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**Socialisation and Subversion:**  
The Development of the Victorian Children's Literary Fairy Tale

by

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**ABSTRACT**

In this dissertation, a socio-historical approach is taken towards the development of the English literary fairy tale as a genre during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, particularly in the realm of Children's Literature. For the purposes of examination, the fairy tale of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century is divided into two sections, fairy tales of the early Victorian period and those of the middle and late Victorian period. It is argued that the fairy tales present in England during the first time period were mostly imported translations from other European countries while the fairy tales of the second time period were the original products of British writers. The tales examined under the first division are those by German brothers, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, (as well as later retellings of their tales) and translations of the tales written by Dutch writer, Hans Christian Andersen. The tales examined under the second division are those written by John Ruskin, Charles Dickens, George MacDonald, Mary de Morgan, Juliana Ewing, Evelyn Sharp and Edith Nesbit. Through the analysis of selected fairy tales, the thesis sets out to show how the development of the English literary fairy tale, during its transition from the one defined period (early Victorian) to the next (middle and late Victorian), reflects the developments that took place within Victorian society at that time. Of particular interest is the changing perception of appropriate gender roles, especially that of the ideal Victorian female. Other contextual and societal elements that are dealt with include developments in the world of science and technology, the changing approach towards the family and the domestic sphere, and Victorian attitudes towards children and children's literature. Critical approaches include feminist readings, sociological approaches (Jack Zipes) and various accounts of Victorian Society.

The Victorian era had a profound effect on society. Its influence was not restricted to English society either - due to the widespread power of the British Empire, the Victorian influence was disseminated throughout the world. The effects are still evident today, both in the conscious rejection of certain 'Victorian' beliefs and in the unconscious acceptance of certain Victorian societal conventions. The period during which Queen Victoria ruled saw many new developments in the fields of science and technology, in religion, in social structures and, not least, in the world of literature. It was during this time that the English literary fairy tale was born and, throughout Queen Victoria's reign, the genre underwent important developments, the effects of which are still with us today. In *The Impact of Victorian Children's Fiction*, J.S. Bratton asserts that Victorian literature for children, in particular, was the beginning of "the development of a living tradition of writing for the young, the place where the most basic manoeuvres of that tradition were first worked out" (Bratton, 1981: 208). I believe that this is also applicable to the English literary fairy tale, especially the children's literary fairy tale, which came into its own during the nineteenth century.

The influence of Victorian literary fairy tale is not only literary. Although its effect on modern fairy tale texts is undeniable, the Victorian literary fairy tale had a substantial effect upon its audiences in the societies that read it. Like most fairy tales, both oral and literary, the Victorian fairy tale was a powerful socialising tool and, as such, had significant effects on its audience. It played an important role in propagating the modes of behaviour and the ideals that were considered important and desirable by the powerful elements of Victorian society. As such a tool of society, the Victorian literary fairy tale often reflects rather interesting elements of Victorian 'culture' and reveals many of the beliefs and anxieties of the period. As the genre became more established in England, its increasingly recognised form was subverted to counteract and comment upon certain elements of society that it had previously propagated. A study of some of the Victorian literary fairy tales, both those upholding Victorian society's beliefs and those subverting them, reveals a number of issues that are generally considered inherent to Victorian society. Fairy tales are inseparable from the society that tells them,<sup>1</sup> and distinctive developments within Victorian literary fairy tales correspond with those of an evolving

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<sup>1</sup> Along with many other fairy tale scholars, Bottigheimer, Tatar and Zipes also hold this view.

Victorian society.

Historians divide the Victorian era into three distinct periods: Early Victorian, Middle Victorian and Late Victorian. An examination of Victorian fairy tale reveals that the literary fairy tale can be divided into two fairly distinct time periods, the one corresponding with the historically defined 'Early Victorian' period, during which, according to Zipes, the majority of the literary fairy tales in England were imported from other parts of Europe, and the other with the 'Middle' and 'Late' Victorian periods, when English writers began to produce modern fairy tales of their own (Zipes, 1987: xvi & xvii). A study of the two fairy tale 'phases' reveals reflections of the changes that Victorian society underwent during the three defined periods, especially with regard to some Victorian attitudes toward children, the role of women in society, imagination and re-creation (Zipes, 2000.xxvi). It is impossible to assert that the attitudes dealt with here are universally representative of Victorian society, merely that they were held by a number of Victorians, as the prevalence of vigorous debate covering a wide variety of topics indicates that public opinion during this period was often divided. Similarly, literary criticism regarding Victorian writing also reveals varying outlooks on the era.

This is especially true of feminist criticism. Victorian feminists, themselves, disagreed over appropriate feminine behaviour and the role of women in society and it comes as no surprise that later feminist literary critics have often differed substantially in their interpretation of Victorian texts. For this study, it is appropriate to apply two different feminist approaches to the texts. During the earlier Victorian period, it appears that women were greatly disempowered within society, and that the world of literature was still dominated by men. Fairy tales produced during this period, for the most part, were written within a strongly patriarchal society and it is appropriate to apply the fairly hard-hitting, uncompromising analysis of feminist critics from the 1970s and 1980s, like Gilbert and Gubar. Middle and later Victorian women began to agitate for suffrage and an improvement in the lives of women. They took on more influential public and political roles and started to make more of a recognized contribution to Victorian literature. The fairy tale texts included within the second period, were produced during a time when women began to wield more power within society, and although the analysis of Gilbert and Gubar remains useful, it is appropriate to apply it in conjunction with the more

moderate approach of a critic like Marina Warner, who explores the way in which women utilise fairy tale to their advantage within society.

A study of elements of the Victorian literary fairy tale, as the foundation of current English, Western fairy tales, is of increasing interest in the present Western societies when one considers the importance that fantasy, the broad term under which fairy tale can often be found, is once again being accorded today. In an age overshadowed by the constant threat of global terrorism, where even the comfort afforded by old fashioned values and beliefs has been undermined by a postmodern suspicion and rejection of a definite 'truth' and 'reality', fantasy appears to have regained an important place in both the literary world and other forms of media. Fantasy, for both adults and children, has been cited as a welcome and necessary escape from the daily trauma of today's society. This new appreciation of fantasy has not gone unnoticed and curiosity over its new lease of life is not restricted to small pockets of popular culture researchers - widely disseminated periodicals, such as *Time Magazine*, are placing the phenomenon under scrutiny in articles such as Grossman's 'Feeding on Fantasy' (published in *Time Magazine* December 2002). Grossman finds that, while the last part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was dominated by science fiction, the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century has turned to fantasy as its much-needed form of escapism (Grossman, 2002: 54). Popular culture is believed to be the best indicator of the prevailing concerns of society, and while science fiction held sway in an era when technology was heralded as the way forward to a better existence, fantasy has taken hold in a time of disillusionment and pessimism regarding the future (Grossman, 2002: 54). As a professor of film and television studies points out, the "promise of science and technology has been normalized. The utopian vision we had didn't come to pass" (Grossman, 2002: 56). Thus, while the "Internet bubble [is] bursting, the market for consumer electronics nosediving ... and the long summer romance with technology is fizzling", adults and children alike voraciously devour the latest Harry Potter offerings and rediscover the joys of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, in both its book and film forms (Grossman, 2002: 56). This return to the fantastic has not passed without criticism, however, and while many welcome the use of fantasy as a retreat, some object violently to the possible effects that books like *Harry Potter* might have on younger readers.

This is not the first time that fantasy and the realm of magic have been turned to as an

escape from an uncomfortable reality by an anxiety-ridden society, nor is it the first time that it has had to face down religious and intellectual critics. In a similar experience to that of today's global citizens, inhabitants of Victorian Britain faced devastating changes to many areas of their previously well-established and comfortable existence. Even while the earlier part of the nineteenth century had been alive with hope regarding the future of British industrial society, many regarded their way of life as having been irrevocably altered (Keep, 2002: 136). As the honeymoon with industrialism began to come to an end, anxiety about the effects of the industrial revolution upon society began to surface as people like Carlyle began to voice their concerns (Supple, in Lerner, 1978: 50-51; Black, 1973: 158). Advances in communication, technology and travel all added to the changes felt so keenly by the Victorians (Keep, 2002: 136). Similarly, discoveries in the world of science were life- and societal- altering developments that not only forced people to reconsider their place in the world, but also shook the religious beliefs of many Victorians to the core (Black, 1973: viii). In the face of such rapid and disconcerting change, people sought comfort in the magical world of fantasy. Ballets, fairy paintings and fantasy writing all made a strong comeback in the later Victorian times. The fairy tale or *märchen* (wonder tale) was a genre appropriated by Victorian writers and often used in widely varying ways to escape, understand, challenge or question the way of life within Victorian society. At the same time, the fairy tale was also used as a tool to socialise both Victorian children and the childlike of Britain into a 'new' Victorian society.

While, towards the end of the Victorian era, the literary fairy tale seems to have been a well-established part of the culture of an educated English population, the magic that had taken up residence in Victorian England filled a void that had long been present in English literary culture. This void was by no means a natural one. Rather, it was the result of the careful and consistent attempts by certain social groups to eradicate all resident magic from the island (Avery, 2000: 71). The Celts had left a rich legacy of oral folklore and fantasy behind them and, in medieval times, fantasy was alive and well in England. *Beowulf*, an Anglo-Saxon poem written sometime during the 8<sup>th</sup> Century, is believed by Gillian Avery (a contributor to *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales*) to have been England's first piece of fantasy writing and, in later years, the legends of King Arthur, which were rich in magic and chivalry, abounded (Avery, 2000: 70 & 71). While often used to disseminate Christian values and frequently told with a didactic purpose, fantasy

in itself was regarded as an acceptable part of society. (Zipes, 2000: xxi). As Puritanism started to take hold, however, and all forms of imagination succumbed to the formation of a strictly moral society, fantasy withered and retreated to oral culture, its place of origin (Avery, 2000: 70). Until the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century, fantasy in England had few heroes to defend it, and while the literary fairy tale flourished in Europe, it withered in English society (Zipes, 1987: xiv). So complete was the dismissal of the fairy tale, and other forms of fantasy, that one of the few admirers of fairy tale, Richard Corbet, Bishop of Oxford, mourned the banishment of fairies from England in his poem 'Farewell, Rewards and Fairies', claiming that "now, alas, they all are dead: | Or gone beyond the seas" (Avery, 2000: 70).

Safely "beyond the seas", fairies were beginning to enjoy the status that came with belonging to the educated literary culture of the Italian and French Royal courts. While the popularity of fantasy began to wane in England during the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, in Italy it was being appropriated by the literary upper class. The origins of the literary fairy tale, as it is recognised today, can be found in the work of Francesco Straparola, who wrote *The Pleasant Nights* (1550) and Giambattista Basile, author of *II Pentamerone* (1634) (Zipes, 2000: xxi). The work of these two Italian authors stood apart from most fantasy writing of the time because it was written in the vernacular of the country and, very importantly, the authors did not intend to portray any specifically Christian meaning through their work (Zipes, 2000: xxi). It was through works like the ones these writers produced that the secular fairy tale was born.

The next most significant step in the development of fairy tale occurred in France. In the 1690s, educated women of the French nobility held literary salons, where the fairy tale began to emerge as a popular literary form. It was the female writers of wonder tales that first gave the fairy tale its name, referring to their tales as *contes de fées* (Zipes 2000: xxii). Although the French literary fairy tale was undoubtedly a genre to which female writers contributed a great deal, the figure that looms largest in its history of the French fairy tale is Charles Perrault, who published his *Histoires du Contes du Temps Passe Avec des Moralities* in 1695. Perrault's influence on fairy tale was a lasting one - most 'classic' fairy tales read by children today are directly descended from the tales that he wrote for the French court in the late 1600s and early 1700s. During the period in which Perrault

wrote his tales, the literary fairy tale began to assert itself as a definite and acceptable genre, separate from that of other fantasy literature, and the specific fairy tale motifs that are so easily recognisable today started to become established (Zipes, 2000: xxii). It was then that *Sleeping Beauty*, *Little Red Riding Hood* and *Snow White* first found their way into the literary form in which we read them today.

Although such tales are presently aimed mostly at children, their 'ancestors' were intended mostly for an adult audience. Authors of the literary fairy tale were highly educated and often incorporated elements from other forms of literature. As a result, the tales produced were often highly sophisticated. The secular, sometimes risqué, content, too, was oriented towards the more adult reader. It was only in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> Century that fairy tales written specifically for children found their way into print, and this audience was limited to those who were fortunate enough to belong to the aristocracy and were thus literate. In 1743, Mme Leprince de Beaumont published what was possibly the first book of fairy tales for children. It contained tales that are still read by children today - an example being 'Beauty and the Beast' (Zipes 2000: xxiii). Childhood began to be considered as a "component of selfhood" with individual tastes and needs for the first time around about the 1780s (Berry, 1999: 15). For the first time, children were not regarded as merely "miniature adults" but acknowledged as fundamentally different (Berry, 1999: 15). This 'new' section of the population was suddenly recognised as an open market. By the end of the eighteenth century, publishing fairy tales for children became profitable, and it was then that a consistent offering of the child's literary fairy tale became available (Zipes, 2000: xiii). With the realisation that fairy tale appealed a great deal to children, came a concern about the effect that it would have on the minds and characters of young readers, and there was no small amount of debate over the merits and dangers of the genre. As a result, up until the 1820s, the fairy tale directed at children was scrupulously regulated, and certain tales were kept out of the reach of the children of respectable homes - most notably those tales contained within the disdained chapbooks - cheap pamphlets containing sensational reading matter produced for those members of the lower classes who were fortunate enough to be literate (Zipes, 2000: xiii).

The usefulness of fairy tale as a socialising tool also became more widely recognised during this time, especially with regard to children. Often appearing, and regarded by

some, as being merely a frivolous form of entertainment, the fairy tale “always [has] designs on [its] audiences and readers” (Harries, in Zipes, 2000: 480). As Harries points out, literary fairy tales, since their emergence in French society, have “more insistently reinforced...existing social arrangements” (Harries, in Zipes, 2000: 480). Socialisation regarding what the contemporary society accepted as appropriate gender roles, in particular, is the subtext of many a fairy tale that comes to us from the original French literary version.

While fairy tale was defining itself as an independent genre in France, during the eighteenth century it remained underground in England, surfacing only on rare occasions. The few fairy tales that did cautiously emerge into literary circles were those that had an overwhelming moral purpose. Sarah Fielding, author of *The Governess* (1749), a collection of stories dominated by morals and lessons, asserts that “Giants, Magic, Fairies, and all sorts of supernatural Assistance” in a story are only acceptable if they point the reader to a moral (Sarah Fielding, quoted in Avery, 2000: 71). Up to the end of the eighteenth century, it seemed that English fairy tale was to be doomed to remain either in hiding or enslaved by the morality and rationalism of the Puritans. This certainly might have been the case, had the emergence of Romanticism and the work of two German brothers, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, not rescued the genre. The emergence of Romanticism in the late 1700s was eventually to bring relief to the beleaguered fairy tale in the nineteenth century, and it is largely due to this movement, and the Grimm brothers, that fairy tale regained an accepted place within English culture.

