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The Triumph of the (m)Other: the Feminine Dichotomy in
'Sleeping Beauty'

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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Contents

The Natural Woman	1
Women, Speech and Fairy Tales	2
Writing With a Patriarchal Pen	7
Sleeping Beauty, Today	11
The Domestication of the Female Heroine: the Passive Princess	16
'The death, then, of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world'	19
To sleep, perchance to dream	23
Fairy Tale Mothers – the Good and the Absent	27
Mothers: the bad	31
Beauty and the Beastly	33
The Abandoning Mother	35
A Borderline Case: Abjection	37
The Other; the Unnatural Woman.	39
Erotic Anxieties: Demonised, Sexual and Subversive	42
Monstrous Mothers and Vagina Dentata	44
Psychoanalysis manifested: One foot in the grave with Angela Carter's 'Lady of the House of Love'	48
The Monster and the Maiden	50
The Woman Behind the Monster: a Mask of Madness	53
A Different Approach	56
Works Cited	61

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Abstract

The tale of 'Sleeping Beauty' offers a familiar fairy tale narrative that features a beautiful sleeping princess, a wicked witch and a dashing prince who saves the day. This formulaic narrative has its roots in oral tales that date back to thousands of years ago. The fact that this narrative has survived so many different centuries, combined with the simplicity of the fairy tale model which makes it particularly accessible and thus particularly applicable, is perhaps why contemporary scholars argue that the literary fairy tale model might be seen as an ahistorical *urtext* that moulds the fabric of society¹ and acts as a metaphor² for navigating shared human experiences.

However, this application of the fairy tale narrative is problematic because the only available historical reference we have to the first emerging fairy tales are the literary narratives that have survived in printed or written form; an aspect of pedagogy that was reserved for the educated male elite for perpetuating specifically patriarchal values of power through a rearticulation of female identity and a suppression of the female voice. The 'Sleeping Beauty' narrative in particular positions the female as the hapless victim who is threatened by a malicious witch and who needs to be rescued by a patriarchal prince.

The patriarchal literary fairy tale reflects gender divisions through the typified characterisation inherent in the fairy tale model, and specifically through the characterisation of female characters; what Max Lüthi calls the 'stylised, starkly structured'³ formula of the 'tendency to the extremes'⁴ that manifests through the division of feminine identity in the roles of good and bad, passive and active, perfect princess and hideous witch. These divisions suggest that the natural, good woman is a quiet wife and mother while the woman who rejects this delineation should be viewed as unnatural and subsequently evil.

The naturalisation of the fairy tale formula must be exposed so as to highlight the artificial, constructed surface that seduces the reader into accepting the laws of the patriarchal fairy tale world without question. I examine the artifice of the naturalised woman through an analysis of the two binary positions of female identity offered by the patriarchal fairy tale,

¹ Zipes 1994: 7

² Zipes 1994: 7

³ Lüthi, 1975: 53

⁴ Lüthi, 1975: 43

paying particularly close attention to the lack of agency inherent in the naturalised passive princess model, and the subsequent demonisation of the active monstrous female figure. I examine these models through four different patriarchal versions of the 'Sleeping Beauty' narrative that reach across five centuries, from the first literary instance of 'Sun, Moon and Talia' in Giambattista Basile's *The Pentamarone*, through the Perrault's 'The Sleeping Beauty in The Wood' and Grimms' 'Brier Rose' to the more contemporary 1939 Disney film *Sleeping Beauty*.

Exposing the naturalisation of the characterisation inherent in the patriarchal fairy tale narrative undermines the dichotomous presentation of feminine identity suggested by the sleeping princess and wicked witch, and opens up a new space of articulation for the woman. Unpacking the binary female figures reveals that they are not as distinct as the patriarchal fairy tale narrative suggests, and an examination of the hybrid fairy Mélusine exposes that feminine agency might be found not in embracing phallic modes of power as the wicked witch figure seems to do, but rather in rejecting gender divisions that align 'masculine' with 'active' and 'feminine' with 'passive'. A new feminine identity has the potential to be forged through rejecting outdated modes of female representation and articulating anew from a distinctly female voice.

The Triumph of the (M) Other

The Feminine Dichotomy in 'Sleeping Beauty'

A man and beside him a thing, somebody – (a woman: always in her parenthesis, always repressed or invalidated as a woman, tolerated as a non-woman, "accepted"!) – someone you are not conscious of, unless she effaces herself, acts the man, speaks and thinks that way.¹

The Natural Woman

The fairy tales that we know today from the technicolour screens of Disney films find their roots in written texts, which in turn find their roots in oral tradition from thousands of years ago. These tales have survived through centuries of retellings and different socio-political climates due to the apparently universal application of their setting which is a never-never-land of neither here nor there, and the universal appeal of their core narratives – of good versus bad, the triumph of right over wrong and the fulfilment of the anticipated happy ending – which is at the heart of social interaction. Today, fairy tales are seen as a magical version of our world, a simulacrum that is an otherworld – an alternate reality or simulation of our real world – which allows us to learn how to deal with our own. Jack Zipes argues that the fairy tales we know

emanate from specific struggles to humanize bestial and barbaric forces, which have terrorized our minds and communities in concrete ways, threatening to destroy free will and human compassion. The fairy tale sets out to conquer this concrete terror through metaphors.²

My project here is not to show *how* the fairy tale conquers this terror through metaphors, but rather *what* it presents as a means to conquer this terror. Furthermore, I also wish to expose what we as readers, listeners and viewers accept *as real* in the fairytale solutions to our real world problems. It is essential to uncover the assumptions inherent in the representation of reality articulated by the fairy tale and to expose the artifice behind the simplicity that the fairy tale presents to the reader, as well as the artifice behind the naturalised aspects of characterisation implicit in the presentation. My particular project is concerned with the naturalised presentation of the dichotomous role of women peculiar to patriarchal fairy tales - that is, how prominent female characters are typically presented in

¹ Cixous, 1986:75

² Zipes, 1991: xi

one of two roles: the passive princess victim or the active witch villain. This is primarily a male representation of feminine roles because, prior to Madame d'Aulnoy's *Les Contes des Fees* in 1697, women seldom had any participation in the narration or recording of popular literary fairy tales. I will begin this paper by looking at the historical interaction of women and fairy tales, and will then focus my study specifically on the familiar narrative of Sleeping Beauty to illustrate the dichotomous feminine model inherent in the fairytale world. After analysing the two positions presented as 'real' roles for the female character, and examining the concept of motherhood as the benchmark of female moral worth in relation to these positions, I denounce both options as *unnatural* and unreal, opting instead for a third position that operates outside of the patriarchal dichotomy of "good" and "bad" women.

Women, Speech and Fairy Tales

"But if you take away my voice," said the little
mermaid, "what have I left?"³

Despite the later literary appropriation of the fairy tale by male writers under patriarchy, fairy tales and women have been inextricably linked since the beginning of 'Once Upon a Time,' with the obscure origins of the oral fairy tale winding itself around the history of women themselves, just like Straparola's Serpent had wound itself around Biancabella's neck at her birth⁴. The link between Biancabella's neck, laced with a beautiful gold collar, and the physical location of the feminine voice-box is no coincidence, for women have been regarded as society's chattering folk, gossipers, tale-tellers and performers, perpetuating the existence and reiteration of the oral narrative. The power of the spoken word is often referred to in literary fairy tales, with perhaps the most striking reference in particular tales where girls are gifted with certain qualities of speech that correspond to their behaviour. The fairy in Charles Perrault's 'Diamonds and Toads', for example, rewards the kind behaviour of the youngest daughter with the gift of flowers and diamonds which readily flow from her mouth as she speaks, while she punishes the bad behaviour of the eldest with snakes and toads that leap from her lips. Women in fairy tales, especially those fairy tales from the 18th- and 19th-Century male-dominated pen, became linked not with speech itself, but with the lack of speech. Good feminine behaviour is illustrated by an acceptance of the patriarchal suppression of feminine

³ Andersen, 1958: 128

⁴ Straparola, Giovanni Francesco *The Nights of Straparola* London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1894; Biancabella is born with a serpent coiled three times around her neck. Her 'serpent sister' leaves her after birthing, and subsequently befriends Biancabella later in life to present her with magical gifts. This serpent is actually a beautiful maiden in serpent form, much like the fairy Mélusine or the Little Mermaid.

speech, whilst bad behaviour manifests itself most obviously through the spoken word. The good daughter is always *quiet*, patient and hard-working while the bad daughter is always outspoken, rude, and lazy. Hasty comments and lack of respect in speech often result in the spontaneous generation of numerous toads and vipers, an upturned kettle of tar⁵, or something equally horrid; the inscribed 'message' is clear – a good woman is a quiet, thoughtful one who will be rewarded for her good behaviour, and the best kind of woman is a Sleeping Beauty who neither talks, moves nor, in some versions, thinks/dreams for herself. This oppressive representation of women is indicative of the popularised view held by patriarchal society; the woman should be silenced and beautiful, a decoration, or at the most, a good and patient mother. Marina Warner writes,

Christian tradition held the virtues of silence, obedience and discretion as especially, even essentially, feminine, but this view spread far wider than the circle of the devout. The Silent Woman was an accepted ideal. That cliché about the sex, 'Silence is golden', can be found foreshadowed in the pages of Aristotle: 'silence is a woman's glory', he writes in the *Politics*, adding, 'but this is not equally the glory of man'.⁶

The Christian tradition Warner refers to played a dominant role in forming the perceptions of the masses. Not only is talking raised as a strictly feminine vice, but talking, and specifically chattering idly and gossiping, were typically viewed as sinful by the Christian church, as Warner illustrates in her exploration of the history of the gossip in her chapter titled 'Word of Mouth'⁷. The consequence of this association of talking with feminine sin was that throughout history the woman who spoke was always considered to be a sinful woman, an evil woman, and like Eve would ensure the fall of every Adam from the Garden of Eden with her apparent inability to control her mouth. Indeed perhaps the most memorable monsters that Odysseus encounters along his way home are the *femme fatale* sirens who lure sailors to their deaths with their enchanting songs. Their magnificent song, their lyrical speech, is so powerful that men are unable to withstand its pull, and sail their vessels into the corpse-strewn rocks on which the sirens perch. As Circe tells Odysseus,

There is no home-coming for the man who draws near them [the sirens] unawares and hears the Sirens' voices: no welcome from his wife, no little children brightening at their father's return. For with the magic of their song the Sirens cast their spell upon him, as they sit there in a meadow piled high with the mouldering skeletons of men, whose withered skin still hangs upon their bones.⁸

It is the song of the siren, the voice of the she-bird, which secures the fatal end of man. In Hans Christian Andersen's tale 'The Little Mermaid', the protagonist desires to give up her siren's voice in order to be with the Prince with whom she is infatuated. She exchanges her voice, her mode of agency, for a life of voiceless servitude, which, ironically, ends in her choosing death when the Prince

⁵ See Grimms' 'Mother Holle' (Zipes, 2002:88)

⁶ Warner, 1995: 29

⁷ Warner, 1995

⁸ Homer, 1958: 190

chooses to wed another. 'The story's chilling message,' Warner writes, 'is that cutting out your tongue is still not enough. To be saved, more is required: self-obliteration, dissolution.'⁹ The Little Mermaid finds 'peace' with herself only when she relinquishes her voice and her life for the happiness of the Prince. Indeed the woman who retains her voice, the *femme fatale*, the siren, the bad woman, is the sinner who is destined to be the undoing of man. 'Eve sinned by mouth,' Warner tells us, 'she bit into the apple of knowledge, she spoke to the serpent and to Adam, and she was in consequence cursed with desire, to kiss and be kissed'¹⁰; Through the presentation of Eve and other female figures, the Christian Church concretised the association of woman with sin (dramatized through sexual proliferation¹¹), and reified the power(lessness) of her speech and the futile passivity of her position in society.

