located in a tower and is retreating into her femininity. The tower itself is a symbol of femininity--it is a closed, protected, womb-like space:

> She went round into all sorts of places, looked into rooms and bed chambers just as she liked, and at last came to an old tower. She climbed up the narrow winding staircase and reached a little door.[39]

Briar-rose is located so she is neither part of the earth nor is she completely removed from it; she is in limbo during her one hundred years sleep. The tower removes Briar-rose from earthly concerns--day-to-day living--but

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37 Grimm 241.

38 Grimm 241.

39 Grimm 238.

allows her to be connected with the earth. This passivity is what my friends and I picked up upon. We removed ourselves to our thrones and watched the world go by, waiting for a prince that never came.

The motif of feminine isolation is found, with variations in several other tales. Many times the female is conscious but unable to speak for a period of time. In "The Pink," an enraged king "ordered a high tower to be built, in which neither sun nor moon could be seen, and had his wife put into it and walled up."[40] This removes her from active participation in life as effectively as the sleep of Briar-rose. In "The Twelve Brothers," the sister "sought a high tree and seated herself in it and spun, and neither spoke nor laughed."[41] The sister in "The Six Swans" also removes herself to a tree-top while she works for her brother's deliverance. These three women are removed to high places that sufficiently limit their action until the male journey present in the tale intersects with their space. All of these women have retreated to small, limiting spaces while men are free to travel great expanses. It is interesting that this different use of space has also been noted in children's play behavior. Boys play running games while girls play games that are more confined like jump-rope. Raphaela Best elaborates on the psychological

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40 Grimm 356.

41 Grimm 62.

implications of space for children:

> This persistent theme--more space for boys, less space for girls . . . corroborate[s] the girls' view of themselves as inferior and the boys' view of themselves as superior and important.[42]

In fact, the men do appear superior to the women because they have the ability to release the women from their confinement.

Briar-rose's movements, prior to her sleep state, were still confined within the castle. This contrasts directly with the space occupied by the prince. Marie Von Frantz believes that the sleep/passivity

> motif forms a contrast to the more active quest of the male hero, who has gone into the Beyond and tries to slay the monster, or to find the treasure, or the bride . . . he has to make more of a journey and accomplish some deed instead of just staying out of life.[43]

He physically crosses spaces compared to the confined Briar-rose. The prince is actively seeking/participating while Briar-rose is waiting.

The prince occupies only the very last part of the story, but his character is much more active. In two

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[42] Raphaela Best, We've All Got Scars (Bloomington: Indiana Press, 1983) 60-61.

[43] VonFrantz 94.

paragraphs, the prince is responsible for more action than any other character in the tale. The reader is informed the moment the prince is introduced that the prince has traveled a distance. He comes from outside of the kingdom: "a King's son came to that country."[44] He comes to the castle, passes through the hedge of thorns, he closely examines the castle grounds, noticing the stables, kitchen, and the great hall. He climbs the tower and opens the door. The prince's viewpoint is also the only one that the reader is able to share. The reader becomes connected with the prince when the descriptions of the rooms start with "he saw." The reader sees the castle through the prince's eyes. The prince is the only character with whom the reader is allowed this association.

The prince is active, controls the reader and, as a result, is more important than Briar-rose. This shift in focus is shown in the final lines: "And then the marriage of the King's son with Briar-rose was celebrated."[45] The tale implies that without the prince, Briar-rose would be unable to make a re-entry into active life. In fact, her re-entry into the world is only important in relation to the prince--she marries him. It is the male role to retrieve women from their inward journeys and, essentially, "ground" them again. In the stories where the heroine, like Briar-

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[44] Grimm 240.

[45] Grimm 241.

rose, has removed herself to a half-way point between the earth and heaven, the male physically retrieves her and brings her back to the earth: "The huntsmen . . . climbed the tree and fetched the maiden down and led her before the King,"[46] "So he climbed up the tree himself, carried her down, placed her on his horse, and bore her home."[47] The return to reality for women is always immediately followed by a wedding. Marriage indicates the successful retrieval by a male.

It is ironic that while Briar-rose is set up as an ideal of womanhood--she has beauty, virtue, riches, is modest, good-natured, wise, and well-loved--very little is known about the prince. The reader knows that he is from another country, he is a prince, and he is not afraid of the thorny hedge. Even his lack of fear fails to set him apart. The narrative states that several young men have attempted to pass through the hedge prior to the prince. The prince does nothing to make his attempt more successful. The flowers "parted from each other *of their own accord* (my own emphasis), and let him pass unhurt."[48] The prince was in the right place at the right time. What is important about the prince is his ability to move freely within the narrative. His male journey balances with the virtue of

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[46] Grimm 235.

[47] Grimm 64.

[48] Grimm 240.