Romanticism was ultimately a reaction against the Enlightenment, although regret over the effects of industrialisation also featured largely in the movement. The Romantics believed that the imagination was a vital part of human life (Diffey, in Prickett, 1981: 172; Warner, 1995: 188). They were horrified at what they believed to be the enslavement of members of society who had been deprived of their humanity and forced to become mere “thinking machines” (Perry, 1997: 365). In order to free themselves from the shackles of ‘civilisation’, the Romantics believed that people needed to rediscover their creativity or continue to “make life miserable for one another in cities” (Brinton, 1926: 50). They held reason to be inadequate as a means of gaining an understanding of human existence, believing that there was a “life higher than that of calculating, meddling reason” (Brinton,

1926: 48). In Germany, Romantics began to use the, by now familiar, literary fairy tale genre in order to openly engage their readers in serious debate (Zipes, 2000: xxiv). For the first time, the individual stamp of the writer began to feature clearly in his/her fairy tale (Zipes, 2000: xxvii). The culture of the Middle Ages, so scorned by the Puritans, held a fascination for the Romantics, who delighted in the chivalry and fantasy of the era, and they sought to regain the richness of imagination that dominated the medieval arts (Pointon, in Prickett, 1981: 83-84). While the Enlightenment had examined folklore and the fairy tale in “the light of ‘reason’” and found it wanting, the Romantics saw the genres as ways in which to gain access to humankind’s natural, yet stifled, childlike creativity (Kitson, in Wu, 2001: 35; Roberts, 2002: 358). As a result there was an upsurge in interest regarding the rediscovery and study of the fairy tale, from which England was not excluded.

In Germany, the brothers Grimm, despite their Calvinist upbringing, were caught up in the Romantic interest regarding the oral fairy tale. In their eyes, German folklore and *märchen* were of significant cultural value, and they set about recording as many tales as they could. They initially regarded their work as purely scholarly, and aimed their first published volume of the recorded tales at an academic audience. They were taken by surprise at the enthusiastic reception with which the tales were met by other members of German society, but quickly adapted their work to suit the new audience. They revised and edited the tales, removing all elements that could be construed to be “bawdy” or “erotic” (Zipes, 2000: xxv). Although the first English translation of their *Kinderund Hausmärchen (Children’s and Household Tales)* (1812) was treated with a fair amount of disapproval because there was still a large element of the implausible in the tales, the Grimms’ work gradually came to play a large role in bringing about the fairy tale’s re-acceptance into England during the 1820s and 1830s, and they published their collection of tales seventeen times (Zipes, 2000: xxv and Bottigheimer, 2000: 219). Their success was possibly due to the varied audience to which their work appealed. They did not forego the scholarly element of their work, and retained the academic notes about the tales in a larger book aimed at the intellectual adult. They also, however, published a smaller book that was aimed specifically at children. The academic status that they were accorded (they were recognised throughout Germany for their work and received honorary doctorates from three universities) meant that their collection of tales could be regarded as being of

intellectual value and thus acceptable in educated English society. Their tales for children were also refined until they were able to say of the book within which they were included was an “educational manual” that taught their child readers morals and values held so dear by the bourgeoisie (Zipes, 2000: xxvi).

Despite the Grimms’ popularity and success in England, and a slight softening of attitude towards overtly moralising fantasy, fairy tales in general were still regarded as slightly dubious literary material for children and were carefully regulated and suppressed where deemed necessary. The Grimms’ tales were accepted because they upheld the status quo of the society that they appealed to. Their work is said to “underline morals in keeping with the Protestant ethic and a patriarchal notion of sex roles” and thus reinforce “the existing structures of power and of gender relations, affecting generations of children throughout Europe” (Zipes, 2000: xvi and Harries, in Zipes, 2000: 480). Their stringent adherence to middle class morality had probably as much to do with commercial reasons as it did with their own desire to propagate such values.

**Upholding the status quo: valiant heroes and passive princesses in the early Victorian literary fairy tale.**

Of the Grimms’ tales, two of the most enduring have proved to be ‘Little Briar Rose’ and ‘Little Snow White’. The majority of the tales within the brothers’ *Children’s and Household Tales* were consistently edited until they agreed with the ideals of the rising bourgeoisie, both in Germany and Britain. The resulting moral manual for young readers was probably accepted by Victorian society precisely because of its ‘educational’ value. Prominent within the edited tales, are paradigms of ideal female and male behaviour. ‘Little Briar Rose’ and ‘Little Snow White’ are two examples of the Grimms’ tales that reflected and propagated the distinct gender roles that were approved of during the beginning of the Victorian era.

It is interesting to note that while the two most popular heroines of the Grimms’ tales are referred to in the diminutive form (‘*Little* Briar Rose’ and *Little* Snow White’) none of the male title characters are referred to as such unless they are animals, or their littleness is qualified, as in ‘The *Valiant Little* Taylor’. The heroines of the tales are accordingly diminutive in character and strength, and were ideal role models for the young female

readers who were to grow up to become the perfect early Victorian woman. In the conduct books that young girls were exposed to during the nineteenth century, the qualities of “submissiveness, modesty and selflessness” were emphasised. One conduct book, quoted in *The Madwoman in the Attic* asserts that, “There are Rules for all our Actions, even down to Sleeping with a good Grace” (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984: 23). Submissive, modest and exceptional in their ability to sleep with a “good Grace,” so much so that they become the love objects of princes while in their comatose states, Little Snow White and Little Briar Rose are the poster girls for all nineteenth century conduct books.

The perfect young “ladies” of the Little Snow White and Little Briar Rose mould, were, according to Gilbert and Gubar, also required by the “aesthetic cult of ladylike fragility and delicate beauty” to

...’kill’ themselves into art objects: slim, pale, passive beings whose “charms” eerily recalled the snowy, porcelain immobility of the dead. Tight-lacing, fasting, vinegar-drinking, and similar cosmetic or dietary excesses were all parts of a physical regimen that helped women either to feign morbid weakness or actually to ‘decline’ into real illness.” (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984: 25)

The following analyses of some of the Grimms’ tales will reveal how this dangerous and harmful ideal of feminine beauty was propagated through their fairy tales.

#### **‘Little Briar Rose’**

The story of ‘Little Briar Rose’ that was encountered by early Victorian readers was different in many ways to that circulated in the French courts at the time of Perrault. The Grimm brothers stringently removed all ‘undesirable’ elements from the tale and also even expelled some of the magic of the earlier French version. The tale begins with a King and Queen who wish “every day” for a child. When their wish is granted, they joyfully arrange a christening. Instead of inviting fairy godmothers to the young princess’s christening feast, as in Perrault’s version, the royal couple invites twelve out of the thirteen “Wise Women” who reside in the kingdom. It is interesting that, while in other versions of the tale, the uninvited Wise Woman/fairy is left out of the proceedings inadvertently, the Grimm brothers have their King consciously only invite twelve because he only has twelve golden plates on which to serve the honoured guests their food. The Wise Women

confer gifts upon the young royal that will stand her in good stead as a princess. The three gifts that are considered by the Grimm brothers to be worth mentioning are virtue, beauty and riches, three qualities that would allow her to fulfil her ultimate role as a good Victorian wife, valuably endowed with a substantial dowry. However, the arrival of the thirteenth, uninvited Wise Woman disrupts the proceedings. Wishing to “avenge herself”, she curses the young princess, pronouncing that she shall “in her fifteenth year prick herself with a spindle and fall down dead” (Grimm, 1997: 237). This female villain is a very interesting character. In a tale that commends female passivity, she is a powerful, aggressive woman with the authority to pronounce a death sentence upon whomsoever she wishes. Had she existed as a member of the society within which the tale was written, she would most definitely have been uninvited to gatherings within polite society and would have been ostracised, just as many independently minded women of the time were. Excluded from society, the anger of the representative thirteenth Wise Woman grows into something vengeful that causes havoc within conventional society, and is obviously something to be feared and kept as far away as possible, just as the rage experienced by the contained and repressed Victorian woman was. Her antisocial tendencies are noted with disdain in the tale, “without greeting, or even looking at anyone,” she cries out her vengeance in a “loud voice” and “without saying a word more” she abruptly departs (Grimm, 1997: 237). Such behaviour was certainly not regarded as becoming for a member of Victorian society, where decorum and propriety ruled supreme, and women, never asserting themselves, spoke in softly melodious voices.

It is significant that the date of Little Briar Rose’s death/sleep is set at age fifteen, presumably the age at which she reaches puberty and starts on the road to sexual awareness and discovery. It is also interesting that the rage-filled, excluded woman who curses her, predetermines that her death shall be as a result of an injury incurred by spinning. Traditionally an acceptable pastime and occupation for grown women, it is closely linked with the image of the ‘good’ female and, by pronouncing the young princess’s death through such feminine employment, the woman is possibly expressing what she wrathfully perceives to be her own destruction through the societal restrictions placed upon women.

While the other Wise Women are powerless to prevent what their sister has decreed shall

come to pass, one of them has yet to give her gift, and she lessens the severity of the sentence. Instead of dying, the princess will fall into a deep sleep that will last a hundred years. Despite the King's attempt to prevent the event from taking place, when Little Briar Rose turns fifteen, she encounters an old woman spinning when she is left unsupervised while exploring the castle. Intrigued, she tries her hand at it, but pricks herself and the "magic decree" is fulfilled, for as soon as she "[feels] the prick" she falls asleep (Grimm, 1997: 238). Instead of dying, and thus possibly escaping restrictions within a patriarchal society, Little Briar Rose becomes the ideal passive female figure. Being "pricked" by a sharp object in a fairy tale is an occurrence often associated with sexual awakening, and the moment she pricks her finger on the spindle, Little Briar Rose is initiated into the male-dominated world of the sexual female. She becomes completely passive, her awakening dependent on the arrival of an icon of the male world, a handsome and valiant prince, in a hundred years time. While she and the rest of the court sleep, a formidable thorny hedge grows up around the Castle. This hedge protects her from the attentions of many princes who hear of her beauty and passivity and attempt to reach her. The attempts of the men to reach her in her passive, vulnerable state are slightly ominous, and it is with a sense of relief on Little Briar Rose's behalf that one reads of their failure to gain access to her through the hedge. The identity of the thorny barrier's creator remains ambiguous as it could be the work of the 'evil' Wise Woman who seeks to prevent the young princess's integration into a patriarchal society just as it could be the creation of the 'good' Wise Woman seeking to ensure that the princess's passivity remains undisturbed until the time stipulated for her awakening by the prince.

In her passive, sleeping state, Little Briar Rose becomes merely an object for those who seek to find her. The prince, who eventually wakes her, seeks her out not because he wishes to engage with her, but because he wants to observe her legendary beauty, to visually consume her. The Grimm version of the tale is a sanitised one, and thus omits the scene included in many earlier versions in which the man who finds sleeping Beauty/Little Briar Rose rapes the unconscious young woman, who falls pregnant, awakening on the birth of her twin babies. Sexual undertones remain in the Grimm version, however, and one suspects that visual consumption of the princess is not the only form of consumption on the prince's mind.

The area around Little Briar Rose's bedroom is described as being "so quiet that a breath could be heard"; it is as still, one could say, as a tomb. In her passive, vulnerable state, Little Briar Rose might as well be dead, and it appears that her conscious existence after she wakes does not offer much more of a real life.

Certainly, if the claim that "the spiritualised Victorian woman who, having died to her own desires, her own self, her own life, leads a posthumous existence in her own lifetime" is to be believed, then she might as well have remained asleep (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984: 25). Coming across the corpse-like beauty of Little Briar Rose, the prince leans down to kiss her, at which moment she regains consciousness. She does not speak but merely looks at him "quite sweetly". Little Briar Rose says nothing from the moment she pricks her finger and begins to mature as a woman within the gender role that society prescribes for her. Before her encounter with a "prick" she is able to articulate her desires and needs, for example, when she demands that she be allowed to try her hand at spinning. Before she is enchanted to fall asleep, she is described as an active young girl who displays a curiosity about her surroundings. She explores the castle, going round "into all sorts of places" looking everywhere "just as she [likes]" (Grimm, 1997: 238). She questions the people that she comes across, and confidently asks the old woman in the tower, "What are you doing there...What sort of thing is that, that rattles around so merrily?" (Grimm, 1997: 238). This lively element within the young woman seems to have vanished sometime during her sleep, and she awakes the patriarchal ideal of the passive Victorian woman.

### **Little Snow White**

"Little Snow White" is another tale that portrays the heroine's development from a young girl into a passive, frail possession of patriarchy. The two tales share similar themes and events. In a way, 'Little Snow White' completes the narrative begun in 'Little Briar Rose'. Sitting at her window, a Queen "pricks" herself, and falls pregnant, producing a child as "white as snow, as red as blood, and as black as the wood of the [ebony] window frame" (Grimm, 1997: 249). While 'Little Briar Rose' falls into a deep sleep, the Queen of 'Little Snow White' dies after becoming initiated into sexual maturity and is replaced by an evil stepmother. This 'stepmother' is dependent upon a magic talking mirror for reassurance about her superior beauty. To her question:

“Looking-glass, Looking-glass on the wall,  
Who in this land is the fairest of us all?” (Grimm, 1997: 249)

the mirror replies:

“Thou, O Queen, art the fairest of all!” (Grimm, 1997: 250)

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in their fascinating study of the Snow White story, believe that the King’s second wife, the evil stepmother that enters the story after Little Snow White’s first mother dies, is in fact the same woman as the one who pricks her finger at the windowsill (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984: 37). In *From the Beast to the Blonde*, Marina Warner notes that in the earlier manuscript of the Grimms’ tale, it is indeed Snow White’s own mother who displays “murderous jealousy” of her daughter – the Grimms only introduced the step-mother in their sanitised 1819 edition (Warner, 1995: 211). The queen’s descent into jealousy, her “metamorphosis into a witch”, occurs when, having “fallen into sexuality” the Queen is “doomed to an inward search”, characterised by her obsession with her magic mirror (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984: 37). Before she is “assumed into the cycle of sexuality”, the Queen appears to have certain possibilities available to her, as indicated by the view she is privileged with from her window, but, absorbed into an adult, patriarchal society, this ability to look outside of herself is subsumed by a “state from which all outward prospects have been removed” (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984: 37). Her magic mirror’s voice is that of her husband, the King, and thus the patriarchal society that rules not only her future but also her “self-evaluation” (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984: 38). When she requires reassurance, she asks the mirror the formulaic question and is satisfied when it confirms her beauty because “she knew that the looking-glass spoke the truth” (Grimm, 1997: p. 251). When pronouncing the Queen’s beauty, the looking glass is indeed capable of telling the truth precisely because it is the voice that decides what is to be considered beautiful in the first place. The “patriarchal voice of judgement” that emerges from the mirror is the one that, to the Queen’s dismay, eventually pronounces Snow White to be more beautiful than she is (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984: 38). Her rage inevitably spilling over, the Queen is no longer acceptable in the eyes of patriarchal society, and the sweet, innocent pale young thing into which the seven year old Snow White has developed is regarded as more attractive than the witch beginning to emerge from deep within the Queen.

Taught to value herself according to the criteria of the mirror's patriarchal conception of beauty, her loss of status as an exceptional beauty is truly devastating for the Queen and, mad with rage and frustration, she determines to kill the young girl who threatens her position as "fairest in the land". She summons a huntsman and orders him to kill the young girl that the mirror/voice of patriarchy has set up as her rival. This attempt at disposing of little Snow White is doomed to failure, however. Gilbert and Gubar point out that, as a man, the huntsman is a member of a male dominated society that regards the girl as 'its' child and is thus unwilling to hurt her (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984: 39). Having taken the Queen's victim into the forest, the huntsman allows her to flee when she begs for her life. He has pity upon her because of her beauty and reasons that "The wild beasts will soon have devoured" her (Grimm, 1997: 250). At the time that the tale was circulated and recorded, wild beasts were no longer regarded as a genuine threat in reality, and it is possible that the 'beasts' that pose such a threat to the unprotected young girl are of a male, human form within a sexually predatory patriarchal society that is rather hostile towards a lone independent woman.