In the 16th Century, preacher Jean Raulin used the biblical reference to the formation of Eve from Adam's rib to substantiate the popularised view of the differences between man and woman with regards to speech, and to illustrate maliciously why women are the preferred method of communicating any news¹². He said,

man, being composed of clay, is silent and ponderous; but woman gives of her osseous origin by the rattle she keeps up. Move a sack of earth and it makes no noise; touch a bag of bones and you are deafened with the clitter-clatter.¹³

Raulin's misguided rationalisation points to the conceptual division between man and woman: man is the whole from which a *small piece* is removed to create woman; she is necessarily inferior to his greater being and power. Man, pictured here, is the stronger, wiser, tongue-holding, and more sensible counterpart to the chattering female who says everything that comes into her mind. This suggests that the woman is a fickle creature, ready to begin her chatter at a mere touch, while the man, the solid earthy foundation, cannot even be roused when forcibly moved with the effort it might take to move a sack of heavy clay. Man's speech is to be taken seriously as carefully thought-out didactic instruction, while woman's speech is to be disregarded as foolish chatter.

⁹ Warner, 1995: 398

¹⁰ Warner, 1995:31

¹¹ The connotations of desire and sexuality linked with sin are explored later in relation to the unnatural woman.

¹² He was specifically talking about harnessing the female chatter as a vehicle for spreading important news about the resurrection of Christ. Raulin recognised the significance of the female voice and attempted to undermine it through this comparison, yet he still desired that it should be used to man's end thereby reinforcing its potential power.

¹³ The reverend Sabine Baring-Gould recorded a copy of Jean Raulin's Easter sermon (the origin of this quotation) in his 1865 book *Post-Mediæval Preachers*, but this particular version is from his essay titled 'What are women made of?' in Baring-Gould, 1865: 102

While Raulin's explanation is derogatory and misogynistic, clearly indicating the man's role in perpetuating the apparent divide between the 'serious' male and the 'foolish' female, it does point to the historical significance of women in perpetuating the survival of the oral narrative, and consequently the oral fairy tale. That is, the fairy tale is a form of storytelling that might be considered to be 'less serious' and subsequently less important than the didactic moral teachings of the male voice. The 'curse' of Eve, instilled by man, is to be persecuted for speaking, and her speech will always be considered by him to reside in the realm of the foolish instead of the realm of the serious with his own words. Men dominate the modes of speech, specifically those of public address and speech, or performatives¹⁴, used for 'purpose'. Woman's speech is necessarily conducted as sin, and is thus dichotomously opposed to that of man in the patriarchal ideology. The speaking subject, Cristina Bacchilega points out, is the one who speaks his own words and gives them meaning through his presence, and this is exposed to be, as Cixous shows, a patriarchal subject who privileges speech over writing and voice as well. That is, speech is different from voice; it is the speaking of *meaningful words*, of partaking in a speech act that changes something. This is the mode of speech that suggests the agency and authority historically denied to women; it is reserved for men *by men*, while women's speech is regarded as a series of meaningless utterances. For this reason, women are typically and historically denied speech in patriarchal texts. They are relegated to the minor, inconsequential, unimportant 'voice', if they must utter, but the best woman, as detailed above, is the kind that does not say anything at all. Men, on the other hand, frequently engage in speech; they are the quintessential agent, acting *actively* in direct opposition to the passive female. Hélène Cixous reiterates this dichotomous relationship between active/passive and man/woman by showing that man uses the difference between activity and passivity, which she terms 'male privilege', to sustain himself and that thereafter 'the question of sexual difference is treated by coupling it with the opposition: activity/passivity.'¹⁵ Man enforces the active/passive divide and then draws on it to perpetuate and sustain his apparent superiority with a circular *non sequitur* form of logic. Women do not speak, and, if they do, they are engaging in sin and must be punished. Authority, in this sense, is necessarily phallo(go)centric and determined by the active, speaking man.

The woman in real life, however, is not as idle as she may appear to be in the patriarchal text. She has recognised and harnessed the power of her tongue, as Raulin once attempted to do, and is able

¹⁴ Performativity, in post-structural theory, typically suggests an Austinian view of utterances, namely that a happy, successful performative is only possible if the six attributes of performativity are all fulfilled. However, I am not dealing with the relative success of the performative, but rather that which the performative presupposes – that there is someone performing. See Austin, J.L. *How To Do Things With Words* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962

¹⁵ Cixous, 1986:64

to direct it through certain vehicles to challenge dominant perceptions of her role in society. Historically the view of the speaking woman changed from noisy rattler to wise oracle, to prophetess and sibyl, and finally, as the Mother Goose of fairy tales, the wise grand-motherly woman. This archetypal crone¹⁶, as Warner calls her, is Perrault's Mother Goose and the women like her, the old wives of the term 'Old Wives' Tales', and she is not condemned for speaking but respected. It is no wonder, because, despite the taboo of the talking female, women were still powerful figures in the community. They 'dominated the domestic webs of information and power; the neighbourhood, the village, the well, the washing place, the shops, the stalls, the street were their arena of influence, not only the household.'¹⁷ The influence of the woman's voice extended far beyond the reach of her own home, and had to be kept in check to ensure her subservience in the patriarchal household and society as a whole; this is precisely why Eve is such a prominent figure in the teachings of moral behaviour by male preachers, and why the woman has been stigmatised by the male-dominated Christian church and society.

Just as Biancabella's serpent sister left her a coil of beautifully-crafted gold from where she had unwound herself, and bestowed upon her many wondrous and magnificent gifts, so the fairy tale has given women a gift; a golden voice box. Despite the adage that women may chatter and tell useless stories, today's woman is wise enough to use her tales as a vehicle for articulating the thoughts and opinions that would otherwise be forced into suppression. This feminine appropriation of the tale finds its early counterpart in Scheherazade, a woman who learnt the power of the spoken tale in the Arabic *One Thousand and One Nights*. Through her superior education, careful planning and use of the fairy tale she was able to postpone her generic death penalty to teach her King and husband a valuable lesson. Scheherazade had to persevere with her plan to change the way that the King saw the world through the gift of story-telling, and, after three years, a thousand and one nights, she succeeded; in the same way, it has taken a thousand and one tales for the 'archetypal crone by the hearth' or wise woman to emerge as a positive symbol of female articulation in Western society. Although historically the speaking woman has been viewed with suspicion and disdain, a new voice is emerging, disrupting and altering the fabric of the patriarchal fairy tale to give way to an exploration of the new woman in contemporary society.

¹⁶ Warner, 1995:xx

¹⁷ Warner, 1995:34

Writing With a Patriarchal Pen

Although oral fairy tales are typically associated with female orators¹⁸, the wise women of the local community, Zipes¹⁹ dates the first recorded appearance of a major literary fairy tale in the second century to Apuleius's 'Psyche and Cupid' published in his *Metamorphoses*. 'Psyche and Cupid' and other early literary fairy tales were written in Latin and were 'largely addressed to the male sex and focused on their acquisition of the proper moral values and ethics that would serve them in the positions of power in society.'²⁰ That is, early 'fairy tales' were treated as a male-dominated pedagogic genre, used to perpetuate patriarchal values of power. Despite their previous involvement with the fairytale genre, women had no capacity in the production of these early literary fairy tales, and as Zipes points out,

The first stage for the literary fairy tale involved a kind of class and perhaps even gender appropriation. The voices of the nonliterate tellers were submerged, and since women in most cases were not allowed to be scribes, the tales were scripted according to male dictates or fantasies, even though they may have been told by women.²¹

This indicates that early recordings of fairy tales were used as a tool to promote a certain ideology and the behaviour accordant with the dominant hegemonic view – the 'proper moral values and ethics'. Just as Raulin attempted to harness the power of the female voice, so the educated male minority attempted to take control of the typically female-dominated fairytale genre and implement didactic teachings that necessarily excluded or marginalised the woman, thereby perpetuating the patriarchal power structures. This highlights an important distinction between *oral* tales and *literary* tales: literary fairy tales were harnessed by the educated elite from the mouths of female orators²², from oral tradition, and were penned by men who 'translated' the tales into literary texts, thereby altering words, word order and consequently the meanings associated with those words and word combinations. Where the narration of oral fairy tales was dominated by women, literary fairy tales became the vehicle of the patriarchal male.

Structuralist and folklorist Vladimir Propp indicates that there is a primary difference between literature and folklore, between tales written and tales spoken: a literary work is concretised,

¹⁸ Warner, 1995:48

¹⁹ Zipes, 1999:8

²⁰ Zipes, 1999:8

²¹ Zipes, 1999:7

²² The Grimms, as Madonna Kolbenschlag points out, collected more than one third of their fairy tales from a single old nurse, 'alte Maria'. Furthermore, Kolbenschlag argues, 'the Grimms were the first to attempt to retell the fairy tales as they had first been told by mothers and female caretakers of children.' (Kolbenschlag, 1979:4)

recorded, inscribed and unchanging whereas performers of oral tales 'do not repeat their texts word for word but introduce changes into them'²³. 'Even if these changes are insignificant,' he says, 'even if the changes that take place in folklore texts are sometimes as slow as geological processes, what is important is the fact of *changeability of folklore compared with the stability of literature*.'²⁴ These changes, Propp asserts, happens in accordance with certain laws. That is, new tastes, ideologies and attitudes will affect what is reworked, removed or supplemented. Each recording of a fairy tale changes according to the performer, or in the case of written works, the scribe. A novel might be republished a number of times with changes made only in footnotes by the editor, whilst a fairy tale might be reappropriated thousands of times with small changes being introduced in every iteration. Zipes's point that the first fairy tales were recorded 'according to male dictates or fantasies' is a pertinent one that informs the whole history of the literary fairy tale tradition.

The male author who harnesses the fairy tale is not only able to forge a particular version of female identity according to patriarchal dictates, but is able to naturalise and universalise it as well. 'To take an extreme case,' Bacchilega writes,

when Snow White is presented as a "natural" woman, the artful construction of her image encourages thinking of her and other stereotypical heroines in pre-cultural, unchangeable terms. By showcasing "women" and making them disappear at the same time, the fairy tale thus transforms us/them into man-made constructs of "Woman."²⁵

Thus those men who appropriated the fairy tales and recorded them imbued them with their perception of what it means to be a natural woman – a perception they present as *unchanging* and *pre-cultural*; as something inherently learned through the virtue of being born as a female, thus apparently necessarily true and always genetically fixed. Figuring the woman in the fairy tale through a male-dominated pen does not illustrate a true presentation of the natural woman, but rather a re-presentation of a synthetic, constructed female figure designed to cover up her artifice and present herself as a natural model. It is essential to break down these accepted *representations* of women to expose how they operate in binary terms of either 'good' or 'evil', and to show how that binary reflects, perpetuates and naturalises the patriarchal hold over women.