Briar-rose, making them a suitable pair. The prince dominates even though his character is less developed.

His domination allows him to be credited for an incident that is independent of his own action. Marianne Hirsch states a common mis-interpretation that it is the prince who awakens the sleeping princess:

> In the traditional tale, female sleep is interrupted by the arrival of the prince who awakens the heroine to adulthood--that is--marriage--a re-entry into external involvement and social activity.[49]

This interpretation increases the dependence of the heroine on the prince, even more than in the original tale. It is the passage of the one hundred years, not the arrival of the prince, that causes Briar-rose's re-entry into the world: "But by this time the hundred years had just passed, and the day had come when Briar-rose was to awake again."[50] This information becomes irrelevant in the presence of the prince, however. The actual passage of the one hundred years becomes secondary to the prince's kiss. The prince's course of life, is independent of the one hundred year sleep of Briar-rose. Because the one hundred years is not relevent to the dominant prince, it becomes irrelevant to the story.

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[49] Hirsch 24.

[50] Grimm 240.

Briar-rose is the ideal because she occupies very little space and journeys inward. When women in other fairy tales journey outward, they are punished or stopped. This positioning is corrected by the conclusion of the tale. In "Little Red-Cap," the girl is warned to "set out before it gets hot, and when you are going, walk nicely and quietly and do not run off the path."[51] Despite these warnings, Little Red-Cap does not stay on the path. Unlike her male fairy-tale counterparts, straying does not lead her to greater fortune. Once she arrives at her destination, she is punished for her curiosity by being eaten by the wolf. Red-Cap's active plot space has now been transformed to a passive space as the result of being eaten. She must wait to be released from the wolf's belly by the huntsman. The huntsman, as a male, is responsible for pulling the female back into the physical world. Once again, the entrance of the male character indicates the completion of his own story, extraneous to the one that is being told in the narrative. "Do I find you here, you old sinner! I have long sought you!"[52] is the huntsman's reaction to finding the wolf. He does not express concern immediately for the grandmother's or Red-Cap's well-being. By the conclusion of the tale, Little Red-Cap has learned the appropriate behavior for a young girl: "As long as I live, I will never

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51 Grimm 139.

52 Grimm 142.

by myself leave the path, to run into the wood, when my mother has forbidden me to do so."[53]

The story "The Worn-Out Dancing Shoes" also depicts women as occupying an active plot space and ultimately corrects this "unnatural" positioning. Despite a father's attempts to contain his daughters: "They all slept together in one chamber, in which their beds stood side by side, and every night when they were in them the King locked the door, and bolted it,"[54] the daughters are able to escape. The worn-out shoes are a tangible sign that the daughters have a degree of autonomy their father cannot control. This knowledge disturbs the king and leads to his declaration that the first person to solve the mystery shall be heir to his throne. The king is ready to give up power in the political realm in order to ensure that order is maintained in his social realm--his family. By taking over the throne, the successful male will join the father as an authority figure. The father assists the masculine maturation process by offering one of his daughters for marriage. The maturity of the male is demonstrated by his successful acquisition of authority in the political, as well as domestic, domain.

Although these women outwit their father, they do not completely escape his control. The world that they are going to is an extension of their room. The only access to

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53 Grimm 143.

54 Grimm 596.

this enchanted world is through their confining bedroom. They cannot enter the outer world during their nightly journeys. This enchantment is only an extension of the boundaries imposed upon them by their father. The discovery of this secret world is also the end of the daughters' limited independence. The retrieval motif is also present in this tale. Once again, a male is responsible for bringing women back from an enchanted state.

In "Briar-rose" and "Snow White," the prince corrects the women's errors of seeking autonomy. The actions of the women follow a definite cause-and-effect pattern. Briar-rose falls asleep after exploring on her own and pricking her finger. Snow White "dies" after speaking to a peddler, against the orders of the dwarves. As males, the princes correct the error of female ways. Bruno Bettelheim illustrates that the standard conclusion of these tales marginalize women by not depicting their emotions:

> In each of these stories, as in so many others, the rescuer demonstrates his love for his future bride in some form. We are left in the dark about the feelings of the heroines, however."[55]

It is assumed that it is the female desire to get married and become part of the prince's story because, as de Lauretis argues,

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55 Bettelheim 277.

> the end of a girl's journey, if successful, will bring her to the place where the boy will find her . . . For the boy has been promised . . . that he will find women waiting at the end of *his* journey . . . This is what predetermines the positions she must occupy in her journey.[56]

The progression of the narrative is dependent upon the actions of the characters. Actions done to the characters also contribute to the movement of the plot. A major turning point in traditional tales is the acquiring of power in some form. Power is frequently obtained through the bestowal of a blessing or the acquisition of an object. Not only do gifts represent power, they also reflect the distinct set of values for each sex.