After wondering through the unknown landscape for a while, Little Snow White comes across a small cottage. Upon entering it, she discovers that seven extraordinarily neat and unusually small people inhabit it. Displaying the typically feminine qualities of self-restraint when it comes to food, she eats only a small amount from each of the seven little plates of food that she finds there, and not more than a drop of liquid from each of the little mugs. She then falls asleep upon one of the beds where the seven dwarves later find her in a typically passive situation. It is probably due to the Grimm brothers' editing that it is carefully made clear that the dwarfs behave in a perfectly chivalrous manner, spending the night in discomfort rather than share a bed with the young girl. They agree to let Little Snow White find refuge within their dwelling for as long as she fulfils the domestic duties accorded to the ideal female:

The dwarfs said: "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..." "Yes," said Snow-white, "with all my heart," and she stayed with them. (Grimm, 1997: 252)

While Snow White learns the art of the domestic angel/female, the Queen, discovering

that her first plot against the girl has failed, sets about finding new ways in which to bring about her untimely death. In a fascinating attempt to turn the patriarchal weapons of male conceptions of female beauty against its own ideal woman, the witch-Queen makes “poisonous or parodic use of a distinctly female device [used to make women acceptable to men] as a murder weapon” (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984: 39). She uses deadly stay laces (described by Gilbert and Gubar to be “very Victorian”) and a comb to attack Little Snow White (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984: 40). She even utilises make-up in a subversive manner - she paints her face to make her look older than she is, precisely the opposite of the manner in which make-up is used to make women look younger and acceptable to patriarchal conceptions of beauty and thus more appealing to men. After one of her attacks on Snow White, she declares “You paragon of beauty...you are finished now”, indicating that her desire to kill the girl is more an attempt at destroying the patriarchal conception of beauty and the value attached to it, than anything else. Her murder attempts fail, however, as the dwarves come to the rescue of the young maiden twice. Even more distressing to the Queen, is that Snow White is “strengthened” in her “chaste...passivity” by these subversive beauty tools (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984: 40).

Finally the “wicked” Queen resorts to the patriarchal weapon that has proved so fatal to women in society. Having conjured up a poisoned apple - the very fruit through which Eve fell and women thereafter have been repressed - she succeeds in tempting the young Snow White to eat it. The young girl/angel, tainted by Eve’s original sin and the forbidden fruit of knowledge, falls into a deathlike coma. In both ‘Little Briar Rose’ and ‘Little Snow White’, disaster befalls the young women when they are left unsupervised by patriarchal authority figures or their representatives. In an age when, especially unmarried, women and girls were strictly supervised and rarely allowed out of the house without some suitable chaperone, this element of the tales would have reflected the patriarchal concern regarding the corruptibility of the women repressed underneath its structures. Unwilling to inter her in the dark ground, the dwarves place Snow White on display in a glass coffin. Despite the Queen’s attempts to destroy Snow White, then, her weapons have “made her into precisely the eternally beautiful, inanimate *objet d’art* patriarchal aesthetics want a girl to be” (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984: 40). While the Queen experiences “conventional female arts” as fatal, in Snow White’s case, despite their destructive tendencies, they “confer the only measure of power available to a woman in a patriarchal

culture” (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984: 40). It is as a work of art, a beautiful, inanimate object that Snow White captures the prince’s attention, who begs the dwarfs to give him the pretty ornament:

...he said to the dwarfs: “Let me have the coffin, I will give you whatever you want for *it*.” But the dwarfs answered: “We will not part with *it* for all the gold in the world.” Then he said: “let me have it as a gift, for I cannot live without seeing Snow-white. I will honour and prize her *as my dearest possession*.” (Grimm, 1997: 257, own emphasis)

Finally possessed by a man (as his latest artwork) Little Snow White wakes up as the men carrying her coffin trip and jolt the piece of poisoned fruit out of her throat. As an “it”, a possession, Snow White has become an idealized image of herself ... as such she has definitely proven herself to be patriarchy’s ideal woman...” (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984: 41). Like Little Briar Rose, she does not speak after she reaches a certain degree of passivity. While she was able to beg for her life when confronted with death at the hands of the huntsman, and engages on more than one occasion with the disguised Queen, she possesses no such initiative from the moment she falls into her death-like coma. This ideal passivity, however, may eventually undo itself. Her marriage to the prince might not be as fortunate as it appears to be, for, as Gilbert and Gubar suggest, it is more than likely that Snow White herself will experience a “prick”, bear a child and find herself, her identity and her sense of value and worth imprisoned within a mirror, where her frustration will eventually spill over in a murderous rage as it did with her (step-)mother (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984: 42). This rage brings with it an awful fate; because of her rage, the ‘wicked’ Queen is forced to dance to her death in “red-hot” shoes (Grimm, 1997: 258). It is interesting that, while the Grimm brothers were careful to sanitise the tales, excluding all material that they thought would upset respectable middle class children (and, more importantly, their parents), they saw fit to include the terribly vicious way in which the deviant Queen is punished. In many of their tales, aberrant women are punished in similarly cruel ways. This certainly indicates something about the way in which non-conformist women were regarded in their society and the society for which they wrote.

### **The Valiant Little Taylor**

In ‘The Valiant Little Taylor’ the acceptable role and behaviour for the active male characters of early Victorian fairy tale are vastly different to their passive female

counterparts. While the female ‘protagonists’ of ‘Little Briar Rose’ and ‘Little Snow White’ are ultimately acquiescent and unresisting when it comes to the events in which they are involved, the male character of ‘The Valiant Little Taylor’ is a cunning, ambitious and intrepid young man who does all he can within his power to achieve wealth and status within his society. Like the Queen of ‘Little Snow White’, the valiant Little Taylor sits sewing at an open window at the beginning of the tale. However, while the Queen is forced to turn her gaze inward, the Little Taylor ventures outside of his house to seek his fortune. A presumptuous upstart, who often twists the truth to get his way, the Little Taylor finds himself in a number of compromising situations which, through his cunning, the stupidity of others and, often, plain good luck, he manages to turn to his advantage. Thus, despite his small stature and humble position in society, he outwits an aggressive giant and later brings about the demise of two others, is employed by the king’s army and overcomes the dangers of three tasks that the king sets for him. Eventually he wins the hand of the king’s daughter (albeit she is a rather unwilling bride) and manages to secure the throne for himself.

#### **The ‘classic’ literary fairy tale and the second half of the nineteenth century**

Although modern fairy tales abounded towards the end of the nineteenth century, and for a long time afterward, the ‘classic’ fairy tales of Perrault and the brothers Grimm remained very popular. In 1889, Andrew Lang published *The Blue Fairy Book*, the first volume in a series of fairy tale books. Included in the first collection of tales is ‘The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood.’ It is interesting that while the book proclaims itself to contain tales “intended for children” it elects to retell the Perrault version of the tale, rather than the shorter, sanitised Grimm version. While the fairy tales of Perrault and other French writers were translated into English in the earlier part of the nineteenth century, the tales were intended more for an adult audience than for children. The sanitised Grimm versions of the tales were regarded to be more suitable for the younger members of society. Even when Dinah Craik surprisingly uses Perrault’s tale as the basis for one of the stories in *The Fairy Book* (1863), she strips it of any elements that could possibly be considered inappropriate by Victorian parents, claiming that the “Editor of this collection has been especially careful that it should contain nothing which could really harm a child”. She excludes the cannibalistic Queen Mother, and, excluding any hint of sexual impropriety, the prince and Sleeping Beauty do not have any children. The prince, too, does not seek

the sleeping princess either, rather, he seeks the truth about the towers that he sees appearing from behind the thorny barrier, and when he finds her he kneels by her bed. The author distances herself from all suggestion of sexual elements, mentioning that others have claimed that he *might* have kissed Sleeping Beauty, but no one could really tell because there were no witnesses. The tale ends when Sleeping Beauty is married off to the prince and regains her ancestral lands through the union.

In Lang's rendition of the Perrault tale, the princess's parents remain awake, and leave her in order to govern the country unlike the other version in which the princess remains united with her family. The Perrault version does not end upon the princess's awakening upon a chaste kiss either and continues to tell the tale of her secret marriage to the prince and the birth of their two children, Morning and Day. When the prince's father dies, he feels that it is finally appropriate for him to make his marriage public, and he brings Sleeping Beauty and her two children to his palace. His mother, who has ogre blood in her veins, designs to eat the children and Sleeping Beauty and, taking her chance when the prince (now King) does off to fight in a war, she orders the cook to serve up Sleeping Beauty and her two children in succession. The cook deceives her and manages to rescue all three of the ogre Queen's victims. The Queen discovers his deception, however, and prepares to wreak her revenge by throwing them all into a pot filled with "toads, vipers, snakes, and all sorts of serpents." Fortunately, the King arrives home in time to rescue his family and, in a rage, the Queen Mother throws herself into the terrible pot and dies.

Lang's decision to include a less sanitised version of Perrault's version of the tale in his collection for children indicates a slight change in attitude towards children's reading material. One can only assume that, with such a tale included in Lang's collection, children were beginning to be allowed to read more graphic material.

### **Waiting in the wings: the development towards a modern English literary fairy tale tradition**

The Grimms' tales were regarded as acceptable because they upheld the status quo of Victorian society. As almost the only literature considered acceptable for children in the early nineteenth century was that which contained overtly Christian, moral messages, it is

not surprising that the only fairy tales that were imported and translated from other parts of Europe were ethically similar to the Grimms' tales. There were very few, if any, 'modern' fairy tales written either for children or adults in England just before the Victorian era and shortly after the young queen ascended the British throne. The few tales that were available were imported and translated from other languages and were passed off as works of art worthy of adult anthropological interest. Indigenous English fairy tale was kept in the lower classes and did not find its way into literature until a while later. Due to Romanticism and the Grimms, fairy tale had lost some of the stigma attached to it, especially with regard to adult entertainment; but for the children's literary fairy tale, there was still a long way to go.

The children's literary fairy tale received another boost when Hans Christian Andersen began to publish his fairy tales in 1835. They were quickly translated into English, and played an important role in allowing the exclusive world of contemporary children's literature, dominated by infant deathbed salvation scenes, to expand its boundaries and include fairy tale.

Children's literature of the nineteenth century was initially dominated by the churches and the Sunday Schools that sprang up all over in England (Bratton, 1981: 14). Having suddenly become aware of the fact that, with advent of the steam press in 1811, the written word would become readily available to all of society, the ruling classes realised with some anxiety that literacy was not going to be confined to the 'upper' realms of society (Bratton, 1981: 14 & 31). One of the concerns of the ruling class was that literacy might cause unrest within England, as the members of the lower classes might refuse to accept their positions within society should they come across dissident reading material (Hill, 1978: 174 and Rose, 2002: 35). As a result of upper class concern, there appears to have been a general consensus to pre-empt such unrest by taking control of education of the lower-middle and lower classes (Bratton, 1981: 17). The Sunday Schools, and other educational institutions that came into being in the nineteenth century, although often founded and run by many well-meaning men and women, also functioned as a form of "social control", as the future members of society were carefully moulded into moral young citizens (Bratton, 1981: 31). The reading material made available to the newly literate members of society was also carefully controlled. Institutions such as the

Religious Tract Society (RTS) and the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SPCK) were created in order to provide the young members of society with morally suitable material (Bratton, 1981: 31, 32 & 46). The literature that these societies provided for the poorer, young readers of Victorian society was the typical “didactic, intention-ridden ... Victorian moral tale for children” (Bratton, 1981: 24). These tales drew on the Puritan literary tradition that not only believed that fiction needed to be “true or as near to the literal truth as possible” otherwise it became ‘lying’, but also “used lurid physical detail to enforce [an] urgent religious message” (Bratton, 1981: 26 & 34). The tales that emerged from this tradition were ones that generally described the experiences of moral, young people who, generally suffering a prolonged and unpleasant death, received spiritual salvation. Their awareness and acceptance of such ‘salvation’ sometimes happened in time to help them bear their suffering, but always allowed them to face their death peacefully in the morbid and heavily religious texts.

Hans Christian Andersen’s tales were probably the gateway between the unrelentingly religious stories that characterised early nineteenth century literature and the increasingly secular modern literary fairy tale. Labelled the ‘father’ of the modern fairy tale, Andersen was probably the first to attempt to create “new literary works” rather than merely collect and retell oral fairy tales as interesting artefacts (Nikolajeva, in Zipes, 2000: 14). These literary works contained strong religious and moral messages that would have been approved of by those who wielded authority over children’s literature. However, his tales were far less prescriptive and contained much more humour than contemporary children’s literature (Nikolajeva, in Zipes, 2000: 14). ‘The Little Mermaid’, for example, is one of his tales that deals with the human soul, and the desire of a young mermaid to obtain one. The overriding theme of the tale is, however, that of unrequited love. Such is a mermaid’s love for a prince who does not return it, that, when given the opportunity to kill him and return to her family in the ocean where she will live in luxury for her allotted 300 years, she chooses to forego the opportunity, and dies without a human soul and without love. Although her self-sacrifice earns her the right to a life after death as one of the “daughters of the air” who have the opportunity to earn a soul, such a situation would certainly not have found its way into English children’s literature where everything was to be rejected in favour of heavenly salvation. For, the little mermaid is given the chance after death to achieve a soul - a very doctrinally suspicious occurrence - and she chooses death without a

soul rather than kill her prince. In Andersen's tales, unlike the contemporary Victorian moral tales, there was a strong magical element, albeit combined with Christianity, and this element slowly started to become more prevalent in the tales by English writers that began to find their way into literature for both children and adults, culminating in the literary fairy tale.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the imported classic fairy tale was well established in Victorian children's literature, and the literary fairy tale entered a new phase in its development. The attitudes of Victorian parents and educators towards fantasy for children had also changed to the extent that English writers were able to make a living writing secular fantasy for children. With the market suddenly open, there was a flood of 'modern' fairy tale, some of it written purely as a mercenary reaction to yet another manifestation of commodified childhood, and some written in order to communicate varying reactions to the turbulence of the era. The changing attitude towards fairy tale is also indicated by the significant change in the identities of the writers who produced the literary fairy tale for children. In the past, children's literature was produced by "evangelical writers" who were "unlearned and unsophisticated in literary matters", their main intention to teach and 'mould' their readers (Bratton, 1981: 26). In the second period of Victorian fairy tale, educated, talented and respected writers began to produce their own literary fairy tales, a clear indication that respect for the fairy tale genre was indeed growing. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, writers such as John Ruskin, Charles Dickens and George MacDonald contributed to what was to become a wealth of English literary fairy tale. During this second phase of Victorian literary fairy tale writers such as those mentioned began to use the fairy tale to question the status quo, rather than merely uphold it. While accepted gender roles were still inherent in many tales, they were now also questioned as well as reinforced, and a large number of specifically Victorian issues began to surface in the genre.

### **Enter the modern fairy tale: John Ruskin's 'The King of the Golden River'**

The highly educated John Ruskin is believed to be author of the first English 'Victorian' fairy tale meant specifically for children (Avery, 2000: 432). He wrote 'The King of the Golden River' in 1841 for his twelve-year-old fiancé, Effie Gray. It was published in

1851. Modelled on the traditional fairy tale form, it contains similar motifs to the earlier literary fairy tales imported from European countries. The work of the Grimm brothers and the tales of their *Children's and Household Tales* heavily influenced Ruskin. He read their tales when he was a young boy and copied the Cruikshank illustrations that accompanied them (Avery, 2000: 432). He admired their work greatly and claimed that they were of

true historical value; - historical at least insofar as it has naturally arisen out of the mind of a people under special circumstances, and risen not without meaning, nor removed altogether from the sphere of religious faith (Ruskin, quote in Zipes, 1987: 13).