The fairy tale is an excellent vehicle for this naturalisation as it presents itself as a timeless *urtext*, a story that tells of a 'once upon a time' that is itself unchanging and pre-cultural. The paradoxical nature of the fairy tale is that the once upon a time presents itself as neither here nor there, but it does in fact pinpoint a very specific time – that of the utterance, the recording, the publication. 'We

²³ Propp, 1984:8

²⁴ Propp, 1984:8

²⁵ Bacchilega, 1997:8

tell stories,' W.F.H. Nicolaisen argues, 'because, in order to cope with the present and to face the future, we have to create the past, both as time and space, through narrating it.'²⁶ When we tell a story, as Nicolaisen outlines, we concretise it twice over through the 'here and now' of the speech act, whether reading a story out loud or narrating it for the first time, and through the once-upon-a-timeness of the tale itself which concerns the spatial and temporal location of the events narrated. This once-upon-a-timeness is peculiar to the fairy tale, typically the western fairy tale, which begins with the line, 'Once Upon a Time'. Other variants of this introductory line include 'Once, a long time ago,' 'There once was,' and 'There once was, and was not'. The last of these, perhaps, alludes to the vague nature of the historical geography which indicates that the events narrated have *some* legitimacy because they may have occurred at *some* time in *some* place to a real person, although those particulars are seldom given because they are of little importance to the actual narrative. The typical fairy tale follows particular structural modes which generate a set of expectations; it is these *expectations* [the triumph of good over bad, the overcoming of impossible obstacles] that create uniformity in fairy tales, and, specifically, uniformity in the reader/listener who learns to anticipate formulaic structures. Zipes says,

The classical fairy tale makes it appear that we are all part of a universal community with shared values and norms, that we are all striving for the same happiness, that there are certain dreams and wishes which are irrefutable, that a particular type of behavior will produce guaranteed results, like living happily ever after in a marvelous castle, *our* castle and fortress that will forever protect us from inimical and unpredictable forces of the outside world.²⁷

What matters, to the classic fairy tale, is that the events narrated are believable because they may or may not have happened to real people, people like *us* – these fairy tales represent, in Nicolaisen's terms, a creation of the past.

However, these introductory words, Lüthi writes, 'create a distance from the present and, along with it, from reality, and offer an invitation to enter another world, a world past, thus one that does not exist.'²⁸ The fabric of the fairytale world is constantly blurred with the apparent fabric of reality despite being two distinct entities. Fairy tales, Jessica Tiffin writes, 'deny reality not only in their calm acceptance of the magical but also in their refusal to provide any sort of realistic detail or conventional causal logic to the worlds they describe.'²⁹ This is a defining feature of the fairy tale, and indeed, as Bacchilega points out:

²⁶ Nicolaisen, 1993:61

²⁷ Zipes, 1994: 5

²⁸ Lüthi, 1984:49

²⁹ Tiffin, 2009: 4

What distinguishes the tale of magic or fairy tale as a genre, however, is its effort to conceal its "work" systematically – to naturalize its artifice, to make everything so clear that it works magic, no questions asked.³⁰

That is, it is not just the fairytale world that exists and works magic, but the *laws* of that fairytale world as well. The unchanging and pre-cultural laws, and consequently, the elements and representations constituting those laws, of the fairytale world also work without question, 'for the fairy tale must appear harmless, natural, eternal, ahistorical, therapeutic.'³¹ This is problematic because the reality offered by the fairy tale is quite unlike our own, but is often confused with it as a means to understand real problems and real relationships between people.

The carefully constructed nature of the fairy tale conceals its artifice which is what makes it particularly problematic in terms of the naturalised world it presents. The women in this patriarchal fairytale world exist in their binary roles of either good or bad; a dichotomy that takes form in relation to the nature of the woman presented: the quiet, passive woman is naturalised as good and desirable, while the outspoken, independent woman is condemned as bad and subsequently unnatural in the patriarchal view of women. It is the purpose of my argument to focus on this dichotomous presentation of women in fairy tales, and in one fairy tale in particular: 'Sleeping Beauty'. I have selected this tale as the structural backbone for my argument as it is one which is fairly well-known today and is recognisable by contemporary readers and fairy tale scholars, and also because it presents the clearest case of the natural, and consequently *unnatural*, woman. 'Ancient as "The Sleeping Beauty" is,' Bettelheim writes, 'in many ways it has a more important message for today's youth than many other tales.'³² Bettelheim's use of this fairy tale to analyse and rationalise the condition of the pubescent female is problematic as it is founded on the patriarchal assumption of the superior desirability of the natural sleeping princess, but it does raise a particularly pertinent observation: it is the most popular fairy tales that need to be questioned. I intend to unpack and analyse the binary female positions – the natural woman and the unnatural woman – presented in the 'message'³³ of 'Sleeping Beauty' and its particular variants to show how this dichotomy is problematic, and how the artifice of the fairy tale needs to be exposed so that the female character can be rewritten into a new realm of existence.

³⁰ Bacchilega, 1997:8

³¹ Zipes 1994: 7

³² Bettelheim, 1978: 226

³³ The message I read in to this tale, one of acquiescing to patriarchal structures, is considerably different from Bettelheim's message of pubescent reassurance. I shall analyse the differences later in this paper.

Sleeping Beauty, Today

When asked about the fairy tale 'Sleeping Beauty,' the average person will call to mind images of the beautiful blonde Princess Aurora, fast asleep with a pacified smile on her rose-red lips, permanently fixed in her gorgeous sixteen-year-old body, waiting to be awoken by Prince Charming with a kiss after he has defeated the ever-present dragon. This description is indicative of the 'Disneyfied' fairy tale, and illustrates that the Walt Disney Company is predominantly responsible for the 21st century perception of fairy tales³⁴. Indeed, Zipes has pointed out that Disney's 'technical skills and ideological proclivities were so consummate that his signature has obfuscated the names of Charles Perrault, the Brothers Grimm, Hans Christian Andersen, and Collodi,³⁵ thereby instating his name as the individual predominantly associated as the 'author' of these texts. The first full length animated motion picture, Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, was released in 1937 and many fairytale films have followed in the seventy-two years since. As Bacchilega points out, many adults will not remember versions of fairy tales before Disney, and most children have never been exposed to them³⁶. In fact, many people respond with surprise when informed that there is not just *one* version of any fairy tale, and that Disney's fairy tales are merely new literary versions in their own right, building on older versions and adding to them the elements that make a good animated film – entertaining, captivating and financially rewarding. Indeed, as Robyn McCallum and John Stephens point out,

A marked effect of Disney animated films has been to narrow and redefine what modern children (and adults) know as the folk tale (or the fairy tale), and what meanings they ascribe to the folk tale.³⁷

Walt Disney's fairytale films have played a pivotal role in *narrowing* and *redefining* the fairy tale, predominantly because '... mass marketed fairy tales of the twentieth century have undergone a sanitisation process according to the sexual preferences of males and conservative norms of the



Record cover artwork illustrating the quintessential Sleeping Beauty waiting for her prince on the 1959 Soundtrack to Disney's *Sleeping Beauty*.

³⁴ I say 'largely' as Disney was the first to produce full-length animated feature films, and still dominates the industry today through their films and associated labels. DreamWorks Pictures has, in the last ten years, started to wrestle the Disney influence with films like *Shrek* and *Shrek 2* which question the dominant perception of fairy tales.

³⁵ Zipes, 1994:72

³⁶ Bacchilega, 1997:2

³⁷ McCallum and Stephens in Zipes (ed), 2000:162

Disney version presents a contemporary filmic appropriation of the narrative. I shall sketch each of these perfunctorily so as to distinguish the structural and compositional differences⁴¹ that constitute their unique versions, typically indicative of particular socio-cultural histories through each of the different windows.

The tale that we know as 'Sleeping Beauty', the tale typically identified by the Aarne-Thompson classification system as tale type 410, made its earliest well-known literary debut⁴² in the Western world as 'Sun, Moon and Talia' in 1634-6 when Giambattista Basile's *Lo cunto de li cunti overo lo trattenemiento de peccerille*, which we know in English as *The Tale of Tales* or *The Pentamarone*, was published after his death. *The Pentamarone* presents the reader with a collection of fifty fairy tales which are all contained within a single fairy tale – the 'frame story' about Zoza, the princess who must waken a sleeping prince.

Zoza is the driving force behind the action in this fairy tale, and, indeed, the entire fairy tale collection. She is just one of many [temporarily sleeping] princesses who mirror the lesser-known sleeping princes, and provides a stark contrast to Talia in the tale 'Sun, Moon and Talia', who, like Sleeping Beauty, is also the victim of an enchanted sleep. Zoza sleeps for a moment and almost loses her chance at a happy marriage, whilst Talia sleeps for 'some time'⁴³ and wakes up to find herself the mother of two children and the soon-to-be wife of a king. Talia, like Disney's Princess Aurora, falls asleep after pricking her finger whilst spinning, but, unlike Aurora who is woken with a kiss, Talia is woken when one of her illegitimate infants suck the flax out of her finger. Unfortunately Talia awakes alone and confused, and has to wait for the (already married) King to come find her before she knows what to do. The current Queen learns of the King's infidelity and has a giant fire prepared so that Talia may be thrown into it, and, luckily for Talia, the King arrives just in time to save her and has the Queen burned instead.

Talia, unbeknownst to her, has fairy helpers who 'had appeared in the palace'⁴⁴ to help her give birth. This is perhaps a precursor to the three fairies, Fauna, Flora and Merryweather, who feature in Disney's version. However, unlike Disney's version, 'Sun, Moon and Talia' is a tale that deals with rape (Talia does not consent to intercourse with the King), necrophilia (the King is not even sure if

⁴¹ While the socio-historical element of each recording is important, my focus is primarily on the tales themselves. I shall investigate the significance of certain aspects of the historical geography later in this paper.

⁴² An earlier literary version existed in the lesser-known fourteenth century *Perceforest*, in an episode entitled "L'hiostorie de Troylus et de la belle Zellandine" (Zipes, 2001:684). However, the first recognised and popularised stand-alone version is recorded in Basile's collection.

⁴³ Basile, 1893:130

⁴⁴ Basile, 1893:130

Talia is alive, never mind awake), cannibalism (the Queen attempts to get the King to eat his sons Moon and Sun), and murder (the Queen orders the Cook to kill Moon and Sun) – all of which are evidently excluded in the 'sanitised' Disney version from 1959.