Gifts encourage passivity in women and action in men. Beauty, wealth, and the promise of future happiness are gifts frequently bestowed upon girls. Gifts of beauty and wealth are not within the control of a woman. They happen to her. Women are given qualities that make them powerful as a commodity desired by men. Masculine gifts require some sort of initiative from the male, a command, a wish, or a movement. Men are given gifts that will make them powerful through their ability to be self-sufficient. Men receive objects that will aid them in their pursuit of fortune and adventure: a gun that will never miss, a cloak that will make the wearer invisible, boots that will travel great

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[56] de Lauretis 133.

distances.

The sex of the recipient differentiates not only the type of object received, but also the manner in which the object is accepted. Lewis Hyde explains the signifacance of the gift relationship:

> The cardinal difference between gift and commodity exchange [is] that a gift establishes a feeling bond between two people, while the sale [or theft] of a commodity leaves no necessary connection.[57]

Women establish relationships with others, men are free to exchange on a strictly business level.

Women are more frequently depicted as receiving power through gift exchange. Good will, rather than commodities, is exchanged. Snow White links exchange with emotion:

> "If you will take care of our house, cook, make the beds, wash, sew, and knit, and if you will keep everything neat and clean, you can stay with us and you shall want for nothing." "Yes," said Snow White," *with all my heart.*"[58]
> (my emphasis)

Snow White will keep the house clean, and in return, the dwarves will offer protection. Women are essentially making a gift of themselves, since they do not possess any other

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57 Lewis Hyde, The Gift (New York: Random House, 1979) 56.

58 Grimm 257.

commodities.

Men can participate in an exchange that is not dependent upon the giving of themselves. They possess objects that they can exchange, so they are able to retain control over their physical bodies. Masculine commodity exchange is often motivated by greed, not good will. If men desire an object that they cannot receive through exchange, they will resort to stealing. By stealing, men gain power without the establishment of ties with the original possessor of the item.

"The Golden Bird," is an example of this masculine behavior. A young man sets out to acquire a golden apple that he can only obtain through a series of exchanges: the apple for a bird, the bird for a horse, the horse for a princess. The tale becomes a story of acquisition as the youth decides to keep all the objects, in effect, steal them, rather than participate in exchange. As he steals back items that he originally exchanged on terms of good will, the youth systemmatically breaks off each relationship. He can never return to the kingdoms that he has robbed. However, this does not bother the boy; he has what he wanted: material wealth. Similar hoarding, and lack of connection, is depicted in "The Knapsack, the Hat, and the Horn." A man willingly trades "up" an enchanted table cloth that provides the owner with food, for objects that grant the possessor military strength. Rather than

exchange on terms of good-will, the young man, in each instance, uses his new found military strength to retrieve his cloth. He does not feel any obligation of trust with the men he shares a meal with and later robs.

Women do possess power directly when it is used for beneficial purposes but it is temporary. This power is earned in exchange for suffering and labor. "Seven Ravens" and "Twelve Swans" reflect this feminine relationship with power. The daughter toils to free her brothers and in both stories comes almost to the point of death in doing so. In these stories, it is the young girls' femininity that instigates their labor. The brothers are transformed into birds as a result of the birth of a sister. Waelti-Walters point out that the appraisal of the feminine presented in Christianity and fairy tales become nearly identical:

> Indeed, the attitude toward women in Christianity and in fairy tales is remarkably similar. This choice in each case lies between a Mary Magdalene, sanctified virginity or vilified sex, princess/dead mother or step-mother/witch.[59]

In these stories, the young girls become more than Mary Magdalene representations of the weaknesses of the female sex; they become Eve, also, committing the Original Sin. The creation of a girl damns the future of the males. The sister then takes on the role of the Virgin Mary who will

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[59] Waelti-Walters 80.

redeem her brothers through her own labor.

I think that a quilt is an accurate metaphor for the Grimm's fairy tales. The Grimm's carefully selected, pieced together, and wrote down oral tales that had been part of a collective German childhood. These individual tales create a larger story, just as each square becomes part of the pattern within the quilt. So far, I have examined at the overall pattern of the quilt through the traditional presentation of characters and plot. These elements of the tales, with the exception of nature, develop the dominant pattern of a sexist bias against women. The characterization of nature subtley disrupts the overall pattern by asserting itself as a powerful feminine character. I believe that there are other bright spots of female ingenuity and autonomy that break away from the traditional characterizations of females. Margaret Atwood also believes that there are "bright spots: in the collection of Grimm's fairy tales:

> The unexpurgated Grimm's Fairy Tales contain a number of fairy tales which women are not only the central characters, but win using their intelligence.[60]

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60 Elizabeth Baer, "Pilgrimmage Inward: Quest And Fairy Tale Motifs in Surfacing" Margaret Atwood: Vision and Forms, ed. Kathyryn Van Spankeren and Jan Garden Castro (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988) 24.