The influence that the Grimm brothers had on his work is clearly visible in 'The King of the Golden River'. Ruskin himself described the tale as a "fairly good imitation of Grimm and Dickens" (Avery, 2000: 432). Although written in the style of earlier literary fairy tale, 'The King of the Golden River' deals with issues that were relevant to contemporary society. When the tale was republished in 1868, Ruskin wrote in an introduction to it that fairy tales were valuable because they were able to "fortify children against the glacial cold of selfish science" (Ruskin, quoted in Avery, 2000: 432). Although he was greatly opposed to what Zipes terms "explicit moralism" in fairy tales, in an age when the industrial revolution had changed English society from an agrarian to an urban one, bringing with it new class politics and a new type of poverty, and progress in science meant that humankind was gradually gaining more yet more control over nature, Ruskin's tale issues a dire warning to his readers. His obvious concern about the breakdown in social values and community ties, and a growing disregard for nature that, to him, seems to accompany science, is evident in the story.

True to fairy tale convention, the hero of the tale is the youngest of three brothers. Like most fairy tale heroes, Gluck is a simple, compassionate young boy, while his brothers are avaricious, unpleasant men. In a pointed allusion to the destructive practices that came into existence with the fairly recent development of commercial and capitalist driven farming, Ruskin comments on the farming techniques of the two men, Hans and Scharz:

...and very good farmers they were. They killed everything that did not pay

for its eating. They shot the blackbirds, because they pecked the fruit; and killed the hedgehogs lest they should suck the cows; they poisoned the cricket for eating the crumbs in the kitchen; they smothered the cicadas, which used to sing all summer in the lime trees. They worked their servants without any wages, till they would not work any more, and then quarrelled with them, and turned them out without paying them. It would have been very odd, if with such a farm, and if with such a system of farming, they hadn't got very rich; and very rich they *did* get. They generally contrived to keep their corn by them till it was very dear, and then sell it for twice its value; they had heaps of gold lying about on their floors, yet it was never known that they had given so much as a penny or a crust in charity... (Ruskin, 1987: 16)

Ruskin's comments on the brothers' unethical business practices might well have been a comment on capitalist society and the belief held by some in Victorian times that the government should maintain a *laissez faire* attitude toward business within society. As a Christian socialist Ruskin would have been uneasy about the possibilities for abuse that such a situation would allow. The two brothers also display perverted versions of the ideals that were held so dear by the rising middle class. In the case of Schwartz and Hans, ambition to succeed becomes avarice, and thrift becomes miserliness as they are "hardly less sparing upon themselves than upon other people" (Ruskin, 1987: 17).

The brothers' greed and unfeeling natures do not go unpunished, and after an encounter with a rather powerful character, they meet with a rather unpleasant end. In a warning to those who would commercialise the countryside at the expense of nature, Ruskin ensures that the two brothers are held accountable for their lack of respect for their natural heritage. As nature wreaks its revenge, their farm's destruction comes at the hands of the South West Wind. This amusing individual is regarded as the first character of his kind in modern fairy tale. According to Stephen Prickett, he is "the first magical personage to show that combination of kindness and eccentric irascibility that was to appear so strongly in a whole tradition of subsequent literature" (Prickett, in Zipes, 2000: 432). Apparently hungry and destitute, the South West Wind displays surprising strength for his small stature and easily defends himself against the wrath of the two large, elder brothers. The strength displayed by the mistreated dwarf is perhaps a warning about the strength of the mistreated and disempowered. The middle class were increasingly and uneasily aware of the mass of the underprivileged working class, and especially in the aftermath of the French Revolution, a large majority of the more privileged classes were concerned about

the strength of an angry mob that had been mistreated for too long, firstly under the likes of the *Ancien Regime* and later under an industrial, capitalist society.

Forced to seek a living in the city once their farm has been destroyed, the three brothers follow the path of many dispossessed farm labourers and peasants who were forced into the urban areas in order to survive. They fail hopelessly as goldsmiths and are eventually reduced to melting down Gluck's prized possession, a golden cup, much to the young boy's dismay.

The melted cup reveals a surprise, however, in the form of the King of the Golden River, previously enchanted and now freed, who tells Gluck that if he pours holy water into the source of the Golden River (that lies in the mountains surrounding Treasure Valley) it will turn into gold for him. Gluck's brothers find out about the King of the Golden River's conversation with their younger brother and set off individually to try their luck. The one brother steals his flask of holy water, the other buys his from an unscrupulous priest. On their way, they encounter various creatures that are suffering, even dying of thirst. Their cruelty prevents them from assisting the suffering people and animals, and it is as a result of this unfeeling behaviour that, rather than become the owners of a golden river, they are turned into black stones. Left alone, Gluck decides to try his luck. Where his brothers have failed, he succeeds because of his compassion towards the suffering creatures that he encounters, and the river, while not literally turning into gold for him, bursts through the mountains and flows into Treasure Valley, bringing it to life again. With Gluck in control of the farming valley, the community starts to display certain socialist tendencies. The poor are never driven from his door and because of this, his "barns become full of corn and his house of treasure" (Ruskin, 1987: 36).

Ruskin's conception of the "glacial cold of selfish science" can be found in the tale in the form of a glacier that the brothers have to cross in order to reach the golden river. The glacier is hostile and stands in the way of the men and the promise of nature's bounty. The older, more cynical and selfish men are able to cross the intimidating terrain with minimal effort, but for Gluck it is "twenty times worse" (Ruskin, 1987: 34). An innocent and simple character, almost peasant-like, he has not yet been corrupted by the 'selfishness' of science and has a very hard time crossing the glacier. When his ordeal is over, he needs to

rest for a long time on the grass on the other side and gain strength from nature before he can continue on his quest.

Despite Ruskin's dislike for overt moralising, 'The King of the Golden River' is unusually full of Christian morality. Gluck's brothers ultimately fail in their quest because their cruelty defiles the holy water, whereas his innocent and gentle nature, and his willingness to sacrifice his happiness for the good of others means that his touch turns any water into holy water - even though it were "defiled with corpses" (Ruskin, 1987: 36). The main concern of the tale, however appears to be with the consequences that Ruskin fears will follow humanity's allegiance to science and capitalism at the expense of nature and those in need. If 'The King of the Golden River' is to be believed, then nothing less than disaster will befall a society that is dominated by dehumanising science and motivated by individualism. Like Schartz and Hans, members of that society will find themselves figuratively turned into stone. According to the tale, however, the traits valued by Romanticism (generosity and a simple affinity with nature and her creatures, including humankind) have the ability to bring about peace and prosperity.

#### **From the sentimental to the satirical: Charles Dickens and 'The Magic Fishbone'**

Another well-known Victorian, Charles Dickens was a great admirer of fairy tale. His love for the genre probably originated from his early experience of the imported literary fairy tale. As a child, he was exposed to some of Charles Perrault's tales (his favourite famously being 'Little Red Riding Hood' and stories from the Brothers Grimm collection) (Zipes, 1987: 89). He also read *The Arabian Nights*, *Aesop's Fables* and *The Tales of Genii* (Zipes, 1987: 89). Throughout his adult life, he continued to display an attachment to the literary fairy tale and many of his own works are steeped in fairy tale traditions and motifs. Despite his childhood romance with the genre, he only ever wrote one fairy tale of his own specifically for children (Avery, 2000: 128). 'The Magic Fishbone' was written in 1868 and was included in the series *Holiday Romance* that was published in two household magazines (Zipes, 1987: 89). As in the other stories of the series, a child supposedly narrates 'The Magic Fishbone' - in this case, the narrator is Alice Rainbird, a young girl who is "aged seven".

Dickens was vehemently opposed to the practice of rewriting fairy tales as one-dimensional tales of instruction. In 'Frauds on the Fairies' he launched a vituperative attack on his otherwise very good friend, George Cruikshank, who had rewritten a number of tales in a "doctrinaire way" (Zipes, 1987: 89). In this article, first published in *Household Words*, Dickens explains why he regards fairy tales to be so valuable:

It would be hard to estimate the amount of gentleness and mercy that has made its way among us through these slight channels. Forbearance, courtesy, consideration for the poor and aged, kind treatment of animals, the love of nature, abhorrence of tyranny and brute force - many such good things have been first nourished in the child's heart by this powerful aid. (Dickens, 1853: 95)

At the time that he wrote 'Frauds on the Fairies', Dickens believed that, more than ever, fairy tales should be left intact:

In an utilitarian age, of all other times, it is a matter of grave importance that Fairy tales should be respected. Our English red tape is too magnificently red ever to be employed in the tying up of such trifles, but everyone who has considered the subject knows full well that a nation without fancy, without some romance, never did, never can, never will, hold a great place under the sun...

To preserve them [fairy tales] in their usefulness, they must be as much preserved in their simplicity, and purity, and innocent extravagance, as if they were actual fact. Whosoever alters them to suit his own opinions, whatever they are, is guilty, to our thinking, of an act of presumption, and appropriates to himself what does not belong to him.

Dickens, 1853: 95)

Later in the essay, having satirised Cruikshank's attempts to rewrite fairy tales according to his doctrines of "Total Abstinence", Dickens ends the piece of writing with a warning to all those who would alter fairy tale to suit their own moral purposes:

The world is too much with us, early and late. Leave this precious old escape from it, alone. (Dickens, 1853: 102)

It is important that such a well-known and respected *family writer* should defend the genre against 'corruption' by overt moralising. If writers like Dickens had not taken a stand on behalf of the older literary fairy tale, many might have been lost to the moralising

influence of people like Cruikshank.

Dickens' disillusioned attitude toward "the world" was shared by a large part of the Victorian population. From the mid-1800s onwards, fantasy started to be seen as a necessary respite from the industrial and capitalist world of the nineteenth century. As adults started to modify their perception of fantasy, their views regarding the exposure of children to works of the imagination also began to change. Fairy tales were finally granted a legitimate and acknowledged position in the world of children's literature. The leniency with which adults were beginning to view entertainment and leisure is reflected in the stories that they allowed the younger members of society to read. Despite his campaign against rewritten fairy tales, Dickens was not above playing with the fairy tale motif himself, and 'The Magic Fishbone' is a slightly subversive comment on the typical Victorian middle class society of the time, and takes an especially interesting look at the Victorian family. A lot of the adult humour inherent in the tale is a result of the satirical take on the societal stereotypes of the time. In the earlier part of the century, such writing would have been considered frivolous, even dangerous in its subversion, and would have been banned from the realms of children's literature. In the later half of the century, however, it is regarded as rather harmless fun.

In Dickens' obituary, his obituarist asks, "Who ever understood children better than he?" (in Marsden, 1990: 51). The one fairy tale that Dickens wrote for children indicates this understanding and empathy for his young audience. The child narrator tells the story in order to "show adults how the world should be" but the tale is not restrictive and does not offer the reader any doctrinaire solutions (Zipes, 1987: 88). Rather, it reinforces what Zipes believes to be Dickens' "own childlike faith in the power of magic to bring about changes in pedestrian bourgeois life" (Zipes, 1987: 89).

The tale begins with what appears to be a description of the traditional fairy tale royal couple. However, although the King is the "manliest of his sex" and the Queen the "loveliest of hers" as Victorian stereotyping would have it, they are immediately revealed to be part of the middle class (Dickens, 1987: 91). In his "private profession", the king is "Under Government", a comical look at the vague, mysterious workings of the fairly recently established bureaucratic machine that was the British government (Dickens,

1987: 91). The Queen, like most respectable women of her time, has no employment. Rather, her identity and social standing is achieved through her father who “had been a medical man” (Dickens, 1987: 91). The royal couple have nineteen children and are “always having more” (Dickens, 1987: 91). Malthus’ ‘findings’ regarding population caused quite a lot of consternation among the middle classes. In his *Essay on the Principle of Population*, Malthus found that population always increased in disproportion to the resources needed to sustain the larger population (Hill, 1978: 11). His *Essay* set forward his theory that the healthier a group of people, the larger the population and the greater the threat of starvation (Hill, 1978: 11). According to Malthus, poverty and the suffering that it caused, was a law of nature that could not be altered. Malthus, and a significant number of liberalists and capitalists, who subscribed to his views and those of his predecessor, Adam Smith, asserted that any attempts by the government to help the poor would only encourage an increase in the size of the poor family and thus abet poverty (Bryant, 1946: 53). In a time when ‘self-help’ was regarded with such reverence, members of the working class were considered by others to lack the self-control necessary to reduce the number of their offspring. As a result, many held them responsible for their own poverty stricken state (Perry, 1997: 358). The number of children in middle class families also became a concern in Victorian times as maintaining families in the state in which middle class society expected them to be started to become rather expensive. In her book *Family Ties: English Families 1540-1920*, Mary Abbott explains that “the difficulties they were experiencing in paying school fees and meeting other family obligations seems to have moved some middle-class couples to attempt to limit the size of their family” (Abbott, 1993: 123). Contraception was not readily available and, for most middle class couples, restricting the size of one’s family usually meant either the rather ineffective withdrawal method, or abstinence, neither of which was ideal, and resulted in a great deal of frustration. Dickens gently pokes fun at the anxiety surrounding reproduction in ‘The Magic Fishbone’, and the middle class King and Queen are saddled with a large, ever increasing family - possibly a comment on the hypocrisy of the ever expanding middle class’s judgement of the large, working class family.

The eldest of the royal couple’s children, Alicia, is responsible for looking after her younger siblings. This was not an unusual situation within the Victorian middle class family. Many families found it too expensive to employ more than one or two servants,

and as Victorian households required a great amount of labour to keep them functioning, servants were mostly employed to help with the necessary manual labour and not to look after children. This job fell to the elder daughters of the family. The expense of running a household increasingly became a concern to Victorian middle class during the 1900s and the quality of thrifty and careful housekeeping gradually came to be added to the criteria for the ideal Victorian woman. According to Mrs Chapone, a Victorian woman quoted in Abbott,

Economy ... is so important a part of a woman's character, so necessary to her own happiness, and so essential to her performing properly the duties of a wife and of a mother, that it ought to have the precedence of all other accomplishments (Chapone, in Abbott, 1993: 125)

The Queen, who, of course, being the loveliest (most perfect) of her sex, is a "careful housekeeper" (Dickens, 1987: 91).

Part of the humour of the tale results from the rather mundane duties performed by the King, a character one would usually expect to be above such duties. Buying salmon at the fishmonger, for example, is hardly a kingly pastime, but that is where the King is (in a "melancholy mood, for Quarter Day was such a long way off, and several of the dear children were growing out of their clothes") when he first encounters the fairy, Grandmarina (Dickens, 1987: 91). While the fairy is invisible to the careworn adults, young "Mr Pickle's boy", a member of the lower class and thus considered by members of the upper classes to be slightly simple and uneducated, is able to see her, and he alerts King Watkins to her presence (Dickens, 1987: 91) Fairy Grandmarina is an elderly, rather irascible fairy, and could well have been modelled on the impatient, yet kind, King of the Golden River of Ruskin's tale, 'The King of the Golden River'. During her conversation with the King (in which she tells him to invite Alicia to eat some of the salmon and, when she finds a fishbone left on her plate, to instruct her to polish it and then use it to wish for what she needs, but only at the correct time) she chastises the grown man on a number of occasions; for disagreeing with her, for interrupting her and for asking too many questions - typical childlike traits for which Victorian children would often have been reprimanded. The King, in his turn, behaves like an embarrassed and duly corrected child. This would have appealed greatly to a Victorian child audience (and would probably have a similar

appeal to a more modern young audience as well) as the king is told on more than one occasion to “be good then, and don’t [do whatever you are doing that displeases me]”, a phrase similar to what would have been heard often by young Victorians. On one of the occasions that the King incurs the old fairy’s wrath, he suggests that Alicia should not have the salmon because it “may disagree with her”, a comment on the perceived delicacy of female children and the general concern for the middle class child’s health that sprung up around the nineteenth century. This perception of child frailty is mocked in the tale, as Grandmarina swiftly turns on the king, accusing him of being greedy and wanting the salmon all for himself.