The second essential literary recording of 'Sleeping Beauty' is Charles Perrault's 'The Sleeping Beauty in The Wood', published in 1697 in his collection *Contes de ma Mère l'Oye, or Tales of Mother Goose*. Perrault recorded this tale, inspired by Basile's 'Sun, Moon and Talia', with a moral in mind: 'A brave, rich, handsome husband is a prize well worth waiting for,' although he concludes, 'but no modern woman would think it worth waiting for a hundred years.'⁴⁵ This is the story of the sleeping beauty, nameless and referred to only as 'the little princess'⁴⁶, 'the most beautiful princess'⁴⁷, 'the new queen'⁴⁸ and 'his wife'⁴⁹, who is awoken from a hundred-year-long sleep when the prince 'fell on his knees before her'⁵⁰. This time it is the prince's mother who desires to eat her grandchildren and her daughter-in-law, the newly-awoken pubescent teenager, due to her Ogre descent and consequent hideous appetite for small children. Again, as in Basile's version, the prince arrives in the nick of time and the old ogress queen is killed. As mentioned earlier, it is not difficult to see how this version has altered from the previous one according to the socio-economic and political era in which Perrault wrote. For example, when the princess pierces her hand with the spindle and '[falls] down in a faint', the servants come running: 'They threw water over her, unlaced her corsets, slapped her hands, rubbed her temples with eau-de-cologne – but nothing would wake her'⁵¹. The type of dress and remedying solutions are indicative of the upper middle-class or aristocratic lifestyle, and are particular to the period in which Perrault wrote. Furthermore, as Bettelheim points out, Perrault's version was altered because

It can easily be understood that Perrault did not feel it appropriate to tell at the French court a story in which a married king ravishes a sleeping maiden, gets her with child, forgets it entirely, and remembers her after a time only by chance.⁵²

Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm published a version of 'Sleeping Beauty' under the name 'Brier Rose' in their 1812 collection of fairy tales *Kinder- und Hausmärchen, or Children's and Household Tales*. This tale is similar to the Perrault version discussed above, but it does showcase some instrumental

⁴⁵ Carter, 1979:71

⁴⁶ Carter, 1979: 58

⁴⁷ Carter, 1979: 63

⁴⁸ Carter, 1979: 67

⁴⁹ Carter, 1979: 67

⁵⁰ Carter, 1979: 64

⁵¹ Carter, 1979: 61

⁵² Bettelheim, 1978: 229

changes. Most notably, the tale ends when Brier Rose, known as 'Beautiful Sleeping Brier Rose'⁵³, is woken by her prince with a kiss. There is no ogress or jealous queen – details that appear in other Grimm tales, perhaps removed from Brier Rose in folk history to make two separate tales. Furthermore, the magical hedge around the castle, detailed in Perrault's version as 'the great wood'⁵⁴, has a somewhat ominous function in this tale as it captures all of the hopeful young princes who desire to break through and see Brier Rose – 'they had got stuck and had died wretched deaths'⁵⁵. Kolbenschlag points out that traditionally women are set apart from society by a figurative hedge which she defines as, 'a range of interests that were identified as feminine: religion, the arts, homemaking, health and education'⁵⁶, and it is this hedge that keeps the women apart from the 'world of the living' until it is time for her to be rescued by the one single man who can enter into this domain. Even when she is woken up she is still subjected to this hedging in which maintains her at a distance from the living realm – the literal rose bush hedge is replaced with a figurative hedge of feminine interests.

These four different versions of 'Sleeping Beauty' are quite distinct in that they come from four different socio-economic and historic moments from four different male authors and, evidently, the fabric of the tale has been altered to suit particular audiences or functions. However, despite the varying names, functions and details within each story, there is one thing that remains constant: the role of the woman. Fairy tales 'stress inequalities in superlative terms'⁵⁷ Duncker writes, and nowhere is this more apparent than in the strict good-bad dichotomy of the feminine character who is either a passive princess or a wicked witch. Dworkin's feminist response to the roles of women in fairy tales leads her to conclude that the fairy tale presents only 'two definitions of woman':

There is the good woman. She is a victim. There is the bad woman. She must be destroyed. The good woman must be possessed. The bad woman must be killed, or punished. Both must be nullified.⁵⁸

Dworkin's observation is pertinent to the case of Sleeping Beauty. Beauty⁵⁹ occupies the first definition of 'woman', the good woman who is, as Bettelheim argues, 'the incarnation of perfect femininity'⁶⁰. Dworkin's radically reductionist arguments are somewhat outdated by contemporary

⁵³ Zipes, 2002: 173

⁵⁴ Carter, 1979: 63

⁵⁵ Zipes, 2002: 174

⁵⁶ Kolbenschlag, 1979: 11

⁵⁷ Duncker, 1984:5

⁵⁸ Dworkin, 1974:48

⁵⁹ I shall use the name 'Beauty' here to refer to the generic Sleeping Beauty character of tale type ATU 410.

⁶⁰ Bettelheim, 1978: 236

feminist standards⁶¹, but are particularly useful considering the simplified, structural nature appropriated by the fairytale form. Indeed, Lüthi argues that the fairy tale *always* displays the extremes in its reductionist nature, seeking 'the high degrees,' he writes, 'the atipodean values. There are extremes in figures, preferably kings and queens, princes and princesses – or goose girl, swine-herd, dragon, man-eater or witch.' Dworkin's two definitions of patriarchal fairytale women are particularly apt considering the reductionist form of the 'high degrees' of fairytale characterisation.

The Domestication of the Female Heroine: the Passive Princess

Sleeping Beauty is the female protagonist in her eponymous tale, and is the ideal, 'natural' woman who appears to have innate grace, desirability, noble civility and beauty. All of these attributes situate her firmly in the realm of the 'good woman'. She is remarkably beautiful, and indeed Perrault grants her attributes which prefigure Disney's Aurora:

The youngest fairy said the princess would grow up to be the loveliest woman in the world. The next said she would have the disposition of an angel, the third that she would be as graceful as a gazelle, the fourth gave her the gift of dancing, the fifth of singing like a nightingale, and the sixth said that she would be able to play any kind of musical instrument that she wanted to.⁶²

These attributes, while perfectly delightful, are all quite useless because they construct Beauty as a charming, entertaining object instead of as an individual. Beauty, figured here, has been given all of the attributes she might need to secure for herself a suitable mate. She is indicative of the patriarchal heroine tradition which remains more-or-less unbroken from Basile to Disney's *Sleeping Beauty*, perhaps the most stable structural element of the literary fairytale formula. These women are famed for their humble nature, beautiful appearance, musical talent, and remarkable relationship with nature, and are celebrated for their delightful composure ('the disposition of an angel') throughout the troublesome events that befall them. They typically accept their fate, seldom complain or protest and rarely take any active role in alleviating their suffering – simply embracing their state with patience and a will to make the best out of a bad situation. They are the victims of an unfortunate circumstance beyond their control. Indeed, Disney's Princess Aurora first catches Prince Philip's attention with her beautiful singing voice, then falls victim to Maleficent's curse and

⁶¹ Contemporary feminist fairy tale scholarship has moved away from Dworkin's reductionism in vastly different directions, yet her work still features prominently in the fundamental logic inspiring investigation into the naturalising aspect of fairy tale. Donald Haase's 2004 collection *Fairy Tales and Feminism: New Approaches*, for example, offers a number of critical responses to the theoretical approaches offered by Dworkin and the Lurie-Lieberman debate.

⁶² Carter, 1979: 60

casually sleeps while all the action takes place. The Disney princess and her predecessors exist primarily to serve a narrative function: if there was no princess then nobody [and of course, no *body*, no object] would need rescuing and, in Disney's case, there would not be a multi-milliondollar movie in the making. Aurora, Brier Rose, Talia and the other sleeping beauties are all indicative of the typical 'innocent persecuted heroine', the victim. Dworkin points out that,

Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Snow-white, Rapunzel – all are characterized by passivity, beauty, innocence, and *victimization*. They are archetypal good women – victims by definition. They never think, act, initiate, confront, resist, challenge, feel, care, or question. Sometimes they are forced to do housework.⁶³

The fairies' gifts have taken away Beauty's agency and have fashioned her into a vehicle which exists solely to entertain: to sing, dance and move beautifully and to look lovely at all times. In fact, Beauty's name, 'Talia', or 'Aurora' as named in the above versions, is omitted in most versions and is replaced solely with descriptions of her functions, as if that were the most important aspect of her identity. The name 'Talia' has Hebrew origins connoting 'lamb' and 'heaven's dew'⁶⁴, while the name 'Aurora' refers to the beautiful Roman goddess of the dawn who renews her beauty every morning to announce the coming of the sun. These connotations tie in with the descriptions which later replace Basile's Beauty's names, as discussed earlier, which include 'the most beautiful princess'⁶⁵, 'the new queen'⁶⁶ and 'his wife'⁶⁷ – descriptions which all pertain to Beauty's function as a beautiful object and as secondary to the importance of the *him*, the prince. Aurora loses her real name in the Disney version as well as it is later replaced with 'Rose', indicative of her astounding beauty which mimics the natural beauty of the flower. Beauty, and all of her names, dissolve the distinction between her name and her function, and reduce her from a state of personhood to a state of aesthetics – a beautiful object which sometimes (particularly in the case of Cinderella) cleans up after her male counterpart and does housework. With regards to beautiful women, Bataille argues that '[t]he further removed from the animal is their appearance, the more beautiful they are reckoned.'⁶⁸ Thus in order to retain their beauty and to render concrete their role in the realm of 'the beautiful woman', these princesses are forced into their sleeping state of subservience and aesthetic functions. Beauty, presented as the natural woman, the good woman, and the desired role for women, is a character who serves a narrative function in the tale, and in her life, and who exists solely to make life aesthetically pleasurable for the prince – the likable heroic protagonist in the tale.