These tales are not as subtle as the characterization of nature as a powerful female presence and, as a result, have been edited out of the standard canon of fairy tales.

"Fitcher's Feathered Bird" is a transitional tale. It can be interpreted as a tale of a woman using ingenuity to save herself and her sisters or as a tale depicting the limitations of being female. A young girl outwits a wizard on her own and restores her two sisters to life. The girl, however, can be successful only when she separates herself from her femininity. Femininity is objectified into the form of an egg. The two sisters who carry around their eggs, and therefore retain their femininity, remain traditional characterizations of feminine weakness. They give into "unnatural" female characteristics of curiosity and disobedience. As a result, their eggs are bloodied--their femininity has been stained through their actions and they are killed by the wizard. The youngest daughter leaves her egg/femininity behind while she explores the house. In this asexual state, she is free to satisfy her curiosity about the home that she is in without the consequences that her sisters faced. In fact, she is able to reverse the actions of the wizard, the dominant male, by reviving her sisters and sending them home. The conclusion of the tale reverts back to the traditional characterization of daughters in fairy tales. When the wizard returns he is oblivious to her "unfeminine" actions because she is able to

produce her egg, unsoiled, proving herself to be a suitable bride. At the wedding party, the daughter disguises herself as a bird and leaves the wizard's house. She cannot leave on her own volition because she must portray the weakness of the female sex. It is interesting that while the daugher was alone, she had power, but in a group she becomes powerless.

There are tales that are able to break with the dominant pattern of the Grimm's quilt. These stories contradict the traditional tales by allowing women to be intelligent, having valuing women as people, and breaking expectations of "feminine" behavior. "The Peasant's Clever Daughter" illustrates all of these principles, but especially a woman being valued on the basis of her intelligence. A father neglects to follow the good advice of his daughter and, as a result is put in jail by the King. The peasant berates himself for not listening to his wise daughter. The King hears of this and tells the man: "'If you have a daughter who is as wise as that, let her come here.'"[61] The King wants to meet the girl because she is smart, not because she is able to spin straw into gold or is the most beautiful woman in the land. The King tests her intelligence by posing a difficult riddle. She solves the riddle; the King releases her father and marries the daughter. Even when faced with hardship, the daughter

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61 Grimm 438.

remains more intelligent than the men around her. The daughter is evicted from the castle when she points out the poor logic of one of her husband's decisions. She is allowed only to take with her "the one thing that was dearest and best in her eyes."[62] Rather than sit and weep, she takes control of her fate. She gives the King a sleeping draught and takes him with her into the country. When he awakes, without his attendants or castle, his wife tells him:

> You told me that I might bring away with me from the palace that which was dearest and most precious in my eyes--I have nothing more precious and dear than yourself, so I have brought you with me.[63]

She demonstrates her love for her husband and also her wisdom in a way that does not force her to have a passive role.

"The Twelve Huntsmen" depicts women breaking stereotypical conceptions of behavior. Twelve women pass for huntsmen at a king's castle. A series of tests are devised to determine the true gender of the huntsmen when the king is informed that they are really women. First, peas are poured on the floor that the huntsmen must cross because "men have a firm step, and when they walk over peas

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62 Grimm 440.

63 Grimm 440.

none of them stir, but girls trip and skip and drag their feet, and the peas roll about."[64] The women prove their ability to walk firmly: "they stepped so firmly on them, and had such a strong, sure walk, that not one of the peas either rolled or stirred."[65] Next, the king has spinning wheels put into the ante-chamber, believing that the women "will go to them and be pleased with them, and that is what no man would do."[66] Again the women do not behave as expected: "they went through the ante-chamber, and never once looked at the spinning wheels."[67]

These heroines point out that women have value outside of physical beauty. Unfortunately, the publication of these tales has been limited by folklore collectors and editors. Folklorists, directly or indirectly, may have discouraged their sources from recounting stories with strong heroines on the basis that they are untraditional. Editors have neglected to include these tales in modern collections that appeal to the general public.[68] As a result, these women that show that fairy tale heroines <u>can</u> be intelligent, strong and feminine are not exposed to children.

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64 Grimm 335.