Grandmarina’s interference in the family’s affairs is indicative of the increasing public interest in the formerly private and separate domestic sphere. The well being of the state was increasingly connected with the well being of the family in the nineteenth century (Berry, 1999: 1). Previously regarded as a sacred and inviolable area, the privacy of the home gradually became “permeable territory” as the educational and legal systems became more involved in the day-to-day running of the Victorian family. From the mid Victorian era, there was “greater legislating and the creation of institutions and social practices that would intervene in the lives of all families, but especially the poor” (Berry, 1999: 163). The Matrimonial Causes Act, the Divorce Act of 1857, the Elementary Education Acts of 1861 and 1870 are all examples of the legislation that broke down the barriers that separated the domestic refuge of the home from the public sphere (Young, 1953: 197, 201 & 203)

Having agreed to follow the fairy’s instructions, the King goes on to his work, where, in a child’s description of what is pretty meaningless work, he “wrote and wrote and wrote,” till home time (Dickens, 1987: 93). Once at home, he honours his promise to Grandmarina, and Alicia, in her turn, follows the fairy’s instructions. Having done so, Alicia then encounters a number of situations that test her ability to discern between when she needs help and when she does not. The concept of ‘self-help’ was one held very dear by the Victorians. One of the foremost treatises on the concept was Samuel Smiles’ book, *Self-Help* (1859). The impact of the book was such that, in *Victorian Values*, Marsden claims that “Few books have been held to be more symbolic of the Victorian era than *Self Help* (Marsden 1990: 86). ‘Self-help’, relying on oneself rather than others, was

considered to be a moral issue as well as an economic one (Briggs, 1990: 86). In *Self Help*, Smiles expounds upon the moral benefits (national as well as individual) of independence from external help, claiming that:

“Heaven helps those who help themselves” is a well-tried maxim, embodying in a small compass the results of vast human experience. The spirit of self-help is the root of all genuine growth in the individual; and exhibited in the lives of many, it constitutes the true source of national vigour and strength. (Smiles, 1958: 35)

Smiles further asserts that external help is “often enfeebling in its effects” while “help from within invariably invigorates” (Smiles, 1958: 35). Smiles’ work resonates with the paternalistic attitude of the upper and middle classes towards the lower classes. His work indicates the tendency of the ruling class to regard poorer members of the British public as weak children that needed to be ‘brought up’ by society. Although criticising ‘over-guidance’, Smiles’ idea that self-help would strengthen the characters of the poor also indicates the condescending attitude of the wealthier members of Victorian society. When, in a ‘misguided’ attempt to help others, people provide “*for* men or classes” Smiles believes that they are guilty of taking “away the stimulus and necessity of doing for themselves” from the beneficiaries of their aid (Smiles, 1958: 35). “Where men are subjected to over-guidance and over-government, the inevitable tendency is to render them comparatively helpless,” Smiles concludes (Smiles, 1958: 35). Victorians, Smiles believes, would do a better job of ‘bringing up’ their poorer ‘charges’ by forcing them to provide for themselves, as Alicia provides for herself in ‘The Magic Fishbone’.

The crises that Alicia faces are not only slightly satirical exercises in developing her capability for self-help, but also are a test of her readiness to take her place as an adult woman in society, and the tasks that she performs are typical of those of a commendable middle class Victorian woman. The first event, against which Alicia is measured, is the sudden decline of the Queen. As mentioned before, the Victorian conception of the ‘feminine’ encouraged, even required, upper and middle class women to be frail and sickly. As Gilbert and Gubar assert, Victorian women were “actually admonished...to be ill” and the ailments that plagued Victorian women were not only the “by-products of their training in femininity” but were actually the objective of such training (Gilbert and Gubar,

1984: 54). It was generally upheld by Victorian society that the “lady” was feeble and infirm and the result was a “cult of female invalidism” that emerged within English society (Ehrenreich and English, in Gilbert and Gubar, 1984: 54). In 1895, Dr Mary Putnam Jacobi recorded the effects of this concept of the frail Victorian female, when it was:

Considered natural and almost laudable to break down under all conceivable varieties of strain - a winter dissipation, a houseful of servants, a quarrel with a female friend, not to speak of more legitimate reasons...Constantly considering their nerves, urged to consider them by well-intentioned but short-sighted advisors [women] pretty soon became nothing but a bundle of nerves (Jacobi, in Gilbert and Gubar, 1984: 55).

Dickens satirises this sickly, feminine ideal in ‘The Magic Fishbone’, and the Queen ‘breaks down’ with a sufficiently dramatic display of frailty to render her the ideal Victorian invalid. Like many women of her time, the strain of constantly bearing children, combined with the claustrophobic existence that she is required to lead and the (literally) debilitating ideal of the feminine, results, not unexpectedly, in headaches and fainting fits. On getting up in the morning, she exclaims, “O dear me, dear me, my head, my head!” and faints away (Dickens, 1987: 93). Occasionally coming out of her swoon, she spends most of her time dozing - the epitome of the “sofa mother” - and remains ill, and mostly unseen, until the end of the tale. Although Alicia witnesses her mother’s fainting fits, and is rather distressed about it, she does not use the fishbone to rectify the situation (much to the King’s consternation). Rather, she fulfils the first of the roles required of her as a Victorian woman - she becomes the primary caregiver of the household. Not only does she nurse her mother, but she also dresses the wounds of one of the young princes when he puts his hand through a glass door while being attacked by the pug dog next door, and comforts the baby when he falls under the grate.

When the prince hurts his hand, she also displays the thrift and ingenuity required of a middle class woman when she calls for the very Victorian rag-bag and begins to “snip and stitch and cut and contrive” to make a bandage rather than use her magic fishbone to call for help. She displays further housekeeping skills when she manages to overcome the chaos caused by the missing cook. Here Dickens satirises the middle class stereotype of the servant classes as irresponsible, fickle and thus slightly dangerous, and he exaggerates

the folly of the cook, who has absconded with her “own true love, who was a very tall but very tipsy soldier” (Dickens, 1987: 95). Alicia, however, the typically diligent middle class female child, proves her ability to manage and organise those under her authority in the household and makes sure that supper is provided despite the missing cook.

Her final test comes when her father arrives home in a melancholy mood, because he is most anxious about their financial situation. Seeing their father, with his head in his hands, display such undesirable qualities in a man, the seventeen children, who are able to do so, creep away. Alicia almost becomes a surrogate wife, as the King confides in her his desperation over how poor they are. Ruskin, in *Sesame and Lilies* (1865) wrote that while “man’s power is active, progressive and defensive” the “woman’s power is not for battle...her intellect is for sweet ordering arrangement and decision” (Ruskin, in Golby, 1986: 118). While a man is “*always* burdened” by his experiences out in the world, the woman remains soft, for her duty is to ensure that “the true nature of the home” is kept intact (Ruskin, in Golby, 1986: 118). The ideal home, which is the responsibility of the woman, is “the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt and division” (Ruskin, in Golby, 1986: 118). Fulfilling her role as surrogate wife, Alicia provides her father with a place of comfort in the heart of the home - the kitchen, the place from where all sustenance emerges. As a woman, however, she cannot do very much to rectify their financial situation by playing out any of the desirable female roles, as they involve providing comfort rather than taking action in order to earn money, and so must now, eventually turn to the fishbone for help, saying:

“When we have done our very best Papa, and that is not enough, then I think the right time must have come for asking the help of others.”  
(Dickens, 1987: 97)

Such an understanding of self-help would have delighted the Victorians who subscribed to Smiles’ treatise on the subject. In an amusing scene, Dickens satirises the formulaic endings of the classic fairy tales by cramming them all impossibly into a paragraph or two. Immediately, it becomes Quarter Day and the family is magically rescued from their predicament, Grandmarina arrives and rewards Alicia for fulfilling the requirements of an adult woman by bringing about her immediate marriage to a prince. As marriage was a “woman’s ‘trade’”, the wedding was the female equivalent of coming of age, completing

one's articles or graduating" (Abbott, 1993: 121). Grandmarina thus initiates Alicia into adulthood, albeit in a slightly satirical take on the convention, as Alicia is still only about seven years old and very much a child bride. The combination of the frivolous, the practical and the fantastic make the last scene especially amusing as Dickens once again satirises the ideal Victorian family and its children. The newlywed couple is blessed by Grandmarina and is promised thirty-five children, whose hair, in a satirical take on the appearance of the ideal child, will, rather frivolously, curl naturally. Alicia's future children will also be spared many of the diseases that carried off Victorian children - this lack of infant mortality within the family probably accounts for the large number of offspring. Having completed her 'training' for life as a Victorian woman, Alicia, at the tender age of seven, seems set to follow in her mother's footsteps to become the "loveliest of her sex", and one cannot help wondering if, after giving birth to 35 children, she might too wake up one day to a headache and constant fainting fits (Dickens, 1987: 93). Although Dickens satirises some of the gender roles within Victorian society in his fairy tale, the satire is fairly subtle, and is hidden amongst the author's witty comments on the middle class family and Victorian attitudes towards thrift, self-help and the lower classes. Later English literary fairy tales, like those written by George MacDonald, were to focus in far more detail on Victorian ideas regarding the female.

#### **'Little Daylight': George MacDonald and subversive sensuality**

George MacDonald, who had a similarly large family in reality, was a prolific fantasy writer. Dismissed from the Church because of his heretical belief that everything on earth was capable of achieving salvation through discovering the holy within them, he used the medium of fairy tale and fantasy to express his spiritual views and his fascination of German transcendentalism and mysticism (Zipes, 1987: 175). MacDonald was one of the first English writers to experiment with the traditional fairy tale genre, and used the form to explore mutinous new concepts of sexuality and love (Zipes, 1987: 175). The fantastic realm of the fairy tale has always been just as powerful as a tool of subversion in the hands of the dissident members of society, as it has been a tool of socialisation in the hands of those who would maintain the status quo; hence the suspicion with which it is often regarded by those in authority. According to Walsh, the vices that are condemned within the fairy tales are themselves attractive, and make the tales that contain them

attractive, precisely because of the “salacious quality of their ‘badness’” (Walsh, 1987, 36). Fairy tales, as a result of this quality, were “powerfully attractive” to Victorian writers who, according to Walsh, were “searching for ways to displace the more frightening aspects of female sexuality” and found the genre, that “by nature explores the extreme limits of human behaviour”, an ideal place in which to deal with ‘deviant’ femininity (Walsh, 1987: 36).

It is interesting that, although Macdonald’s work indicated his insurrection against traditional Victorian relationships, his writing for children was very popular during his lifetime. Like Evelyn Sharp, MacDonald believed that someone could only achieve self-development as a unique person through transgressing accepted conventions and rebelling against societal restrictions (Zipes, 1987: 176). The fully developed person was, according to MacDonald, an equal coalition of male and female qualities (Zipes, 1987: 176).

‘Little Daylight’ was written in 1867, and is both an amusing play on the ‘Sleeping Beauty’ motif and an interesting and challenging examination of male-female relationships. A number of fairy tales ostensibly directed at children were permeated with rather adult debates regarding sexuality. The surfacing of adult elements within children’s literature, especially the literary fairy tale, was the result of a tendency within Victorian publishing to “blur” the “distinction” between adult and children’s literature from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards (Walsh, 1987: 21). When adult literature and children’s literary fairy tale intermingled, the resulting fairy tale often “refracted through its fantastic prism a whole spectrum of Victorian attitudes towards women and sexual relationships” (Walsh, 1987: 32).

The beginning of the tale is set in a palace situated next to a wood. Forests are places not yet overrun by civilised society; especially in fairy tale, the forest is a place where nature, and all that is wild, reigns. While part of the forest near the palace is “kept very trim and nice, and ... free of brushwood for a long way in” the forest is by no means completely tamed and “by degrees it got wild, and it grew wilder, and wilder, and wilder, until some said wild beasts at last did what they liked in it” (MacDonald, 1979: 205). While the forest shelters all wildness, civilised society lives happily in and around the castle, where a baby princess eventually arrives. MacDonald satirises the Victorian squeamishness and

embarrassment about both the birthing process and what brought about such an event. The narrator dryly notes that the princess, little Daylight, “made her appearance from somewhere - nobody could tell where” (MacDonald, 1979: 205).

Just as in the Sleeping Beauty tales of Perrault and the brothers Grimm, the royal couple invite a number of fairies to bless the young princess on the occasion of her christening, and, just as in the older fairy tales, an excluded and aggrieved evil fairy/witch comes to cause mischief. In this particular tale, the aggrieved witch, instead of condemning the young princess to an early death, instead declares that she will sleep all day. The other fairies, however, have planned for the witch’s mischief and have kept one member of the group hidden in order that she may undo the damage caused by the unwanted witch. The following scene is a wonderful send-up of fairy tale conventions and ‘protocol’ that occurs when the fairies encounter the witch:

“And little daylight it shall be,” cried the fairy, in the tone of a dry axle, “and little good shall any of her gifts do her. For I bestow upon her the gift of sleeping all day long, whether she will or not. Ha, ha! He, he! Hi, hi!”

Then out started the sixth fairy, who, of course, the others had arranged should come after the wicked one, in order to undo as much as she might:

“If she sleep all day,” she said mournfully, “she shall, at least wake all night.”

“You spoke before I had done.” said the wicked fairy. That’s against the law. It gives me another chance.”

“I beg your pardon,” said all the fairies together.

“She did. I hadn’t done laughing,” said the crone. “I had only got to Hi, hi! And I had to go through Ho, ho! And Hu, hu! So I decree that if she wakes all night she shall wax and wane with its mistress the moon. And what that may mean I hope her royal parents will live to see. Ho, ho! Hu, hu!”

Then out stepped another fairy, for they had been wise enough to keep two in reserve, because every fairy knew the trick of one.

“Until,” said the seventh fairy, “a prince comes who shall kiss her without knowing it.”

The wicked fairy made a horrid noise like an angry cat, and hobbled away. She could not pretend that she had not finished her speech this time, for

she had laughed Ho, ho! And Hu, hu! (MacDonald, 1979: 208)

Macdonald plays with fairy tale convention in this scene, and sends up the formulaic meeting between the good and bad godmothers of the 'Sleeping Beauty' motif that would have been readily recognised by Victorian readers by the mid nineteenth century. The writer turns the meeting into a childish game, the 'rules' of which the fairies strictly abide by. Unable to finish her standard, set monologue, the 'bad' fairy, as seen above, demands another chance just as if she were a child and so initially outwits the good fairies. MacDonald's satirical take on the discourse between the fairies could also be read as a mockery of the set, formulaic Victorian conventions of 'politeness' that members of society adhered to so strictly in the nineteenth century.