⁶³ Dworkin, 1974: 42

⁶⁴ See Kolatch, A. J. *The Jonathan David Dictionary of First Names* Virginia: J. David Publishers, 1980 p477

⁶⁵ Basile, 1893:63

⁶⁶ Basile, 1893:67

⁶⁷ Basile, 1893:67

⁶⁸ Bataille, 1977: 143

Beauty's prince, in contrast to Beauty herself, is seen as the real protagonist of the story; he is the only one who takes any action. The King in Basile's version is out hunting, the quintessential male activity reminiscent of primitive gender divisions between hunters and gatherers that, in the broadest sense, align the male with the active hunter who kills animals for meat and furs, and the female with the gatherer who tends to homely matters such as garden crops and the family unit⁶⁹. This early work division tends to suggest that the male engages in more powerful activities that are innately masculine in nature, thereby subordinating the female to matters that are presented as naturally feminine. This arbitrary signification is reinforced as 'natural' and 'innate', despite being perpetuated by patriarchal value systems. Basile's King enacts the masculine hunting attributes associated with his role as the patriarch as he climbs up a ladder in order visually and physically to extend his influence while investigating the disappearance of his falcon, and then, upon seeing Talia fast asleep, 'carried her to a couch and, having gathered the fruits of love, left her lying there.'⁷⁰ He then carried on with other matters, 'and for a long time entirely forgot the affair'⁷¹ because, being a King, he had much more important royal affairs to address. Furthermore, the King reinscribes his masculine agency when he has to rescue Talia from the 'old' Queen's wrath; Talia attempted 'to excuse herself, saying that it was not her fault and that the King had taken possession of her territory whilst she was sleeping'⁷², but her pleas fell on deaf ears as 'the Queen would not listen to her'⁷³. Talia's only protest is to beg the Queen for leave to take off her beautiful garments, and then, when permission is granted, she screams so that she would attract the attention of an agent who might rescue her; it works too, because, as Disney tells us, 'some day my prince will come'⁷⁴. In Perrault's version, the Prince hears a tale of a princess fast asleep in a castle, whose 'sleep was going to last for a hundred years, until the prince who is meant to have her comes to wake her up'⁷⁵. Here Beauty is positioned as the object to the Prince's subject, as the thing predestined to be the Prince's possession. Kay Stone, in her paper "Things Walt Disney Never Told Us", argues that the differences between princes and princesses in is that,

Heroes succeed because they act, not because they are. They are judged not by their appearance or inherent sweet nature but by their ability to overcome obstacles, even if these obstacles are defects in their own characters. Heroines are not allowed any defects, nor are they required to develop, since

⁶⁹ See Barnard, A (ed) *Hunter-gatherers in History, Archaeology and Anthropology* Oxford: Berg, 2004

⁷⁰ Basile, 1983: 130

⁷¹ Basile, 1983: 130

⁷² Basile, 1983: 131

⁷³ Basile, 1983: 131

⁷⁴ "Some Day My Prince Will Come" was first performed in Disney's first animated fairy tale film, the 1937 *Snow White*.

⁷⁵ Carter, 1979: 63

they are already perfect. The only tests of most heroines require nothing beyond what they are born with: a beautiful face, tiny feet, or a pleasing temperament.⁷⁶

Aurora, Talia and the other sleeping beauties are either born perfect, in terms of the ideal patriarchal woman, or are given the attributes of the perfect woman by generous fairies when still a baby. These princesses never develop, and it is the task of the male hero to further the narrative of the tale and to overcome the dragon/evil/briars threatening *his* possession, and the possession of that object. She is, as Kolbenschlag argues, 'a symbol of *passivity*, and by extension a metaphor for the spiritual condition of women – cut off from autonomy and transcendence, from self-actualization and ethical capacity in a male-dominated milieu'⁷⁷.

*'The death, then, of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world'*⁷⁸

'The paradox of this superlative ['fairest and most desirable thing'] is such that it marks the moment where the oxymoron 'dead woman' subverts to a pleonasm.'⁷⁹



'Sleeping Beauty', one of the oldest wax figures in Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum (1763)

Sleeping Beauty is undoubtedly the ultimate 'passive princess'; she does not talk, does not act and does nothing other than simply lie down and look beautiful. Once sleeping, she has no active function. As Patricia Duncker argues, 'All the women have to do is wait. She must not initiate sexual activity, a potential she now possesses that is fraught with danger. She must wait and sleep out the years until she is possessed.'⁸⁰ When Talia falls asleep her father 'left the dead Talia seated on a velvet chair under an embroidered canopy in the palace'⁸¹ and fled the palace; Perrault's version recounts that the Prince 'arrived in a room that was

⁷⁶ Stone, 1975:45

⁷⁷ Kolbenschlag, 1979:5

⁷⁸ Poe, 1846:163-167

⁷⁹ Bronfen, 1992: 63

⁸⁰ Duncker, 1984: 9

⁸¹ Basile, 1983: 130

entirely covered in gilding and, there on the bed with the curtains drawn back so that he could see her clearly, lay a princess [...] so lovely she seemed, almost, to shine¹⁸². The tale of 'Snow White' also deals with a beautiful princess who is cursed with an enchanted sleep, and, in the Grimms' version, is placed in a 'transparent glass coffin so that she could be seen from all sides' on which the dwarfs wrote 'her name on it in gold letters and added that she was a princess'¹⁸³. When the prince sees Snow White in her coffin he offers to buy her from the dwarfs, and, when they refuse, he says, 'Then give it to me as a gift' and explains, 'for I can't go on living without being able to see Snow White.'¹⁸⁴ These women become art for art's sake, admired for their beauty with little regard to purpose or intent; the prince desires Snow White simply so that he may see her. Snow White becomes an *objet d'art*, an 'it' in a syntactic slip which analogises the sleeping princess with her coffin, which [not 'whom'] the prince attempts to purchase so that he may gaze upon her. 'For,' Gilbert and Gubar write, 'dead and self-less in her glass coffin, she is an object, to be displayed and desired, patriarchy's marble 'opus', the decorative and decorous Galatea with whom every ruler would like to grace his parlor.'¹⁸⁵ Indeed, man is the Pygmalion who crafts the *perfect* woman, the sleeping beauty and the marble opus, through the vehicle of the fairy tale urtext; the woman he creates becomes, in Baudrillard's term, a simulacrum and a *representation*. That is, the patriarchal construction of the image of the woman is accepted in place of the woman herself. Beauty's princes, too, cannot help but admire the magnificent setting in which they find the beautiful princess and cannot contain their 'being on fire with love'¹⁸⁶ with the object in front of them – consequently Basile's King 'gathered the fruits of love'¹⁸⁷, Perrault's Prince 'fell on his knees before her'¹⁸⁸ whilst Grimms' and Disney's prince 'leaned over her and gave her a kiss'¹⁸⁹. The remarkable setting in which the prince finds the beautiful sleeping princess is like a gilded frame which augments the aesthetic purpose of the beautiful sleeping princess in the woods, sealing her fate as an imagined fantasy as opposed to a real woman; she is purely an object of desire.

Dworkin remarks on the effects of fairy tales in presenting desirable roles for boys and girls to aspire to:

¹⁸² Carter, 1979: 64

¹⁸³ Zipes, 2002: 187

¹⁸⁴ Zipes, 2002: 188

¹⁸⁵ Gilbert & Gubar, 1989:205

¹⁸⁶ Basile, 1983: 130

¹⁸⁷ Basile, 1983: 130

¹⁸⁸ Carter, 1979: 64

¹⁸⁹ Zipes, 2002: 174

they (the boys) dreamed of mounting the Great Steed and buying Snow White from the dwarfs; we (the girls) aspired to become that object of every necrophiliac's lust – the innocent, *victimized* Sleeping Beauty, beauteous lump of ultimate, sleeping good.⁹⁰

Dworkin's reference to 'every necrophiliac's lust' is indicative of the princes' 'being on fire with love' discussed above, and is remarkable because the sleeping princess is as close to being dead as a live person can possibly be. In analysing the suppressed female figures in the Grimm fairy tales, Stone suggests that 'if the Grimm heroines are, for the most part, uninspiring, those of Walt Disney seem barely alive.'⁹¹ Perrault, aware of this kinship to a state of death, remarks:

Her trance had not yet taken the colour from her face; her cheeks were rosy and her lips like coral. Her eyes were closed but you could hear her breathing very, very softly and, if you saw the slow movement of her breast, you knew she was not dead.⁹²

In Basile's version, just like Perrault's, as soon as the hemp gets under Talia's nail, 'she immediately fell dead upon the ground'⁹³. A few lines later the King arrives and 'called to her, thinking she was asleep', but, 'nothing he did or said brought her back to her senses'⁹⁴. This does not stop the King from 'gathering the fruits of love' and leaving her on the couch only to forget afterwards that anything ever happened. Beauty might as well be dead, asleep not in her bed but in a coffin, for her lack of consent does not stop the King from indulging his 'necrophiliac lust'. This is best illustrated when, Anne Rice, writing as A.N. Roquelaure, enlarges the tale of Sleeping Beauty into three volumes of erotic narrative. The trilogy begins with *The Claiming of Sleeping Beauty*⁹⁵ in which the Prince discovers the fabled sleeping princess and, like Basile's King, ravishes her fifteen-year old body. Only in this version, this is the moment that the princess wakes up:

He sucked on her lips, he drew the life out of her into himself, and feeling his seed explode within her, heard her cry out. And then her blue eyes opened.⁹⁶

Beauty is consequently bound into a sentence of servitude (sexual and otherwise) at the prince's beck and call – a situation that differs from her previous comatose condition only in that she is no longer sleeping. Indeed the prince draws 'the life out of her and into himself' and is thereafter in control of not only his actions but of Beauty's as well, rendering her agency null and void; she becomes the ideal patriarchal woman⁹⁷. Indeed there is little difference between Perrault's sleeping

⁹⁰ Dworkin, 1974: 33

⁹¹ Stone, 1975:44

⁹² Carter, 1979: 61

⁹³ Basile, 1983: 130

⁹⁴ Basile, 1983: 130

⁹⁵ Roquelaure, 1999

⁹⁶ Roquelaure, 1999:3

⁹⁷ Remarkably, it is only the third title in the trilogy, *Beauty's Release*, which begins with Beauty's own focalised point of view. The first is focalised, initially, by the Prince, whilst the first scene of the second book is focalised by one of the male guards.

princess and the Madame Tussaud's wax figure of the same name which has been fitted with a sophisticated mechanism to simulate an up-down 'breathing' movement in the figure's chest, as well as a motorised heartbeat. Elisabeth Bronfen analyses the concept of the wax model, talking specifically about anatomical wax museums set up in Florence in the 1770s and 1780s, and shows how the wax figures, cast from dead women so as to analyse anatomical structure outside of an operating theatre, 'served to cover, distance and control both sexuality and death by rendering the mutable, dangerously fluid, destabilised feminine body in a cleansed, purified, immobile form'¹⁹⁸.

dominant classes in America and England.¹³⁸ That is, the mass-marketed fairytale film, the film created specifically as a 'crowd-pleaser', has been altered to suit the desires of the dominant consumer market to ensure favourable sales figures. A conservative audience, for example, would take more readily to those gender roles deemed 'normal' by the dominant patriarchal system, thereby perpetuating the presentation of those fairy tales which portray heterosexual relationships shared by an active prince and a victimized princess.

While the above description of the Sleeping Beauty narrative might be indicative of the popularised Disney version of the events, the history of 'Sleeping Beauty' is as diverse and varied as the history of the fairy tale itself. The various retellings of this particular tale might appear to be more or less the same, but, as Tolkien suggests, it is the subtle differences that are particularly telling:

We need, in any case, to clean our windows; so that the things seen clearly may be freed from the drab blur of triteness or familiarity – from possessiveness. Of all faces of our *familiares* are the ones both most difficult to play fantastic tricks with, and most difficult really to see with fresh attention, perceiving their likeness and unlikeness: that they are faces, and yet unique faces.³⁹

Indeed, this comparison between familiar fairy tales and windows is more telling than Tolkien lets on, for any iteration of a fairy tale is a transparent window into the values and norms of the society which produced it. While oral fairy tales are typically associated with female tellers, Western literary fairy tales are exclusively linked to *men* in a historical context as they dominated the modes of literary expression. As Harries argues, 'The history of fairy tales is not primarily a history of oral transmission but rather a history of print.'⁴⁰ This history necessarily suggests a literary opus that consists predominantly of patriarchal texts that suppress feminine agency while promoting patriarchal mandates. My discussion of 'Sleeping Beauty' hinges on the four primary patriarchal versions of the tale across five centuries; these historically different versions of the tale are penned by men, namely Basile, the Grimm brothers, Perrault, and Disney, and all accept the structural artifice and naturalising aspects of fairy tale without question. These four versions are widely recognized as the most well-known and widely distributed patriarchal versions in literary fairytale

project his own whims and desires. Beauty is the ideal wife, the subservient, acquiescing and sexualised female who exists solely for her prince.