65 Grimm 335.

66 Grimm 335.

67 Grimm 336.

68 Ruth MacDonald, "The Tale Retold," <u>Children's Literature Association Quarterly</u> 7 (1982): 19.

Wilhelm Grimm edited the tales himself when it became apparent that the collection was becoming popular as a children's book. He softened the folktales to tailor them to a younger audience. Cannibalistic mothers became step-mothers to lessen the horror of their food cravings. Ruth Bottingheimer argues that Wilhelm Grimm began instilling distinct values into the characters:

> Diligent work, gender specific roles, a generally punitive stance towards girls and women, and a coherent world view conducing to stability in the social fabric take shape over [Wilhelm Grimm's] years of editing and expanding the collection.[69]

Over one hundred years have passed since the 1857 edition was published and the editing still continues. The focus is no longer the recording of German history, but printing the stories for entertainment. The values that adults believe children should have are reflected in the editing of the tales. John Scott argues that it was inevitable that the tales undergo changes to make them appropriate for children:

> Not having originally been created specifically for children, they often contained violence and sexual incidents considered inappropriate for young readers, and, since the early nineteenth century, they have frequently been adapted to fit adult ideals of what constituted suitable reading

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[69] Ruth Bottingheimer, Grimms' Bad Girls and Bold Boys (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987) 19.

for youngsters.[70]

The Grimm's were concerned with accurately recreating the diction of oral folk tales; current writers/illustrators are concerned primarily with what will sell to a young audience. Most fairy tale collections intended for children take only a narrow segment of the original Grimm's collection. Unfortunately, these are the tales where women are passive. The "popular" tales of "Snow White," "Cinderella," and "Briar-rose" are published in mutiple editions while non-traditional tales are slipping into obscurity. The multiple editions of tales that only portray passive women becomes a socializaing force for children. Betsy Hearne explains:

> The effect of six editions is wider-reaching than the effect of two or three, cumulatively strenghtening the place of the story in the canon of children's literature and, as a metaphor, in children's minds.[71]

Hearne also provides insight into the results of the editing process on the context of the tales:

> I would summarize the general adaptation in popularized picture book editions of Grimm tales

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70 John Scott, Children's Literature From A to Z (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1984) 113.

71 Betsy Hearne, "Booking the Brothers Grimm," The Brothers Grimm and Folktale, ed. James McGlathery (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illisnois Press, 1988) 223.

> as one of toning down effects, of softening the bone hard elements of plot, character, theme, symbolic imagery, and style--of eliminating the tales' sharp edges.[72]

Not only are only the passive tales reprinted, the plots are tightened to remove extraneous information to the central narrative. As a result, nature frequently loses some of its power.

It is interesting to speculate on what would have occurred if the tales had not been written down and remained part of the oral tradition. It is possible that the Grimm's fear would have come true--the tales would have been lost and forgotten. The alternative to this is that they would have remained popular but would have had greater opportunity to change and reflect the society in which they were being told. August Nitschke wrote: "oral tales could serve to stabilize, conserve or challenge the common beliefs, laws, values and norms of a group."[73] Fairy tales, if they had remained strictly part of the oral tradition, might have slowly been modernized by society.

It is possible for a tale to become modernized when it is passed along orally because there is a bond between the person telling the story and the listening audience. Jack Zipes believes that the relationship between the teller and

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[72] Hearne 227.

[73] August Nitschke as quoted in Zipes "The Changing Function of the Fairy Tale" 12.

listener has been destroyed by the distancing created by written tales:

> Whereas the original folk tale was cultivated by both narrator and audience to clarify and interpret phenomena in a way that would strengthen meaningful social bonds, the total meaning conferred by the narrative perspective of a mass mediated fairy tale on reality has assumed totalitarian proportions, because the narrative voice is no longer responsible to the vested interests of the state and private industry.[74]

Oral storytelling is dynamic, events are easily altered to please both the teller and the listener. Stories that are written down become static. Each reader receives, regardless of the time or place, word for word, the same story. This relationship, that has been lost with the demise of oral story telling, resulted in tales that coincided with the values and needs of a culture. The story no longer changes to suit the needs of its audience.

A story that is accompanied with picture illustrations further limits reader/listener involvement. The individual is no longer encouraged to construct images from the words. Illustrations are provided that guide the reader/listener's interpretation of the tale. Picture book editions of fairy tales heighten the sexism because the passive roles of women are complemented by illustrations that reinforce female

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[74] Jack Zipes, "Fairy Tales and Mass Media," The Myths of Information: Technology and Postindustrial Culture, ed. Kathleen Woodward (Madison: Coda Press, 1980) 101.

inactivity in the stories. The way different artists depict characteristics of girls and boys is remarkably similar. The inherent messages in the illustrations are that girls are more emotional, smaller, and less active. Boys are bold leaders that are active in everything they do. Hansel and Gretel are both abandoned but Gretel is always comforted by Hansel. At the witch's cottage, Gretel is depicted as weeping while obediently carrying out the witch's orders.[75] As a girl, her tears and fears are acceptable. Not only is Gretel able to express fear, she is also able to express relief. Gretel is pictured as having an emotional reunion with her father. She firmly hugs him around the neck while he swings her off the floor. Hansel stands off to the side, inspecting the treasure that they both brought home.[76] This illustration foreshadows the future of these children: Hansel will become part of the masculine world of exchange where he must be unemotional. Gretel, as a daughter, wife, and mother, will continue to function within a realm where emotions are acceptable--the family.