True to the evil fairy's word, little Daylight sleeps all day and wakes only at night time. Exquisitely beautiful and good-humoured, she becomes a favourite in the palace as she grows older, but she experiences a strange transformation every month. For, as the moon wanes, so does little Daylight, who turns into a decrepit old woman and appears to be barely alive. This transformation into an "old woman exhausted with suffering" is "the more painful" because her appearance is "unnatural" - while her hair and eyes remain unchanged her skin and the rest of her body appear to decay (MacDonald, 1979: 210)

As the new moon reappears, however, Daylight's beauty and youth return. Her connection with the moon is strong, and her love for it means that she spends as much time as she can in the open. The tale also mentions her tendency to wander further and further into the forest as her transformation takes place, thus indicating a tendency to distance herself from civilisation at this time, foregoing society for the wild as she waits for a prince to disenchant her by kissing her "without knowing it".

Macdonald's work was dominated by symbolism, and it can safely be assumed that the princess's transformation is not without meaning; it just remains to be discovered exactly what her transformation indicates. When looked at from the point of view of two different characters, differing implications come to light. In MacDonald's mysticism, the moon is clearly connected with the female, as can be seen in another of his tales, 'The History of Photogen and Nycteris' a tale about a day-boy and a night-girl. This connection is not unique to MacDonald, either. Artemis/Diana, the virgin goddess who was paradoxically

worshipped as a goddess of fertility, has been associated with the moon since early times. It could quite easily be that Daylight's connection with the moon is a symbol of her virginity. As a young, beautiful virginal girl, Daylight fulfils the societal convention of the female as angel. However, as the moon grows old, and eventually dies, little Daylight becomes the feared and repulsive hag - the opposite equal of the angelic young virgin. Related to the cycle of the moon, the princess's repulsive existence during certain times of the month could also be related to her menstrual cycle. The "menstrual flow" was held to be "abhorrent by Victorian culture", suggesting that "any sexual maturation [was] "perceived essentially as a non-sensual, static condition" (Walsh, 1987: 34).

Although society values the virgin, it is only as long as she possesses the potential to be 'taken'. As Gilbert and Gubar put it,

Even while the angel virgin's snowy whiteness symbolizes her purity, however, her inhuman superiority to "beastly" men, it also hints tantalizingly at her female vulnerability. In its absence of colour, her childish [metaphorical] white dress is a blank page that asks to be written on just as her virginity asks to be "taken," "despoiled," "deflowered." Thus her [whiteness] implies that she exists only and completely for the man [who will write on it]. (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984: 616)

When the moon is in her prime, this is little Daylight's role within society. However, as the moon ages, her value within society diminishes and she seeks refuge in the wild, away from civilisation. When one understands how, according to this perception of the female, women of the time were trapped within a fundamentally contradictory system that defined a woman's value, it is easy to see why Little Daylight flees society. For, virginity was only regarded as attractive in the young female body (de Beauvoir, in Gilbert and Gubar, 1984: 132). If a woman retained her virginity for too long, "its mystery" was no longer alluring but "disturbing" (de Beauvoir, in Gilbert and Gubar, 1984: 132). When no longer a young woman, the virgin's body was perceived to be "cursed" as an "object for no subject", a body that "no man's desire had made desirable" (de Beauvoir, in Gilbert and Gubar, 1984: 132). A female body that refuses to be possessed within the "world of men" was regarded as something abnormal and thus grotesque and "disturbing" (de Beauvoir, in Gilbert and Gubar, 1984: 132).

However, should a woman, once sexually mature (indicated by her menstrual bleeding) choose not to withhold herself from sexual experience, she loses her value, anyway. It is precisely this feared transformation that makes the disenchantment of little Daylight appear to be such an impossible occurrence, even though a prince does encounter and fall in love with her. For, to be released from the curse, she needs to be kissed by a prince when she is in her societally unacceptable form, when he does not know her as a young, virginal beauty, but rather as either an offensive Old Maid, or the sexual and maternal figure that was so feared by Victorian men.

The prince who eventually wanders his way into little Daylight's life, however, proves to be the undoing of the wicked fairy's enchantment as, confronting the patriarchal anxiety over the maternal female figure, he frees himself to have a meaningful relationship with a woman. This prince, in an interesting bit of intertextuality within the tale, is fleeing his country that is experiencing something much like the French Revolution. (Its inclusion in the tale must reflect the fact that this violent historical event was still fairly fresh in the minds of the Victorians.) Having observed the princess at the "zenith of her loveliness", the prince falls in love with her but, due to obstacles that the wicked fairy places in his path, he is unable to meet with her again after full moon until the time of her transformation takes place. Stumbling by accident upon her frail, unrecognisable form, he believes her to be a dying old woman. Rather than leave her out in the forest, the young prince tries to carry the 'old' woman back to the princess's house where he hopes that they will be able to help her. Rather than be repulsed by her hag-like appearance, her condition fills him with such compassion that, significantly calling her "mother", and thus encountering her as the sexually active maternal figure, he kisses her on the mouth. At this, the enchantment is undone, and he discovers with awe that the old hag is in fact the beautiful Daylight. Having overcome patriarchy's fear and revulsion of the Old Maid, while paradoxically defeating his anxiety over the maternal figure, the prince has both freed the princess from her imprisonment within societal convention, and earned the right to be loved by her. Freed from her enchantment, she chooses to engage with him. "You kissed me when I was an old woman: There! I kiss you when I am a young princess," murmurs Daylight, thus ending the tale on a note that suggests ever so slightly, the sensuality that the two young people will enjoy now that they have overcome societal restrictions regarding female sexuality.

### The 'New Woman': Challenging Victorian gender stereotypes

During the nineteenth century, many women began to rebel against the lot accorded to them by society and the 'New Woman' was born (Caine, 1992: 239). A growing number of women began to brave the stigma attached to working for a living and sought employment out of the home. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, employment and academic opportunities open to women began to expand (Caine, 1992: 239). Groups of women, like the suffragists, began to demand that women be accorded the vote, as well as other basic rights that were given exclusively to men and by the end of the nineteenth century, women were gradually gaining more public power (Caine, 1992: 239). The Victorian ideals regarding beauty and ladylike behaviour were also placed under great scrutiny, and women began to demand greater control regarding their bodies with regard to contraception and childbearing. This subversion caused a great deal of anxiety amongst many opponents of the struggle for women's rights who believed that if women ceased to exist merely within the domestic arena, they would not fulfil their primary role as moral guardians of the home (Caine, 1992: 44 & 50). The family, and thus the state, would be irrevocably damaged by feminism. Queen Victoria, despite being a woman of great power herself, and an advocate for the use of chloroform during childbirth, referred to feminism as "this mad wicked folly of Women's Rights" (Perry, 1997: 435). Another highly influential, yet very conservative woman, Mary Kingsley, "infuriated" by being labelled as a 'New Woman' wrote to the editor of the paper that referred to her as such, "I did not do anything without the assistance of the superior sex" (Kingsley, in Birkett, 1990: 175). Despite such negative responses by society and many women who held power through the patriarchal structures of Victorian England, the beginnings of feminism took root and slowly began to grow at the end of the nineteenth century.

Many feminist concerns are reflected in the fairy tales written by women during this period. An obvious example of such writing is Mary de Morgan's 'A Toy Princess' (1877). The tale exposes and condemns society's tendency to reduce women to mere dolls, and is about a fairy godmother who rescues her unhappy charge from a repressive and claustrophobic court, leaving an enchanted doll in her place. This toy princess says nothing other than "If you please," "No, thank you," "Certainly," and "Just so." (De Morgan, in Laurie, 1993: 111). The doll princess becomes so popular at court that, when

at the end of the tale the King and his advisors are asked to choose between the real princess and the doll, they choose the lifeless and submissive piece of machinery over the vibrant princess. Dismissing them as a “pack of sillies and idiots,” the fairy godmother whisks her goddaughter away to lead a much happier life with the man of her choice. Other tales were not as explicit in their rejection of old gender roles, but still managed to question and rework the female fairy tale character to become a means to challenge societal images and expectations of women. Juliana Ewing and Evelyn Sharp are two such writers.

Juliana Ewing was one of the first authors to write fairy tales and other literature for the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge that was aimed at middle class children. Unlike other writers, including her mother, Mrs Gatty, whose target audiences were generally children of the working-class, Ewing wrote for the “upper class nursery and school room”. Previously, writers had tailored their stories to appeal to the religious leaders and Sunday School authorities, who believed that stories for the children belonging to the working class should confine themselves to instructing the country’s future factory workers in a manner that would ensure not only their religious salvation, but also their acquiescence to Victorian societal structures and values in the years to come. Their writing was neither subtle nor ever really humorous. Ewing’s work, on the other hand, although it often gives instructions on moral issues, does so with a great deal of humour. Her main aim was to write “on behalf of children” and she “did not seek to impose adult authoritarian values on them” (Zipes, 1987: 127). Although her fairy tales contain very little magic as such, they deal with ogres and other folkloric characters and with unusual transformations. She had very definite opinions regarding the genre; according to her, the important elements of fairy tales were universal and

...to use [them] ...does not lay the teller of fairy tales open to the charge of plagiarism. Such as the idea of the weak outwitting the strong; the failure of man to choose wisely when he may have his wish; or the desire of the sprites to exchange their careless and unfettered existence for the pains and penalties of humanity, if they may thereby share in the hopes of the human soul. Secondly...in these household stories (the models for which were originally oral tradition) the thing most to be avoided is a discursive or descriptive style of writing. Brevity and epigram must ever be the soul of their wit, and they should be written as tales that are told. (Ewing, quoted in Zipes, 1987: 128).

Her tale 'Good Luck is Better than Gold' seeks to warn its readers about seeking easy wealth rather than accepting good fortune that manifests itself in ways other than monetary gain. In 'The Ogre Courting', she ventures out of the moral parameters of the earlier children's fairy tale to draw an amusing portrait of society and offers an alternative to the helpless figure of the damsel in distress. Managing Molly is created and, through the capable and effective way in which she triumphs over a threatening ogre, throws up questions over the role of women in the traditional fairy tale.

'The Ogre Courting' is set in a fairy-tale past when "ogres were still the terror of certain districts" (Ewing, 1987: 129). One particular ogre has held a particular neighbourhood to ransom for a considerable amount of time, becoming very wealthy in the process. What the inhabitants of the district dislike the most about him, however, is the lack of respect for Victorian propriety that he demonstrates by the fact that "he would keep getting married" (Ewing, 1987: 130). His wives never live long after marrying him and although rumours abound as to their fate, there is no doubt that their untimely deaths are a direct result of being married to such an abusive creature:

Some said he ate his wives; some said he tormented, and others, that he merely worked them to death. (Ewing, 1987: 129)

Having just lost his twenty-fourth wife, the ogre begins to look for a new one and as his requirements for all his wives are that they be small and excellent housekeepers, all the short women in the area live in "constant fear and dread" (Ewing, 1987: 129). His rather unusual preference for short wives indicates a need to dominate - a trait commonly found in people guilty of abuse. When examined in the light of the archetypal Victorian female, the unequal relationship between the powerful ogre and the diminutive women he chooses as his wives reads as a comment on the relationship between male and female in Victorian society. Victorian women were relatively powerless within society. All women were denied the right to vote, in the case of separation and divorce they were refused custody of their children and even, until 1851, married women had no control over their own land and inheritance. As, according to the Census of 1851, there were "more than half a million 'surplus' women in England, a significant proportion of them from the middle classes," to remain a spinster was a common, but not desirable, option (Abbott, 1993: 119). Even

though they retained control of their own possessions (if they were fortunate enough to be part of the minority that received an inheritance) they were often reliant upon the charity and the whim of resentful relatives and were extremely vulnerable. At the beginning of the tale, Managing Molly is in the vulnerable position of spinsterhood because her widowed father is poor and unable to provide her with a dowry. The shortest person in the district and a renowned housekeeper, she has caught the ogre's eye and he approaches her father in order to arrange his twenty-fifth wedding. While everyone pities Molly, as many people pitied Victorian spinsters, she does not "distress herself at the news" (Ewing, 1987: 130). Unbeknown to the ogre, he has set his sights on a woman small in stature and without power within Victorian society, but with a mighty spirit. She is not yet ready to resign herself to an abusive marriage and sets about finding a way to save herself from her apparent fate.

In a scene in which Ewing subtly makes fun of the ideal of the frugal housewife, Molly tricks the ogre into thinking that she can make rats into a delicious stew and rotten apples into fine wine. The ogre is most impressed and, considering her remarkably frugal and an excellent housewife, is even more determined to have her as his wife. "Now in haste to conclude the match" he asks Molly's father what dowry he intends to give with his daughter (Ewing, 1987: 130). The negotiation that ensues between Molly's father and the ogre reflects the concept of women as commodities as the two patriarchal figures debate Molly's financial worth. The woman in the tale is clearly regarded as an item for consumption as, at one point the ogre threatens to take her by force and carry her off. Molly's engagement to the ogre is a result of a business transaction between the two male figures and she only gets to make her own demands (for a feather bed and a house) once the patriarchal 'deal' has been made. The ogre agrees and builds the house with his own hands, labouring long and hard until winter. When he sets about making Molly's feather bed, the wily woman, playing on the description of a snowstorm as "the old woman plucking her geese", demands that he fill it with the "feathers" that fall from the sky. The ogre fills the bed with great difficulty, as the snow flakes keep melting but is eventually successful. At this point Molly demands that he sleep overnight in the bed to ensure that it is worthy. The night the ogre spends in the bed is so uncomfortable that, not only does he call off his marriage to Molly for fear of having to spend the rest of his married life in discomfort, but his health is permanently affected and he is never as powerful as he was

before. It is significant that the ogre loses his strength by sleeping in Molly's bed of snow. As illustrated in the earlier examination of the Grimms' 'Little Snow White', the "Victorian iconography of female whiteness is...most obviously related to the Victorian ideal of feminine purity" (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984: 615). While this conception of the snowy virgin is left unchallenged in the fairy tale collection of the German brothers, especially in the story of Little Snow White, 'The Ogre Courting', contains a female character that reworks the associations of the snowy female in order to protect and empower herself. In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar examine some of the ways in which nineteenth century women overcame the restrictions placed on them by the Victorian ideal of the feminine.

How can a woman transcend the weakness implicit in such whiteness? As many myths and tales (including a number of Victorian novels) make clear, one way is through a further deployment of the complex symbolism of whiteness itself. For, although in one sense whiteness implies an invitation, in another, it suggests a refusal, just as passivity connotes both compliance and resistance. Snow may be vulnerable to the sun but it is also a denial of heat, and the word *virginity*, because its root associates it with the word *vir*, meaning manliness or power, images a kind of self-enclosing armour, as the mythic moon-white figure of Diana the huntress tells us. For such a snow maiden, virginity, signifying power instead of weakness, is not a gift she gives her groom but a boon she grants to herself: the boon of androgynous wholeness, autonomy, self-sufficiency (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984: 616-17).

Molly's virginal snow bed is the weapon with which she ultimately defeats the ogre and it is the passive resistance of her virginity that depletes the ogre's masculine strength. Before he is allowed to disappear into obscurity, however, Molly requires that he compensate her for her 'disappointment' and so ends up as a very wealthy woman who, "being now well dowered" receives many offers of marriage and so mates "to her mind" (Ewing, 1987: 133). She thus turns the shame of a broken engagement, an event that usually meant ostracism and the threat of permanent spinsterhood to a young woman, to her advantage.

Ewing's tale is one that recounts the well-known theme of the powerless overcoming the powerful. It can also be read as a comment upon the unequal power relationship between men and women in Victorian society, in a time when such power discrepancies were

starting to be questioned. 'The Ogre Courting' does not just comment on society; as a reflection of the "climate that allowed a crucial measure of emancipation for women", it also offers an alternative, self-assertive existence for the otherwise self-sacrificing and disempowered female of earlier Victorian society (Warner, 1995: 267). The tale seems to advise female members of society to subvert the male defined ideas of female sexuality in Victorian society to work in their favour rather than merely submit.