These sleeping women are not real women, and are instead constructs and narrative functions; Sleeping Beauty is a *non-person*. Cixous talks about the patriarchal woman whom man desires, the quiet and meek woman who acquiesces to his every need¹⁰², and argues that 'She does not exist, she can not-be; but there has to be something of her. He keeps, then, of the woman on whom he is no longer dependent, only this space, always virginal, as matter to be subjected to the desire he wishes to impart.'¹⁰³ To assert his individual male dominance the man requires some *thing*; he does not wish to have an actual person, and the idea of that feminine body, dead, a universal empty signifier, is enough. The passive heroine is this non-person, non-female. She does not exist, but the space that she occupies is decidedly feminine in idea and in aesthetic beauty. Sleeping Beauty, in the four versions discussed above, is always a beautiful, virginal and pubescent girl who is cursed from her birth and has no active hand in her own destiny. She must accept the role delineated for her by the wise men or the fairies, and must not question or challenge the course of action. Indeed, as Bataille argues, her beautiful appearance is not even her own as it is created and maintained for male pleasure: 'If beauty so far removed from the animal is passionately desired, it is because to possess is to sully, to reduce to the animal level. Beauty is desired in order that it may be fouled; not for its own sake, but for the joy brought by the certainty of profaning it.'¹⁰⁴ Every aspect of Beauty's existence, it seems, is contingent on male dictates.

To sleep, perchance to dream

Beauty's lengthy sleep, perhaps, is indicative of her desire to escape her predestined fate. For Bettelheim,

The turning inward, which in outer appearance looks like passivity (or sleeping one's life away), happens when internal mental processes of such importance go on within the person that he has no energy for outwardly directed action.¹⁰⁵

He suggests that Beauty's process of maturation (Perrault's beauty is entering puberty when she falls asleep) is such an enormous mental struggle that it engages all of her power and effort. That is why she appears to be physically sleeping – her mind is occupying all of her resources so that leaves none

¹⁰² Such as Dorothy in the 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz*, based on Frank L. Baum's book of the same name, who introduces herself to the 'Great and Powerful' wizard as 'Dorothy, the small and meek'.

¹⁰³ Cixous, 1986:65

¹⁰⁴ Bataille, 1977: 144

¹⁰⁵ Bettelheim, 1978: 225

for her body to employ. Jones suggests, in much the same vein, that '[b]y remaining in her crystal cocoon, the heroine is protected and insulated from the disturbing changes and emotions that characterize maturation.'¹⁰⁶ Although Bettelheim and Jones present different views of what Beauty does whilst sleeping, they subscribe to the same premise: by retaining her death-like trance she is able to traverse the boundary between the real world and the dream world, blending her everlasting beauty with her own desires, and is consequently able to either escape into herself from the unfamiliar hormonal state or is able to retreat into herself to address her mental processes.

Furthermore, Bettelheim argues, responding to feminist readings, that Sleeping Beauty is mirrored by many sleeping princes who undergo the same pubescent struggles. He says,

Since there are thousands of fairy tales, one may safely guess that there are probably equal numbers where the courage and determination of females rescue males and vice versa. This is as it should be, since fairy tales reveal important truths about life.¹⁰⁷

Bettelheim's speculations are without academic justification, he 'safely' *guesses*, and he does not address that the tale of Sleeping Beauty, mirrored in her sister tale of Snow White, is the most popular out of all of the sleeping narratives about men and women. In fact, referring particularly to the Grimm fairy tale collection, Stone points out that

Of the total 210 stories in the complete edition, there are 40 heroines, not all of them passive and pretty. In fact, a dozen docile heroines are the overwhelming favorites, reappearing in book after book from the mid-nineteenth century to the present.¹⁰⁸

The particular event of the beautiful sleeping princess in the woods, and of the other passive princesses, has captured the pens of many writers, and has been reiterated incessantly for the last four hundred years. The story of the sleeping prince has fallen to the wayside, and can be found in obscure collections (only recently escalating in popularity) such as Alison Lurie's *Clever Gretchen and other Forgotten Folktales* – a tale which mirrors Zoza's¹⁰⁹ plight in Basile's frame story – and Angela Carter's *Angela Carter's Book of Fairy Tales*. Bettelheim's argument that there are equal numbers of tales about heroic princesses has some truth (perhaps not 'equal', but certainly 'corresponding'), but, in contemporary popular culture, it seems to be the 'docile heroine' who comes out as the most memorable. Lieberman argues that only 'the best-known stories, those that everyone has read or heard, indeed, those that Disney has popularized, have affected masses of children in our culture.'¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Jones, 1993:31

¹⁰⁷ Bettelheim, 1978:227

¹⁰⁸ Stone, 1975:43

¹⁰⁹ Zoza's tale, the tale of the Sleeping Prince, is the frame story in which we find 'Sun, Moon and Talia', and suggests in a chronological, linear manner that the Prince came first. In fact, one might suggest that the tale of the beautiful sleeping princess is just the Prince's dream in that she does not really exist – she exists only in fairy tales.

¹¹⁰ Lieberman, 1989:186

It is these stories that should be considered, for the others, those not as diffuse and far-reaching, 'are so relatively unknown that they cannot seriously be considered in a study of the meaning of fairy tales to women.'¹¹¹ The limited exposure to the 'thousands of fairy tales' presents only one aspect of those 'important truths about life' Bettelheim purports to demonstrate, and thus shows only one aspect of female development. Jones argues that female development is, as Bettelheim asserts, portrayed in and through fairy tales. 'The issue,' Jones says, 'seems now not so much a matter of whether female development is depicted in fairy tales, but *how* it is depicted.'¹¹² In the light of feminist criticism, the question becomes whether or not these depictions of female development

offer practical and therapeutic advice about dealing with the maturation process or whether they inculcate sexist and patriarchal values in order to co-opt their female audience members into accepting second-class status.¹¹³

For Bettelheim the enchanted sleep suggests to the pubescent teenager that it is acceptable to withdraw into yourself and 'sleep' this troublesome time away, thereby offering 'practical and therapeutic advice' for coping. However, on the whole, it is not difficult to see why the overwhelming majority of theorists, considering the preference of passive heroine tales, argue that Beauty is more closely aligned with the position which co-opts the female audience into 'accepting second-class status', or, as De Lauretis puts it, being 'seduced into consenting to femininity.'¹¹⁴ Indeed, as Marcia Lieberman argues, the fairy tales we are most familiar with in contemporary society are those that promote female acculturation to roles of passivity and gender inequality in a typically 'traditional' (or patriarchal¹¹⁵) society¹¹⁶.

Sleeping Beauty is dead in so far as her agency is dead; her opinions, her desires, her ability to think and articulate are all dead. Her body, however, is not dead. It is a vessel, a vehicle, the perfect patriarchal woman. She breathes and her heart beats which maintains the colour of her rosy complexion and perpetuates her role as a beautiful *object*. In fact, when the sleeping Beauty is able to dream (in Perrault's version of the events), even her dreams are dictated by the wishes of the other characters in the tale:

¹¹¹ Lieberman, 1989:186

¹¹² Jones, 1993:24

¹¹³ Jones, 1993:24

¹¹⁴ De Lauretis, 1984:134

¹¹⁵ Lieberman's term is 'traditional' society, although I believe that the concepts of traditional society and patriarchal society are interchangeable. (Lieberman 1989: 185)

¹¹⁶ Lieberman, 1989: 185

He [the prince] was more tongue-tied than she, because she had plenty of time to dream of what she would say to him; her good fairy had made sure she would have sweet dreams during her long sleep.¹¹⁷

Beauty's dreams even conspire against her to dictate her function: they are 'sweet' dreams which feature the exact moment of waking up to the arrival of the charming prince. Kolbenschlag reiterates this manipulation of psychological processes and argues that despite her outer sleep, 'she is busy living out the Pygmalion script [...], allowing herself to be sculpted, shaved, painted, plastered, pushed aside, pedestaled, pounded into a lifelike Galatea, the perfect fulfilment of a man's fantasies'¹¹⁸. Cixous speculates in a fictional piece on Beauty's desires,

What does she want? To sleep, perchance to dream, to be loved in a dream, to be approached, touched, almost, to almost come (*jour*). But not to come: or else she would wake up. But she came in a dream, once upon a time.¹¹⁹

The word '*jour*', used in the context above, is related to '*jouissance*', a French Freudian term, often employed by Julia Kristeva, which signifies both erotic and psychic pleasure¹²⁰. Indeed the French word for erotic release, the orgasm, is *le petit mort* which, of course, directly translates to 'the little death'. Beauty's desires and dream of a little death, a release, either erotically or psychically, manifests itself into an extended lifetime of catatonic sleeping; Cixous illustrates how the woman in question is aware of her proposed limitations – her inability to experience her own release. This, Cixous argues, is the man's dream: he dreams of a woman who acquiesces to his limitations on her condition of existence.

Man, as the omnipotent Pygmalion creator, has the power to 'draw the life out of' the female, but consequently also has the power to give it, or a refracted variation of it, back. Cixous argues,

It is men who like to play dolls. As we have known since Pygmalion. Their old dream: to be god the mother, the best mother, the second mother, the one who gives the second birth. She sleeps, she is intact, eternal, absolutely powerless, He has no doubt she has been waiting for him forever. The secret of her beauty, kept for him: she has the perfection of something finished. Or not begun. However, she is still breathing. Just enough life – and not too much. Then he will kiss her. So that when she opens her eyes she will see only *him*; him in place of everything, all-him.¹²¹

Beauty does not wish to awake from her sleep; what happens when she awakes is something 'sociocultural', 'he makes her lots of babies, she spends her youth in labor; from bed to bed, until the age at which the thing isn't "woman" for him anymore.'¹²² The reality of waking up, for Beauty, is that she must give up her eternal youth and move from one coffin, one vessel of death, into another.