Women are supposed to occupy a smaller amount of physical space because they are daintier and frailer than men. Women control the space they occupy by controlling what they eat. There is a contrast in how other characters

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75 Paul Galdone, illus., Hansel and Gretel, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1982).

76 Elizabeth Crawford, illus., Hansel and Gretel, (New York: William and Morrow Co., 1979).

and daughters relate to food. A version of "Hansel and Gretel" depicts the family eating a meal. Hansel is interested in the meal, he looks into the serving pots and has a full plate of food before him. Gretel sits at the table with her hands in her lap, uninterested in the food before her.[77] In a 1982 edition of "Little Brother and Little Sister,"[78] the entire family is depicted at the dinner table. The brother, the ugly mother and sister are eating; all are eating except the little sister. She sits passively, arms tight at her sides, occupying a small space while others are extending their arms, passing food and chewing. The accompanying message of these illustrations is that women do not take pleasure or have an interest in eating.

Women are rarely depicted as taking the initiative in the drawings. Hansel is shown extending his hand to Gretel while he sits on the back of the duck.[79] This same edition depicts Hansel as resisting and pulling against the witch as she leads him to a cage. Gretel is not pictured in her heroic action, but fleeing from the oven. Running away from the oven implies a sense of horror at what she has done. One of the few graphic depictions of Gretel pushing the

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77 Lisbeth Zwerger, illus., Hansel and Gretel, (New York: William Morrow and Co. 1979).

78 Barbara Cooney, illus., Little Brother Little Sister, (New York: Doubleday Company, 1982).

79 Galdone.

witch into an oven is found in one of the earliest editions of the folktales from 1819. In the drawing, Hansel is caged in the background and Gretel is in the foreground, shoving the witch into the oven.[80] Illustrations in "The Seven Ravens" also reduce the violence. None of the illustrations record the girl's gory mutilation.[81] There is never any visual acknowlegement of her physical sacrifice for her brothers. Overall, more recent editions have shied away from depicting violence, and by doing so, have usurped the temporary power of women.

Illustrations also convey stereotypical images about how men and women behave when they are together. The boys in The Seven Ravens are a fun-loving, rowdy group of guys. The boys are in perpetual motion, whether they are rough-housing in front of their parents or clamoring for a jug.[82] Groups of women contrast this activity by being more sedentary. In an edition of "The Worn Out Dancing Slippers"[83] the illustrations reinforce the suspicion of women in groups that is fostered by the text of the tale.

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80 Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, Kinder-Und Hausmarchen (Munchen: Winkler Verlag, 1819) 123.

81 Brian Alderson, trans., Micaheal Forman, illus., The Brothers Grimms Popular Folk Tales (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1978).

82 Felix Hoffman, illus., The Seven Ravens, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1962).

83 Errol le Cain, illus., Twelve Dancing Princesses (New York: Viking Press, 1978).

The daughters are shown lying around, yawning, sleeping, and looking bored in general when they are together. They look at the male figures, father and soldier, with expressions of contempt and disdain. When the soldier reveals what he has discovered, a princess is depicted as standing motionless behind a tapestry, spying on the proceedings. Rather than conveying action, these illustrations suggest women are haughty, proud, and rude. This reinforcement of the negative female elements in Grimm's fairy tales has disturbing implications for children. Research has indicated that little girls are more strongly influenced by picture books than little boys.[84] Kay Stone recalls that:

> Many males, questioned informally, could not even remember if they had ever read fairy tales. With females . . . all could remember clearly having read and reacted to fairy tales, and several in different age groups accurately recalled specific stories--even when they had disliked and rejected them.[85]

The publishing industry has been influential in regards to which tales are printed and the nature of the

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[84] Eleanor Ashton, "Measures of Play Behavior: the Influence of Sex-role Stereotyped Children's Books," Sex-roles 9 (1983): 46.

[85] Kay Stone, "The Misuses of Enchantment," Women's Folklore, Women's Culture, eds. Rosan Kalcik and Susan Jordan (Pennsylavania: University of Pennsylavania Press, 1971) 130.

accompanying illustrations. However, they have not had much influence on the content of the tales. The tales printed, although limited in number, remain true to the original Grimm's version. The film industry has taken the liberty of recreating the tales. Obviously to stretch a nine page story into a feature film length cartoon, parts of the story must be enlarged and embellished. Rather than expand the tale to grant the women character's more autonomy, Disney Studios took a gigantic step backwards and made the movie character of Snow White even more sexist than the original.