### **Role Reversal: Evelyn Sharp's 'The Spell of the Magician's Daughter'**

Evelyn Sharp wrote 'The Spell of the Magician's Daughter' in 1902, one year after Queen Victoria died. Like many middle class women near the end of the Century, Sharp left home to find work as a private tutor, later in her life she worked as a reporter. She was a pacifist and a suffragette; as a leader in the Women's Social and Political Union, she was imprisoned for taking part in suffragette demonstrations (Zipes, 1987: 359). As Jack Zipes points out, although her earlier writing was not as overtly political as it was to become in later years, her tales advocate "rebellion against accepted notions of behaviour and propriety", as a means to gain "greater self-awareness". 'The Spell of the Magician's Daughter', considered to be one of her best tales, is clearly influenced by her feminist beliefs (Zipes, 2000: 464).

Firefly is the youngest of three sisters who live in a forest with their magician father. Along with her feminist and pacifist concerns, Sharp was also disturbed by the effect that the industrial revolution had on society (Zipes, 1987: 359). She chooses to place the magician's family in the middle of a forest, thus far untouched by industrialisation. Unlike many middle class fathers, the magician does not have to spend his days contributing to the industrial society that England has become. Instead, he spends his days "teaching his daughters to be witches" (Sharp, 1987: 361). This is a most unusual occupation for a man. Generally, when girls received education at all, it was at the hands of other women. In fact, it was "argued" by "manuals ... that proliferated from the 1880's" that "the rearing of her children was an intelligent woman's true vocation" (Abbott, 1993: 105). It is also interesting that the father is teaching them to be *witches*. When encountered in fairy tales, witches are usually strong, but evil, women and are inevitably punished in some way for their social deviance. The witch is the opposite of the 'Angel in the House' that is so

revered by Victorian society. Gilbert and Gubar speak of the “angel’s necessary opposite and double, the monster in the house” and describe the witch as a “subversive feminine symbol” that “stands outside of the sphere of culture’s hegemony” (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984: 19). It is thus most unusual for a man not only to encourage but also to actively instruct his female daughters to grow into strong, subversive women (witches) when society requires passive angels. Her subversive female power nurtured by their father in the forest, Firefly grows to become an independent and headstrong young girl. Unlike many women before the end of the nineteenth century, she and her sisters expect that they will “do something” when they grow up, rather than languish as angels in their houses (Sharp, 1987: 361). Unsure that she wants to become a witch, Firefly, to the amusement of her sisters, announces that, if she has to do something, she will marry a prince (in other words, climb a few rungs up the social ladder). Her sisters tease her about her ‘career choice’ and, indirectly, her desire for more social status. Although Sharp obviously challenges conventional roles accorded women in fairy tales and society in ‘The Spell of the Magician’s Daughter’, it is significant that Firefly defines herself and her power by her father. When she does finally meet a young prince, albeit unknowingly, she uses her father’s magical status in order to combat his disdain for her as a young girl. In doing so, she becomes embroiled in rescuing the prince’s country from a giant that consumes massive amounts of fruit.

‘The Spell of the Magician’s Daughter’ was written during a time of great anxiety regarding the British Empire. In 1902 the Anglo-Boer War, which Britain had entered into in 1899 in the confident belief that it would be won “by Christmas”, drew to a slow and a bitterly won end. Elsewhere, the British Empire was beginning to crumble and English confidence in the right of the British to colonise and control various other parts of the world was beginning to wane. The giant that has taken up residence in the boy’s country could quite easily represent the ageing, high maintenance giant of the British Empire as he “sits in his castle on the top of the biggest hill in the kingdom [while] every orchard in the place is stripped in order to give him enough to eat” (Sharp, 1987: 363). The insatiable giant is also remarkably similar to the insatiable consumer society that sprang up during the Victorian era as a result of the industrial revolution. As the people of the giant-infested country go to extremes in order to satisfy the invader by pulling down all their houses and turning their streets into orchards and gardens, a large number of sacrifices were made in

order to satisfy the giant consumer society of England. These sacrifices were usually to the detriment of the impoverished working classes.

Also connected with the industrialisation of England was the commercialisation of farming. While farming up until the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries had generally been subsistent, the introduction of machinery and better farming methods meant that farming for commercial purposes became a profitable pursuit. Commercialised farming was not profitable for all, however, and large numbers of country dwellers were forced to move to the city as previously public areas of land were privatised. Like factory workers, agricultural labourers, too, became alienated from their work. Like those who dwell in the country occupied by the giant are beheaded the minute they are found “swallowing as much as a red currant”, Victorian farm labourers did not enjoy the fruits of their labour but grew food and farmed other forms of produce which they did not eat (Sharp, 1987: 363).

The only way to get rid of the enormous, politely threatening giant is by making him laugh at a joke, a difficult task as he is a melancholy creature and generally gets depressed when told jokes. Unwilling to expose her ignorance to the arrogant young prince when he asks her to conjure up a joke, Firefly decides to invent her own spell. As Gilbert and Gubar has illustrated so well, in the nineteenth century, and for a number of centuries preceding it, creativity was generally considered as being a male prerogative. Gerard Manley Hopkins, in a letter to R. W. Dixon, writes, “The male quality is the creative gift.” (Hopkins, quoted in Gilbert and Gubar, 1984: 3). This is not so in ‘The spell of the Magician’s Daughter’, where Firefly displays extraordinary creativity in creating “her very first spell” (Sharp, 1987: 30). Having sent the boy to find the “nicest, greenest, and wisest dragon in the world” and “the dwarf who has been trying all his life to make a noise in the world”, Firefly returns home to find out from her father that the boy is in fact a prince. She is anxious about sending the prince off on what she believes might be a false trail, and so confesses to her father, who tells her that she has created a real spell because she “took it straight from [her] head and [her] heart and wove it round the King’s son” (Sharp, 1987: 365). It is interesting that Firefly’s power comes from a combination of her heart *and* her head. Traditionally, the intellectual (the mind/head) has been considered a male domain, while the world of emotion (the heart) has been accorded to the female. Here, however, Firefly is able to work with both elements.

In order to bring the prince into contact with her creations more quickly, Firefly needs to find them first. She decides to take up the challenge, and fills the role usually allocated to male fairy tale characters by setting off on an adventure quest. Rather than prevent her from setting off on her quest, the magician happily waves her off, only offering to provide her with some spells. This is unusual behaviour for a Victorian father as women, “reared for lives of privacy, reticence ... [and] domesticity”, were generally confined to the domestic domain by patriarchal society’s conception of the ‘angel in the house’. Firefly is determined to be self-sufficient, however, and progresses empty-handed on her way while her sisters remain at home.

On her way, she encounters an eagle that threatens to eat her. Unlike many other female fairy tale characters, Firefly does not require rescuing, and deals quite capably with the dangerous situation. While the quality of truthfulness was emphasised in most Victorian writing, and lying was regarded as a terrible vice, Sharp creates a young character who feels no compulsion about lying to extricate herself from an unpleasant situation and to get what she wants. She pretends to be a powerful witch and tricks the eagle into carrying her to a green dragon. Once she has met the dragon, she tricks a whale into carrying her to the dwarf. Both these creatures comment on how she has grown throughout the long trip with each of them. Later on, when she meets the prince again, she measures herself against him and finds that she has indeed grown. The growing female body is often regarded with a large amount of anxiety, especially by women, within a society that insists upon women remaining mentally and physically childlike and frail. Gilbert and Gubar refer to the “sexual nausea” that “helps to explain why so many women for so long expressed loathing of (or at least anxiety about) their own, inexorably female bodies” (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984: 34). Firefly, however, feels no such anxiety and is pleased at how much she has matured. She finds out just how much she has grown when she measures herself against the matured prince and finds herself almost equal to him in stature. Rather than merely regarding herself as diminutive and powerless compared to the male figure of the story, Firefly actively compares herself favourably to the prince. The behaviour of Sharp’s female character would not have been approved of by another female writer of the time, Charlotte Yonge, who claimed that:

I have no hesitation in declaring my full belief in the inferiority of woman, nor that she brought it upon herself [by eating the forbidden fruit] (Yonge, in Bratton, 1981: 181)

Having eventually found her creations and instructed them to help the prince, Firefly ends up in the prince's country. The country is described as a pastoral paradise, where nature, rather than industry rules:

All round her [Firefly] stretched the most beautiful country she had ever seen, for there were no crowded streets in it, and no houses, and nothing to make it sad or ugly or dull; it was covered, instead, with the most charming orchards and the most delightful fruit gardens; and all the people in the kingdom lived in the open air, because there was nowhere else to live; and all the children played under the fruit trees; and everyone was happy and gay from morning till night. (Sharp, 1987: 370)

However, despite its beauty and its utopian lack of the industrial ugliness that consumed most of industrial Victorian England, the prince's country is still occupied by the giant. When Firefly eventually meets up with him as he arrives back in his country, the prince has still not found a joke, and she is forced to confess that she, in fact, made the spell up. At her confession, the prince laughs, but he does not do so alone. The giant, too, finds her story very funny, and his laughter spells the end of the country's invasion. It appears that Firefly's spell was, in fact, a legitimate one. The prince declares her to be a real witch and marries her - again, this is an interesting reaction for a male character to have when confronted by the subversive female/witch. It is also interesting that Firefly does not relinquish her witch-like powers (often connected with the sexually assertive female) after her marriage, either:

So the magician's youngest daughter did marry the King's son, when she grew up. But there is no doubt that she also became a witch, for to this day she can do what she likes with the King's son. (Sharp 1987: 372)

The strong witch woman, Firefly, is encouraged and nurtured in her subversion by her father and husband, traditionally the two male entities that usually suppress the witch/monster in an attempt to create the favoured, passive angel in the house.

### Urban Victorian Life: science, technology and class in Edith Nesbit's fairy tales

Unlike Sharp's *Firefly*, Edith Nesbit remained tied to the domestic sphere for most of her life. Despite being confined to the house in order to care for her invalid husband, however, her lively interest in the world around her informs many of her tales. Although she dreamt of becoming a renowned and admirable poet, she was forced to abandon this ideal when, shortly after she got married at age twenty-two, she was forced to support both her child and her invalid husband. At a time when it was still difficult for women to find respectable and profitable employment, she resorted, as did so many Victorian women in similar situations, to making and selling cards and fans (Abbott, 1993: 126). Fortunately, Nesbit possessed some literary talent, and she was able to supplement this income by reading her poetry at recitals and writing, firstly for adults, and later trying her hand at children's stories (Zipes, 1987: 352).

The main characters of the majority of her tales for children are middle class children. Along with the middle class child character, came the values that had come to be associated with the ideal middle class child: "fairness, loyalty, compassion and self-sacrifice" (Zipes, 1987: 351). These characters and the qualities with which they are well endowed, are easily recognisable in 'The Deliverers of their Country', one of the two tales examined here. The other tale, 'The Charmed Life', deals with the tribulations faced by two young lovers who, it initially appears, have transgressed by falling in love with members of different classes. Although magic is alive and well in Nesbit's tales, she also incorporates a great deal of her 'modern' society in the tale. The integration between the 'old' magic of the fairies and the 'new' magic of technology and science results in an enchanting and dynamic new fairy tale world, in which Nesbit sets tales that, although sometimes hinting uncomfortably at a lesson, generally provide more entertainment than moralising.

'The Deliverers of their Country' begins with one of the young protagonists, Effie, "getting something in her eye" and having to go to her father, a doctor, for help. Her father, having retrieved the irritation from her, comments that what he has retrieved is "very curious". Effie immediately takes an interest in what he is talking about because he has never said anything like that about "anything that she had any share in" (Nesbit,

1975:59). Effie's father appears to have a rather uncharitable view of, and dismissive approach to, his children and perceives her "getting something in her eye" as "rather tiresome and naughty". This is recounted in a very matter of fact way and tends to support the view that Victorians shared Effie's father's perceptions of children. Despite this fairly intolerant view of children, childhood came into its own as a recognisably different life-stage in the nineteenth century, and the child oriented industry grew enormously.

The thing that he has retrieved from her eye warrants his attention, however, and he examines it under his microscope. The Victorian obsession with the observation and classification of species is clearly evident throughout the tale. The doctor mutters knowledgeably to himself about the creature under his microscope, and is delighted to announce that it is a "new specimen, undoubtedly" (Nesbit, 1975: 60). He dispatches Effie to call "the professor". The professor (what he is a professor of remains unknown) and the doctor quarrel "very happily all afternoon about the name and the family of the thing that had come out of Effie's eye" (Nesbit, 1975: 60). An active interest and participation in the field of science was not only restricted to 'scientists' in Victorian times. The field of science was not yet developed enough to the point of specialisation that it is today, and many laymen were quite capable of keeping up with the latest scientific discoveries and events.

The doctor's specimen is not the only one of its kind, however, and it transpires that dragons have invaded the country. In an era of rationality and scientific knowledge, the fairy tale elements of the situation are initially denied by the adult world.

The paper would not call them dragons, because of course, no one believes in dragons nowadays - and at any rate the papers were not going to be so silly as to believe in fairy stories (Nesbit, 1975: 61)

Eventually, after the editor of one of the newspapers that is so determinedly refusing to believe in dragons, is "picked up and carried away by a large one," they acknowledge the magical quality of the infestation and print stories about the "Alarming Plague of Dragons" (Nesbit, 1975: 61). The mass media was born in the nineteenth century, and the effect that it had on national belief and knowledge is clear in the manner in which the "winged lizards" only become dragons when named as such by the newspapers.

Faced with a fairy tale dilemma, the modern society is at a loss about how to deal with it. While “[O]f course the Country Council and the police did everything that could be done” they are unsuccessful (Nesbit, 1975: 62). Their attempt to control the situation is, however, indicative of the bureaucracy that grew up during the nineteenth century. The Health of Towns Committee (1840), the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population Report (1842), the Smoke Abatement Committee (1843), the Royal Commission on Health of Towns (1844), the Public Health Act (1848), the Draining and Sewerage of Towns Report and the Cholera Report (1854) are all examples of the increasing interest in the sanitation and health of town and city occupants (Young, 1953: 191, 193 & 195). During the Victorian era the need for official bodies to deal with sanitation and other issues facing newly industrialised cities became evident (Hill, 1978: 184-85 & 193). Towns and cities were gradually empowered with “real municipal self-government” and were able to administer public services more effectively (Hill, 1978: 184-85 & 194). In ‘The Deliverers of their Country,’ the City Council takes responsibility for ensuring that the rotting corpses of dead dragons are cremated. This attempt by bureaucracy to curtail the emergency is, however, unsuccessful. Even the traditional method of dealing with dragons (offering the hand of the princess to the person who kills the beast) is impractical because there are far more dragons than princesses available.

The commercially dominated society in which the children live is indicated by the way in which, during the countrywide emergency, the dragon infestation is regarded as the creation of a new market, and the shops suddenly become “full of patent dragon poison and anti-dragon soap and dragon-proof curtains for the windows” (Nesbit, 1975: 63). Forced to live a nocturnal lifestyle because it is too dangerous to go outside during the dragon plagued daytime, Effie and her brother, Harry, quickly grow bored and frustrated, and determine to sneak out of the house in order to find a way to rescue the country. Their rescue plan involves waking St George, the dragon slayer, because he “was the only person in his town who knew how to manage dragons” (Nesbit, 1975: 64). According to Harry, St George “is a real person” and thus capable of helping them (Nesbit, 1975: 64). According to Harry, “the people in the fairy tales don’t count,” a highly ironic statement when one considers that he, himself, is a fairy tale character (Nesbit, 1975: 64). In the same manner that Harry dismisses fairy tales, adults have rejected St George as a real

character. Because Effie and Harry believe in St George, they are in a position to ‘wake him’ and ask for his help. Much to Harry’s discomfit, Effie is the one who first realises where they can find the ‘sleeping’ hero - in St George’s Church. Like the prince of Evelyn Sharp’s tale, Harry reveals a prejudice towards girls, claiming that Effie has “a little sense sometimes, for a girl” (Nesbit, 1975: 64). Having restored his feeling of masculine self-worth by hiding behind negative female stereotypes, Harry is able to take control of the mission once again. Later that afternoon, they sneak out of the house, Effie with a dragon-proof shawl and Harry besmeared with patent dragon poison, and set off to find St George.