¹¹⁷ Carter, 1979:, 66

¹¹⁸ Kolbenschlag, 1979:13

¹¹⁹ Cixous, 1986:67

¹²⁰ McAfee, 2004:16

¹²¹ Cixous, 1986:66

¹²² Cixous, 1986:66

Beauty's future, should she wake up, is to be a good wife and a good mother, to live in a world that surrounds the 'all-him' of the male-dominated arena of power. She has no choice but to agree, as Patient Griselda does, to the Marquis's proposal which outlines his ideal female companion, the corpse-woman:

I seye this: be ye redy with good herte
To al my lust, and that I frely may,
As me best thynketh, do yow laughe or smerte,
And nevere ye to grucche it, nyghte ne day?
And eek whan I sey 'ye,' ne sey nat 'nay,'
Neither by word ne frownyng contenance?
Swere this, and here I swere oure alliance.¹²³

The Marquis's proposal leaves Patient Griselda, Beauty, and the other passive princesses who fall into the same rubric, with a conditional offer of marriage. If they wish to be married to the most powerful, most wealthy, most active man (all attributes they are denied in themselves and thus seek elsewhere), then they must never question their husband's decisions, *neither by word ne frownyng contenance*. Beauty, in this predicament, is really faced with two choices: an outward, physical death-like sleep, or an inward, mental death-like existence. No wonder Beauty's sleep lasts a hundred years: by maintaining her non-death she is able to forego the societal role and function fashioned for her. Sleeping Beauty is the corpse, which, as Bronfen identifies, 'has no relation to the world in which it appears except that of an image, of a shadow, constantly present behind the living form even as this living form is about to transform into a shadow.'¹²⁴ Beauty, the corpse-woman, exists behind the living thing in the penumbra cast by man, 'In the shadow he throws on her; the shadow she is.'¹²⁵

Fairy Tale Mothers – the Good and the Absent

Talia might want to prolong her sleeping sanctuary so that she does not have to fulfil her patriarchally-defined role, but even this moment of temporary agency is forcibly removed from her when, nine months after being raped by the King, she gives birth to two hungry children. When one of her children attempts to suckle her finger, it 'sucked so hard that it drew out the splinter, and Talia was roused as if from a deep sleep'¹²⁶. The confused and shocked Talia has no idea how to react

¹²³ Chaucer, 1991: 142

¹²⁴ Bronfen, 1992:104

¹²⁵ Cixous, 1986:67

¹²⁶ Basile, 1983: 130

to her apparently maternal situation and, upon seeing two small children alone and hungry, she instinctively 'clasped them to her breast and held them as dear as life'¹²⁷. Any agency that Talia may have had is taken away from her as she becomes forced into and imprisoned in her function as a mother – a function outlined, constructed and controlled by man; a function that features predominantly in the fairy tale and in patriarchal society at large as a measure of feminine worth and a site of constant anxiety.

'Women mother,' Nancy Chodorow writes. 'In our society, as in most societies, women not only bear children. They also take primary responsibility for infant care, spend more time with infants and children than do men, and sustain primary emotional ties with infants.'¹²⁸ When compared to men in a Western society, women *do* mother. This is primarily an idealised Victorian view of the nature and function of women and motherhood in a Western society, although the adage still applies despite the slowly-changing gender roles in contemporary society. As Adrienne Rich points out,

Most of us were raised by our mothers, or by women who for love, necessity, or money took the place of our biological mothers. Throughout history women have helped birth and nurture each other's children. Most women have been mothers in the sense of tenders and carers for the young, whether as sisters, aunts, nurses, teachers, foster-mothers, stepmothers.¹²⁹

That is, women tend to fulfil the mothering role and function even if they have not physically given birth. Of all of the social roles delineated for women, mothering is the most acceptable which is perhaps why Talia so readily accepts her inexplicable situation: it does not matter that she does not understand why she came to have two children, what matters is the reality that the children are there and need to be looked after. In the patriarchal terms taken for granted in the tale, she is the ideal woman and the natural mother, the mother who Rich identifies as 'a person without further identity, one who can find her chief gratification in being all day with small children, living at a pace tuned to theirs'¹³⁰. However, unlike the ideal natural mother, fairytale mothers very rarely fulfil their maternal function well at all.

Actual flesh-and-blood mothers are seldom active in the actual fairytale narrative, if they exist at all, and usually occupy a type of limbo, a dead space that serves only a narrative function to propel the story forward. Talia is an exception as she is an actual mother who survives the birthing process,

¹²⁷ Basile, 1983: 130

¹²⁸ Chodorow, 1978:3

¹²⁹ Rich, 1986: 12

¹³⁰ Rich, 1986: 22. This is one of Rich's early 'unexamined concepts', as she terms it, and was something that brought her much grief as a young mother. Later, after unpacking her anxieties, she debunked the myth of the natural mother as a patriarchal construct.

although her children and her state of motherhood are removed in later versions of the Sleeping Beauty narrative and the moment of her awakening is instead replaced with a chaste gaze or a simple kiss, thus retaining her virginal status. Talia's own mother does not even feature in her story, which prefigures a narrative trend wherein the biological mother is either completely absent, in which case she is dead to the narrative, or she literally dies shortly after childbirth. The Grimm's version of the tale of 'Snow White', for example, begins with the mother figure who sat sewing at a window and wished for a child as white as snow, as red as blood and as black as the wood of the window frame. Shortly after voicing this wish, the Queen gives birth to the perfect daughter who satisfied her every desire, and 'right after she was born, the queen died'¹³¹, bestowing upon her daughter nothing but a title of nobility and an aesthetically pleasing appearance. Cinderella's mother in the Grimms version is no different, '[t]he wife of a rich man fell ill, and as she felt her end approaching, she called her only daughter to her bedside [...] she then closed her eyes and departed.'¹³²

Propp refers to the initial stage of the fairy tale as *absentation*¹³³, wherein a family member, typically the mother, departs and the hero[ine] is introduced. This absentation suggests a division of the family unit which propels the narrative forward so as to resolve the tension that results from the division. For example, Cinderella's mother dies in the first few lines of the tale which leaves the father open to remarry a wicked woman, thereby creating a familial tension that Cinderella finally resolves to her benefit by the end of the tale. Once dead, patriarchally defined mothers give way for their female progeny to move through the social hierarchy and take over the maternal role so as to perpetuate the procreative cycle. After procreating, the patriarchal woman has fulfilled her role as a wife and as child-bearer, and is no longer necessary. This is particularly true when considering that the fairytale mother, especially sleeping Beauty's own mother, is almost always a noble woman and historically would never actually 'mother' her own children. In fact, she is the most noble of all, *the Queen*, in the Disney, Perrault and Grimm versions. Beauty's noble lineage is indicated best in the detailed Perrault version where the good fairy touches all of the staff in the house with her magic ring to make them fall into the same enchanted sleep:

the housekeepers, the maids of honour, the chambermaids, the gentlemen-in-waiting, the court officials, the cooks, the scullions, the errand-boys, the night-watchmen, the Swiss guards, the page-boys and the footmen; she touched all the horses in the stable, and the stable-boys too, and even Puff, the princess' little lap-dog, who was curled up on her bed beside her. As soon as she had touched them with her magic ring, they all fell fast asleep and would not wake up until their mistress

¹³¹ Zipes, 2002: 181

¹³² Zipes, 2002: 79

¹³³ Propp, 1984: 25

woke, ready to look after her *when she needed them*.¹³⁴

Not only does Perrault divulge the aristocratic expectation that servants exist simply to cater to the needs of the upper classes – he says that the good fairy 'touched *everything* in the house' as if the employees were part of the furniture, and then seems to acquiesce to the notion that the people described thereafter must suspend their subjectivity until the princess awakens and needs them – he also lists all of the people required to act out the princess' various basic functions. Indeed, feeding a child would be taken on by a wet nurse, thereby making the noble woman especially redundant and disposable after fulfilling her feminine function as a birthing vessel for noble progeny.

The dead fairytale mother is almost always viewed from a positive stance and she often resurfaces in the tale to provide the child with some assistance or guidance as a supernatural helper or symbolically through other positive female characters. Fauna, Flora and Merryweather are particularly maternal female fairies who assist Beauty, and even Talia's children are looked after 'by two fairies who had appeared in the palace'¹³⁵ while their mother slept. Indeed, killing off the mother early is the only way to ensure that she will always be remembered as a good woman who performed the ultimate maternal sacrifice: a mother's life for her child's.¹³⁶

However, these fairy-tale mothers of patriarchal tales, Dworkin argues,

are mythological female figures. They define for us the female character and delineate its existential possibilities. When she is good, she is soon dead. In fact, when she is good, she is so passive in life that death must be only more of the same. Here we discover the cardinal principle of sexist ontology – the only good woman is a dead woman. When she is bad she lives, or when she lives she is bad. She has only one real function, motherhood.¹³⁷

Dworkin reiterates the absolute division between the good and the bad and highlights that the *good* patriarchal fairytale woman has only a single function: she must reproduce and then die shortly afterwards, just like Snow White's mother. Warner suggests that this early death is indicative of the historical context of the pre-modern mother and represents a feature of the family that persisted until substantial developments in modern medicine: the mother dies after giving birth in the fairy tale because in the socio-historical context 'childbirth was the most common cause of female

¹³⁴ Carter, 1979:, 62; my emphasis

¹³⁵ Basile, 1983:130

¹³⁶ This is also, of course, the easiest way to resolve any Freudian female oedipal conflicts which might develop for the daughter who no longer needs to abject her mother and triumph through competition in order to win her father's affections; without a mother, this can all happen naturally and without resistance.

¹³⁷ Dworkin, 1974:41

mortality¹³⁸. Thus the absent mother is indicative of a real-world situation that imprisons the patriarchal fairytale mother in a state of perpetual passivity. That is, the good patriarchal fairytale mother finds her life very much shortened by the reality of the social context external to the fairytale world, thus exaggerating Dworkin's sexist ontology: the patriarchal woman must face the likely possibility of losing her life so as to fulfil her role as a good woman.

If she does not fulfil her primary function as a mother or mothering figure then she must necessarily be bad and is classed in the villain contingent as a force to be eliminated. This problematic assumption about the role of women in society negates any potential agency on their part, and reiterates the ideal of the corpse-woman. Indeed, Beauty, as a corpse-girl, will grow up into a mother who will die shortly after giving birth to her own children in order to retain her angelic sanctity, thereby perpetuating what Dworkin identifies as 'more of the same'.

Mothers: the bad

The mother who *lives*, as Dworkin outlines, is almost always portrayed in varying degrees of 'bad' and 'evil', from abandoning mothers to monstrous women with blue laser-beam eyes and a thumping wooden tail¹³⁹. The monstrous mother figure thrives in fairytale villainy as illustrated by Tatar's analysis of antagonists from all of the Grimm tales, the total of which can be divided into three distinct categories:

The first comprises beasts and monsters. [...] The second group consists of social deviants. [...] The third (and this group easily outnumbers the members of both other categories) is composed of women. These are the various cooks, stepmothers, witches, and mothers-in-law with voracious appetites for human fare, sometimes even for the flesh and blood or for the liver and heart of their own relatives.¹⁴⁰

It is remarkable that the 'bad' character figured in fairy tales is overwhelmingly female: the monstrous mother is a tangible indication of feminine sin and presents a beastly reversal of the nurturing maternal functions so readily associated with the role of the typical woman, the natural mother. The positioning of the female in the 'monster' position in patriarchal fairy tale draws on the strong tradition of associating women with the negative aspects of society – she is beastly and must be killed, she is the sinner, the terrible Eve who perpetuates the inevitable mortality of man. The

¹³⁸ Warner, 1995:213

¹³⁹ See Lucy Lane Clifford's 'The New Mother'; a cautionary tale that plays on the trope of the wicked stepmother to enforce good behaviour in children. (Clifford, 2008)

¹⁴⁰ Tatar, 2003:139

moral value of activity, as Lieberman argues, is thus sex-linked¹⁴¹: the evil character in Beauty's tale, and other patriarchal tales that follow suit, whether evil is manifest through human, dragon or fairy forms, is feminine. While there are certainly male villains in patriarchal fairy tales, the monstrous female wins out overall as the preferred bogey; she is always eradicated, nullified, and rectified by the legitimate male power which restores patriarchal, thus *natural, order* when exercised.