This expansion of sexism in "Snow White" carries frightening implications if this well known revision reflects Italo Calvino's belief that a tale, "tends to absorb something of the place where it is narrated--a landscape, a custom, a moral outlook, or else merely, a very faint accent or flavor or the locality."[86] The movie "Snow White" implies that we are living in a society that continues to elevate and value men over women. Lucy Rollin comments that "In Disney's hands, the values of the American public and the power of the folk fairy tale become one, making a formidable combination indeed."[87] It is unfortunate that Walt Disney chose to reinforce the values

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86 Italo Calvino as quoted in Tatar 46.

87 Lucy Rollin, "Fear of Faerie: Disney and the Elitist Critics," Children's Literature Association Quarterly 12 (1987): 93.

of the public that are detrimental to women.

Disney kept the characters found in "Little Snow-white," but completely changed the focus of the tale. The Grimm's version of the tale is a story of survival with some shocking acts of violence. The majority of the tale focuses upon Snow White's escape from her step-mother. It is at the conclusion of the tale that Snow White becomes part of the prince's story. Having obtained Snow White, the prince will continue with his quest through life, with Snow White quietly at his side. Disney wraps this conclusion around his movie, creating a masculine frame of the entire Snow White drama. Disney manages to contort the Grimm's version of escape and jealousy into a suspenseful story of romantic hide-and-go-seek. It is the relationship between Snow White and the prince that builds tension, not the relationship betwen Snow White and her step-mother. Snow White's escape from her step-mother becomes part of her hiding from the "seeking" prince. The change in focus effects the presentation of the characters and plot.

The Grimm's version begins with foreshadowing of Snow White's creation. Snow White is the focus of the tale. Her mother expresses her wish for a child: "'Would that I had a child as white as snow, as red as blood, and as black as the wood of the window-frame.'"[88] Snow White's future beauty is promised in this passage, as well as the good mother's

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[88] Grimm 249.

imminent death. The reader does not know much about Grimm's Snow White except that she is good and beautiful. This is all the information that the tale requires, however. From this point, we know that Snow White's beauty will be a focus of the tale--it is the cause of her step mother's envy and also what attracts the prince to her.

Disney finds it necessary to alter Grimm's character of Snow White in order to reconcile the plot with a love story. Snow White, a child herself, gains a maternal drive in the Disney version. The dwarfs are unable to keep their home clean: "'These poor children! No parents--no one to clean and cook for them, no one to bake them cookies and pies.'"[89] The child Snow White also expresses a very strong adult desire to find her prince. The prince, not survival, becomes the driving force for Snow White.

The force of nature has also changed in the film version. Grimm's Snow White, once in the forest "began to run, and ran over sharp stones and through thorns, and the wild beasts ran past her, but did her no harm."[90] The forest, although frightening, is not menacing. The Disney version depicts nature as trying to thwart Snow White's flight into the forest: "Each tree seemed to clutch at her as she ran and she fancied she saw grotesque faces and

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89 Walt Disney Productions Walt Disney's Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (New York: Viking Press, 1979) 52.

90 Grimm 251.

glowing eyes in the gloom."[91] Nature no longer serves as a bridge between the extremes of the female character, instead nature is a duplication of the roles of Snow White and her step-mother, the witch. The forest that seems to "clutch" at Snow White mimics the desires of the step-mother who wants to inflict pain upon Snow White. The cuddly, cute, tame animals that live in the forest mirror the sweet nature of Snow White. By limiting the natural forces to extensions of the human characters, Disney has eliminated nature as an individual. Nature has lost the control that is present in the Grimm's tales and is no longer a positive female role.

One of the additions that Disney made was giving distinctive personalities to the dwarves rather than having them serve as protectors, as in Grimm's version. Richard Schickel notes that Disney:

> emphasize[d] the role of the dwarfs, who were not even named in the Grimm's tale, and [played] down the Queen's part. There is infinitely more footage devoted to the funny little men than there is to the stepmother, whose attempts on Snow White's life are reduced, in the movie, from three to one.[92]

By developing the dwarfs more fully, Disney was able to shift the focus away from the violence that was clearly

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91 Walt Disney Productions 26.

92 Richard Schickel The Disney Version (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968) 216.

unacceptable for a feature length cartoon targeted at children.

Disney may have felt that the violence present in the Grimm's version was not appropriate for children. However, he created the character of Grumpy who conveys a message that is also inappropriate for children. The character of Grumpy is blatantly misogynistic. His derogatory comments about Snow White are intended to be funny. He is constantly warning his male counterparts to be wary of Snow-white on the basis of her sex. He is suspicious of the female touch: "'She's a female, and all females is poison!'"[93] He also questions female integrity: "'her wiles are beginnin' to work--I'm warnin' you--give women an inch and they'll walk all over you.'"[94] Finally, he asserts his own masculinity by rejecting anything that is associated with femininity: "'next thing you know she'll be tyin' up your beards in pink ribbons.'"[95] For Grumpy, having his beard, a distinctive masculine symbol, tied up in a pink ribbon would be the ultimate humiliation. It would be a visible sign of female dominance over a man. Through all of this abuse, Snow White remains passive. Her only reaction is to pray. She asks to "'please let Grumpy like me.'"[96] Snow White wants to charm

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93 Walt Disney Productions 106.