Although Harry dismisses fairy tale characters as unimportant, the behaviour of the two children is greatly influenced by fantasy. When Effie expresses her fear, Harry admonishes her to remember the “Seven Champions and all the princes. People who are going to be their country’s deliverers never scream and say they want to go home” (Nesbit, 1975: 64). When they find St George, they are initially unable to wake him. The two children react differently to the sleeping hero, the one in a traditionally masculine way, the other in a typically Victorian feminine way. While Harry speaks to St George, then shouts to him and finally shakes him by his marble shoulders, Effie bursts into tears, puts her arms around the hero’s neck, kisses his face and begs him to help them. At Effie’s entreaties, St George wakes up, but he is unable to help them because “things have changed” since his time, and there are too many dragons for him to fight. “Everything is done by machinery now,” he explains, and suggests that they look for a modern solution to a modern dilemma. When hearing that their weather has been unusually hot and dry, he tells them to “find the taps” because “dragons can’t stand wet and cold” (Nesbit, 1975: 66-7). St George falls asleep before he can tell them where to find the taps, and the children are faced with the task of discovering the whereabouts of the bathroom accessories on their own. Before they prepare to leave the sleeping hero, however, they display the self-sacrificing qualities of so many of Nesbit’s characters by removing their dragon proof gear and placing it on St George in order to protect him from “dragons the size that eat champions” (Nesbit, 1975: 67). As a result of this selfless act, one of the dragons that eat children captures them (Nesbit, 1975: 67). It is interesting that, despite all of Harry’s apparent bravery, it is Effie who rescues them from the situation by cutting through her dress sash and assisting Harry in the simple task of climbing out of his jacket. Through their self-sacrifice, the children have been brought right to the place they set out to look

for, as the dragon has unintentionally brought them to the cave containing “the taps” that control the weather in England.

In an amusing scene in which nature is ‘scientised’, the children manage to control the elements. On discovering that the sunshine tap is stuck, they soon set the country to rights by making it rain, snow and hail all over the country, putting out the fires within the dragons and thus killing them. Returning home in excitement, they discover that, once they have dried off from the rain, their countrymen have immediately forgotten about the dragons in their excitement over the latest advance in technology, in the form of “a new invention for toasting muffins by electricity” (Nesbit, 1975: 73). In his ‘Industrial culture and the Victorian novel’, Joseph Childers mentions the “grand *melange* of *things* that seemed to flow unchecked out of British factories” and the “vast array of goods and materials” produced during the Victorian period (Childers, in David, 2001: 77). The fairy tale’s adult character’s fascination with the new toaster reflects the obsession that Victorians had for ‘things’, especially new and unusual things to do with technology.

Rather than be grateful for his children’s safe return and the dragons’ defeat at their hands, their father is annoyed that they did not tell him what they meant to do because he “should have liked to have retained a specimen” (Nesbit, 1975: 73). Having thrown away the one he retrieved from Effie’s eye, he “intended to get a more perfect specimen” but he did “not anticipate the immediate extinction of the species” (Nesbit, 1975: 73). After Darwin’s work was published in 1859 and 1871, Victorians became increasingly interested in the concept of the ‘survival of the fittest’. This concern with evolution and extinction is mirrored in the way that, when the two species, human and dragon, clash, it is the humans who survive. Intelligent enough to adapt to the situation and then come up with a solution when their existence is threatened, they are the ones who ultimately survive, whereas the dragons, lazy and unable to adapt when their climate changes, are the victims of “immediate extinction.”

‘The Deliverers of their Country’ not only resonates with the nineteenth century obsession with technology, it also reflects the positivist thinking that held sway in a large part of Victorian society. Emerging in the “postromantic nineteenth-century” Victorian positivism came about as people sought to fill the void that had been left by the “lost

Christian totality” by creating a “saving belief” (Dale, 1989: 5). This system of belief was based on what has been called a “religion of science” – the conviction that all of human life and society could be understood and explained through the application of scientific laws (Dale, 1989: 7). Auguste Comte, one of positivism’s great advocates, believed that the only effective approach to the study of all “human phenomenon”, like history and society, was one based purely on a “scientific method” (Dale, 1989: 52). Positivists regarded this scientific approach to life to be the result of the evolution of the human mind. The third stage of the historical development of the human mind, the scientific approach, was regarded as a split from the misapprehensions brought about by previous ineffective approaches to knowledge (one can assume fairy tales to be included in such an inheritance) as humans began to both understand the world, according to laws that they compiled after careful observation of the practical world, and restructure society according to these laws (Kucich, 2002: 15, 18, 124-5). Positivism’s attempts to take all the mystery and wonder out of nature appear, on the surface, to hold sway in Nesbit’s tale. However, she endows science and technology with such a magical quality of its own, that rather than strip nature of its mystery, the two tools of positivism find themselves endowed with a mysterious quality of their own. ‘The Deliverers of their Country,’ a story that absorbs science and technology into its fantasy world and endows it with the kind of magic that was regarded with such scorn by people such as Comte and Spencer (who regarded science to be the “knowledge of most worth”) is fairy tale’s revenge on positivism (Berry, 1999: 158).

### **The Charmed Life**

‘The Charmed Life’ is less concerned with science, and more concerned with the love affair between a princess and a prince who thinks that he is a liftman. Technology does play a pivotal role in the story about class relations for, not only do the princess and the lift man/prince meet and develop their relationship inside a lift, but the prince also initially becomes a lift man as a result of his father’s obsession with technology. The story opens with a prince “whose father failed in business and lost everything he had in the world - crown, kingdom, money, jewels, and friends” (Nesbit, 1983: 60). The narrator explains that this happened because “he was so fond of machinery that he was always making working models of things he invented, and so had no time to attend to the duties that

Kings are engaged for. So he lost his situation” (Nesbit, 1983: 60). This conception of the monarchy reflects the growing perception of the monarchy as accountable to the public. The French Revolution, although resulting in a short-lived backlash of conservatism across Europe, brought about a widespread re-examination of the role of the monarchy, and Nesbit mentions a “King in French history” who neglected his position, losing his head as a result (Nesbit, 1983: 60). Like all literary fairy tales and many of the tales examined thus far, Nesbit’s story contains literary intertextuality and she also makes references to other historical and cultural events.

The King in Nesbit’s story is a talented inventor, and when he loses his job as King, he is able to set up a business in another country and support his wife and son. The royal family leads a rather unremarkable lifestyle in their new little house. The Queen occupies herself as many well-off middle class Victorian women did. She prunes her geraniums and does “fancy-work” for bazaars. The prince, called Florizel, receives an education at the “Red-Coat School” and the King develops his lift business. During Queen Victoria’s reign, the Royal family gradually assumed the responsibility of the ideal English family (although in reality, it was far from perfect). By Victorian times, the middle class is believed by some scholars to have “compromised” with the upper class, electing to become integrated within the “elite culture” of the aristocracy and “opting for the lifestyles of landed gentlemen” rather than overthrowing the previous ruling class (Seed and Wolff, 1988: 2-4). When imitating the aristocracy, members of the middle class would certainly have looked to the respectable matriarchal figure of Queen Victoria and her family, as an example of the correct upper class family. The inverted stereotype of the Royal family, portrayed as the middle class Victorian family, perhaps indicates the relationship that sprang up between the middle class and the Royal family.

Like many young men, the prince is eventually apprenticed to his father, and learns how to run his father’s business. When he turns twenty-one, he receives the “usual coming-of-age” presents which include the “complete works of Dickens and Thackeray” (Nesbit, 1983: 61). While Alicia’s coming of age is symbolised by her marriage (in ‘The Magic Fishbone’) the prince’s maturation is indicated by an acceptance into the world of literature and the male intellect. Virginia Woolf apparently “mourned” the historical “exclusion” of women from “that weighty male tradition” represented by the work of

“Thackeray and Dickens and Balzac” and it is interesting that two of the three writers that represent the male tradition are included in the prince’s coming of age gifts (Bratton, 1981: 540). It is also characteristic of the different futures accorded to the sexes as they grew into adulthood. Despite his coming of age, the prince still refers to his mother as ‘mamma’ and is told off by the Queen for fidgeting. Even though she treats him like a much younger child, she obviously regards him as mature enough to take control of his own life, for she reveals to him that he has been blessed with a “Charmed Life” and is now responsible for keeping it safe. Having received his Charmed Life from his mother, the prince hides it in a safe place. It is interesting that from this moment on, he has no more conversations with his mother, but rather turns to his father for guidance, almost as if, having taken his Charmed Life away from the care of his mother, he has separated himself from the maternal, life-giving figure and thus truly come of age into a masculine world.

Florizel’s adventures begin when the King who is a “very go-ahead sort of man” finds out about lifts and orders one for the palace. The narrator mentions that the King took a very long time to find out about the invention of the lift “because no one ever lets a King know anything if it can be helped” (Nesbit, 1983: 62). This is another interesting view on royalty that grew as the monarchy gradually lost more power to the new ruling class, the bourgeoisie, during the nineteenth century. Florizel is put in charge of the construction of the royal lift, and as the King has one made for his daughter as well, Florizel encounters the Princess Candida. In a satire of contemporary romance novels, their initial meeting is described as follows:

...the Princess Candida herself came to look at the works; and she and Florizel met, and their eyes met, and their hands met, because his caught hers, and dragged her back, just in time to save her from being crushed by a heavy steel bar that was being lowered into its place (Nesbit, 1983: 63).

It appears to be love at first sight, but Candida is disappointed to discover that Florizel is merely an engineer, and not the prince she assumes that he must be because he looks so much like a prince (the defining looks of a prince are not elaborated upon in the tale). As a princess she is not allowed to be attracted to a prince, and Florizel, who does not know of his royal blood, realises this obstacle to their relationship and confides in his father that he wishes he were a prince. His father, a member of an older generation that accepted social

and class barriers advises him to “bear it”. As part of a younger generation for which social mobility has gradually become a reality, Florizel cannot accept this advice, and sets about disguising himself as a lift attendant in order to be close to the princess. Contrary to many Victorian parents, who regarded the marriage choices of their children to be just as much their business as their children’s, the King does not interfere with Florizel’s decision because he believes “in letting young people manage their own love affairs” (Nesbit, 1983: 64).

Candida’s father, however, who is not such a progressive man, discovers the love affair between Candida and Florizel. Adhering to a strict class-consciousness, he throws Florizel into jail and condemns him to death for “wanting to marry someone so much above his station” (Nesbit, 1983: 69). However, as the princess has his Charmed Life in her care, all execution attempts are unsuccessful. Even when the King discovers that the princess is hiding Florizel’s life in different places and attempts to find it, Candida manages to outwit him and his spy, the eldest lady in waiting.

Away on holiday, the King and Queen of Bohemia learn about their son’s ordeal and, distraught, they meet up on the steps of the boarding house where they are holidaying. Here Nesbit pokes fun at Victorian propriety regarding physical contact between the sexes, and she has the King horrify the other boarders by taking his wife in his arms. After upsetting the boarders, the King and Queen rush to the city to rescue their son. There they witness the last, and unsuccessful, attempt of the king to execute Florizel. He has Candida brought out and demands that she tell him where she has hidden Florizel’s Charmed Life. The wily princess tricks her father into promising that the execution that morning shall be the last before she reveals the whereabouts of the Charmed Life. Although the princess displays great intelligence in the last scene, the “judges and lords-in-waiting” feel really sorry for her because they think that her brain has been “turned” (Nesbit, 1983: 72). Like many nineteenth century women who were threatened with “dire consequences” should they choose to extend themselves intellectually, Candida is obviously not regarded as strong enough to exercise herself mentally (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984: 55). However, she reveals, to the King’s consternation, that she has hidden Florizel’s life in her heart, and that to kill him would mean to kill her. At this point, Florizel’s parents reveal their true identity. In a humorous scene, the King and Queen take their crowns out of their

respective pockets and reticules and place them on their heads (the Queen first removing her bonnet) and pass Florizel his crown. This scene is particularly funny because of the lack of ceremony and pomp with which the royal couple reveal themselves. Realising that the class problem has been resolved for him, the King immediately gives the young couple his blessing and sets the wedding for half an hour later. This rather ridiculous turn about causes the reader to question the superficial constraints of the class system and Nesbit may well have been making a conscious comment on society.

While class mobility has always been a feature of the fairy tale, it was generally as mere wish fulfilment that had very little chance of becoming a reality. According to Berry, in Victorian times, however, class mobility started to become a realistic possibility (Berry, 1999: 5). As a result of this new possibility, the class relations dealt with in Victorian literary fairy tales take on some interesting aspects. Both Nesbit's 'The Charmed Life' and Dickens' 'The magic Fishbone' contain royal families that lead a middle class existence. The growth of the middle class and the extension of the vote from the aristocrats to a larger part of the population meant that, despite having to overcome a certain amount of discrimination, the middle class grew to become very powerful. In fact, the middle class could be said to have started to become the ruling class in the nineteenth century. The interest shown in the possibility of middle class kings and queens could reflect the blurring of the distinction between the aristocracy and the middle class, and could also indicate the growing power of the latter.

### **Conclusion**

Nesbit's first fairy tales were published shortly before Queen Victoria's death, and, just as she continued to write after the Queen who gave her name to the period died, so did the literary fairy tale continue to flourish. It is the "classic" tales, however, that appear to have survived into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Despite their prevalence and popularity towards the end of the Victorian era and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, many of the 'modern' Victorian fairy tales seem to have vanished into the realms of the specialist Victorian fantasy books, while the truly English folk/fairy tale never really found its way out of the oral culture.<sup>2</sup> It

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<sup>2</sup> There are a few exceptions to the statement. A few tales, like 'Goldilocks' and the 'Jack' stories, found their way into chapbooks, where they were discovered by writers, who included retold versions of the tales in their literary fairy tale collections.

is possible that the English Victorian fairy tale, steeped in contextual references, and dealing with many specifically Victorian events and issues, is not as meaningful to the twenty first century reader, while the classic tales, already sanitised and simplified of many contextual references by the time of their absorption into the English literary culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are more easily identified with. As Marina Warner notes,

Like a standup comedian, the tale must sense the aspirations and prejudices, the fears and hungers of its audience ... fairystory-tellers know that a tale, if it is to enthrall, must move the listeners to pleasure, laughter or tears; if they fail in this, nobody will want to hear their stories any more. The genre's need of an audience forces the teller to enter that audience's economy of beliefs (Warner, 1995: 409).

Such a rich fairy tale heritage, however, should not be forgotten or so easily discarded, especially one that has had such a lasting effect upon the genre. Rather, as fairy tale and fantasy once again begin to occupy a significant and dominant position in popular culture, it seems more important than ever to examine the origins of the modern literary fairy tale and its conventions. These origins are to be found in the wide array of tales that were produced during the Victorian era, and they warrant far more attention than they have previously been accorded.

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