94 Walt Disney Productions 128.

95 Walt Disney Productions 130.

96 Walt Disney Productions 158.

all males. She cannot accept rejection from Grumpy and wants to win him over, even though he has not demonstrated any qualities that would make him a good friend.

The only character that remains true to the original Grimm characterization is the prince. His role is merely expanded so that his story eclipses the story of Snow White. It is possible to expand the role of the prince and be consistent with the Grimm's characterization because both portray the prince as being active. In the Disney movie, the prince is introduced at the beginning. His unexplained presence is rationalized because Snow White, "like every young girl was wishing for her true love."[97] From this point on, the focus of the tale is Snow White's reunion with the prince. Although he is not a visual presence on the screen, he remains a dominant through Snow White's constant references to finding her prince.

The expansion of the prince's role has a direct influence on the plot. The characters in "Snow White" mimic de Lauretis' narrative patterns even more closely than the original fairy tales. The prince seeks, Snow White waits. Disney's version of Snow White, from the very beginning, is a story about how the prince's journey will progress. At the beginning of the movie, the prince comments after first seeing Snow White, "'Now that I've found you . . . I must

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97 Walt Disney Productions 14.

know your name. I've searched everywhere for you.'"[98] This is the first indication of the hide-and-seek between the prince and Snow White. The game concludes with their permanent reunion. Snow White verbally confirms her knowledge of her role of being a passive participator. Upon waking from love's first kiss, which is the antidote for the apple, Snow-white murmurs, "'My prince! You've found me at last!'" while the prince validates his own active role, "'I've been searching so long!'"[99] Snow White, in the cartoon, knows her fate. She is wishing for her true love. Women in Grimm's fairy tales also knew their destiny, but it was never so clearly stated.

Snow White's actions are important in relation to how they will affect the prince's destiny of finding her. Her entire being is focused upon realizing her dream: finding a prince. After she has cleaned the house for the dwarfs, she is told to entertain them. She tells a love story, a verbalization of her own desires, and concludes with, "'I just know that I'll meet him again, and we'll be married and live happily ever after.'"[100] Her prayers again highlight the importance that the prince has taken in her life, "'Bless the seven little men that have been so kind to me,

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98 Walt Disney Productions 16.

99 Walt Disney Productions 204.

100 Walt Disney Productions 152.

and . . . may my dreams come true.'"[101] Snow White bites the poisoned apple not from hunger, but because her disguised step-mother presents it to her as a "wishing apple."[102] Snow White's wishes will bring the prince closer to the fulfillment of his destiny--finding her. As she bites the "wishing apple": "She could already see her handsome prince riding toward her."[103]

The most powerful visual images that have been added to the Grimm's quilt are those created by Walt Disney. The Disney version of Snow White is the most dramatic and obvious editing of the Grimm's fairy tales. Disney has streamlined the tale so there is no extraneous information or action that might interfere with the fulfillment of the prince's story. Nature is removed as a character, the tension between Snow White and her step-mother is minimalized, all eyes await the reunion of the prince and Snow White. The squares added by Disney stand out because they concentrate on projecting only the elements present in the dominant pattern of sexism in the Grimm's quilt. The Disney version of "Snow White" has become, like the original Grimm's tale, a childhood classic. Disney Studio's successful marketing of animated feature length fairy tales are proof that classical fairy tales based upon conservative

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101 Walt Disney Productions 158.

102 Walt Disney Productions 180.

103 Walt Disney Productions 180.

social behavior and sexist notions continue to make money.[104]

I don't remember how my friends and I ended our game of "Queen." I don't think we had an ending. We never reached a point where we "lived happily ever after." We couldn't. We were little girls stranded in our thrones waiting for a prince to find us so we could take part in a story. We didn't know that there were alternatives in Grimm. We hadn't been exposed to the tales that break the stereotypical image of women found in fairy tales. We were operating strictly from the modified versions of fairy tales provided to us by Walt Disney and picture books. We only knew the tales that were proponents of passivity for women and activity for men. The integrity of the original collection has been lost in the editing process. The original collection of fairy tales put together by Grimm does provide a few non-traditional alternatives for women. Society may have found these alternatives distracting and re-worked the collection until it became a unified whole.

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104 Jack Zipes, "The Changing Function of Fairy Tales," The Lion and the Unicorn 12 (1988): 13.

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