In early tales, the evil stepmother typically taken for granted today was actually a bad *mother* who had survived childbirth, but in more contemporary versions of fairy tales the repulsion of biologically-driven infanticide¹⁴² became slowly eclipsed by the prefix 'step-', so that the horrors embodied by the villainous mother figure were a product of an unfortunate marriage agreement as opposed to a biological nightmare. Despite the presence of the contemporary prefix, Tatar points out that

the evil stepmother becomes an over-powering presence in the tale. She stands as the flesh-and-blood embodiment of maternity, and it is this figure of manifest evil that is most openly associated with women as mothers.¹⁴³

Fauna, Flora and Merryweather are examples of the personification of the 'natural' maternal impulse, but the converse is true for the abjected aspects of the mother: everything which she had to suppress in order to retain her saintly status comes back through the stepmother and her sinister sisters. 'Whether a figure is designated as a stepmother or a witch,' Tatar argues, 'she takes on a single well-defined function in fairy tales – one that is limited to the sphere known as villainy and that magnifies and distorts all the perceived evils associated with mothers.'¹⁴⁴ Just as Rich suggests that various women can take on the function of the mother, or aspects of mothering, so do various women represent parts of a mothering whole; the witch, the bad fairy or evil stepmother can all be indicative of the *same* character. For example, in the Sleeping Beauty narrative, Basile's tale features a monstrous Queen who attempts to eat her successor's children; the Grimms' version, drawn on Basile's tale, is split into two tales aligned with the female characters where the good sleeping princess features in 'Brier Rose' and the beastly queen features in 'The Stepmother'¹⁴⁵; Perrault's version features a nasty old witch; and Disney's mother manifests in the form of one of the greatest

¹⁴¹ Lieberman, 1989:197

¹⁴² See, Bloch, D. *So The Witch Won't Eat Me: Fantasy and the Child's Fear of Infanticide* London: Burnett Books, 1979

¹⁴³ Tatar, 2003:151

¹⁴⁴ Tatar, 2003:142

¹⁴⁵ 'The Stepmother' is tale 229, and is listed in Jack Zipes's collection *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm* under 'omitted tales'. (Zipes, 2002:631)

villains of all time, Maleficent¹⁴⁶. The negative aspects of the mothering function culminate in this single female villain who is the antagonist to the passive princess and must thus be overcome and killed so that the good characters may live 'happily ever after' in their pre-defined patriarchal roles.

Beauty and the Beastly

Setting up the bad woman as the physically repulsive monster who must be killed or nullified by the male protagonist reiterates the distinct binary between Beauty and the Witch. That is, the stepmother develops through patriarchal, literary versions of fairy tale as an embodiment of all of the bad aspects of the mother (the abandoning, abortive, non-maternal mother). Bettelheim suggests that the strict good-bad dichotomy created by these two female positions in patriarchal, literary fairy tales is indicative of the real mother, the dead or dying female character, and her child's natural anger at the mother's absence. The mother, the good woman, is split into two, Bettelheim argues, so that 'the fantasy of the wicked stepmother not only preserves the good mother intact, it also prevents having to feel guilty about one's angry thoughts and wishes about her'¹⁴⁷. Beauty is able to respond to and react against the wicked version of the mother, the stepmother, thus leaving the good mother figure intact in her angelic passivity. When splitting the woman into two, Beauty represents the ideal woman and the Witch represents the awful parts of that ideal woman that need to be repressed and killed, like the carnivorous wolf, the wicked Maleficent or the evil stepmother. Just as the mothering function is split between different women, as Rich points out, so is the actual mother split into her various constituent parts so as to retain the goodness of the self and abject anything that threatens that angelic passivity. Bettelheim, using the tale of 'Little Red Riding Hood', shows how the bad woman, the evil witch or the fiendish wolf 'is a passing manifestation – Grandma will return triumphant'.¹⁴⁸ That is, the witch is the Kristevan abject which manifests so that it will be eliminated to preserve the object.

Basile's Queen, for example, is the tangible abject who rejects all of the associations of maternal care and devotion. The first we learn of the Queen is that she was suspicious of her husband's prolonged absence and 'burned with a heat very different from the sun's heat'¹⁴⁹, illustrating that

¹⁴⁶ Voted first place in the Top 30 Disney Villain Countdown:
<http://www.ultimatedisney.com/countdown4/index3.html>

¹⁴⁷ Bettelheim, 1978: 69

¹⁴⁸ Bettelheim, 1978: 67

¹⁴⁹ Basile, 1983: 131

her existence is contingent on her husband's behaviour and that she presents a temperament that is not aligned with natural goodness. Through manipulation, murder threats and careful planning, she implemented her plot to overthrow her rivals. When Talia and her children arrived at the castle, the Queen 'with the heart of Medea, ordered the cook to cut their throats and to make them into hashes and sauces and give them to their unfortunate father to eat'¹⁵⁰, clearly exhibiting her inherent monstrosity. The naturally-kind cook is moved by pity for the fate of the children and substitutes two goat kids instead, further augmenting the Queen's unnatural behaviour by contrasting it to the cook's gentle nature. The greedy Queen then sentences Talia to death by burning, an inhumane and tortuous execution, and shows her corrupt superficiality when she acquiesces to Talia's request that she be able to remove all of her clothes 'not out of pity for her, but because she wanted to save the clothes, which were embroidered with gold and pearls'¹⁵¹. The King, the phallic symbol of patriarchal power, enters in at an opportune moment and rescues Talia, ordering that the Queen be thrown into the fire instead, thus destroying the monstrous female who threatens the naturalised patriarchal family. This simple plot summary is sufficient to show how the childless, jealous woman, the 'unnatural' woman, becomes the abstract monstrosity which temporarily threatens the patriarchal institution and must be killed in order to neutralise that threat.

The Queen is truly beastly and presents the perfect opposition to Beauty's innocence. She does not have her own name, like Talia, and when not called 'the Queen', she is referred to by derogatory names such as 'you renegade Turk'¹⁵², 'tyrant-faced one'¹⁵³ and 'spiteful dog'¹⁵⁴. It is not difficult to see why psychoanalytic scholars have interpreted this tale as an illustration of the female oedipal conflict wherein the girl struggles to replace her mother as her father's mate. Talia, the angelic ideal woman supplants the older Queen mother and so it follows that 'good' triumphs over 'evil'. To further emphasise the dichotomous relationship between good and bad, the Queen, unlike Talia, is barren; she has not fulfilled her role as mother in naturalised patriarchal terms. Furthermore, she is naturally suspicious, jealous, greedy and murderous – all of the things that a mother should not be. It is not difficult to see why the King chooses to eliminate the Queen and install Beauty in her place, opting for the fecund Talia instead of the Queen who denied him his progeny.

¹⁵⁰ Basile, 1983: 131

¹⁵¹ Basile, 1983: 132

¹⁵² Basile, 1983: 132

¹⁵³ Basile, 1983: 132

¹⁵⁴ Basile, 1983: 132

The Abandoning Mother

The problem with splitting up good and bad women in relation to motherhood and mothering, as is exemplified by the binary between Talia and the Queen, is that it takes place on what is assumed to be an inherently desirable site: mothering, the primary function of the patriarchal woman. The assumed acceptance of mothering is implied in the debate about whether a woman is good or bad, and the experience of maternity is something that has become, under patriarchal definitions and rule, what Rich terms an *institution*¹⁵⁵. The abandoning mother is a woman who questions the validity of the primary function of motherhood, the institution of motherhood, by distancing herself from her children in order to satisfy her own needs. She is not as savagely bloodthirsty as other mother figures, but she represents a niche of psychologically traumatic non-mothering that defies the patriarchal assumption 'that maternal love is, and should be, quite literally selfless'¹⁵⁶. For example, in the Grimms' version of the tale, Rapunzel's mother sells her daughter off to the witch next door in exchange for some of the Witch's lettuce. This exchange does not fare well for the child when the Witch declares to the husband, 'You needn't fear about the child's well-being, for I shall take care of it like a mother.'¹⁵⁷ Not only does the witch negate Rapunzel's subjectivity, referring to her as an *it*, but instils a degree of uncertainty for the safety and wellbeing of the child as the only reference point for mother thus far encountered in the tale is Rapunzel's own insufficient mother¹⁵⁸.

Hansel and Gretel's real mother is particularly awful; when faced with an economic crisis her first solution is to dispose of her costly children. She suggests to her husband that 'we'll take the children out into the forest where it's most dense [...] Then we'll go about our work and leave them alone. They won't find their way back home and we'll be rid of them.'¹⁵⁹ The abandoned Hansel and Gretel are later faced with the physical manifestation of their mother's evil inclinations: the cannibalistic, beastly witch with red eyes and a keen sense of smell to detect whenever human beings are near so that she may feed off of them and have a 'tasty meal'¹⁶⁰. This cannibalistic tendency is a direct inversion of the mothering role as the female character reintroduces the child's body into her own in a monstrous reverse birth. This is also a reversal of the assumption of selflessness – the monstrous mother eliminates the need for selflessness by eliminating the problem of the other 'self' and

¹⁵⁵ Rich, 1986

¹⁵⁶ Rich, 1986: 22. This is another of Rich's 'unexamined assumptions'.

¹⁵⁷ Zipes, 2002: 43

¹⁵⁸ However, it might be that the witch is pointing out the inadequacy of the mothering figure in this tale.

¹⁵⁹ Zipes, 2002: 53

¹⁶⁰ Zipes, 2002: 57

securing the significance and importance of her own 'selfhood'. It implies selflessness on the part of the child, a direct contradiction of the concept of 'child'.

The bad mother, it seems, is 'bad' because she neglects her maternal duties and threatens to undermine the stability of patriarchal doctrine. According to this 'maternalist imperative', Shelley Saguaro writes,

such woman [who are not mothers, or do not wish to be mothers] will be 'doubly' failed: failed by virtue of their very being – as 'woman' – and then failed by virtue of their being not 'woman enough'.¹⁶¹

Within a patriarchal society the woman is doomed to be defined in relation to her function as a mother. Indeed, Rich argues, 'Terms like "barren" or "childless" have been used to negate any further identity.'¹⁶²

The fear of failure and the neglect of maternal duties raises the conceptual differences between *mothering* and *reproducing*, the difference Rich identifies as that between the *institution* of Motherhood and the *potential* for reproduction¹⁶³. Where one is the function of caring for a child, the other is the function of serving simply as a birthing vessel – an action that usually renders the fairytale mother dead after the birth resulting in the necessary absention for the narrative drive. The 'good' mother, it seems, is the one who performs one of these functions, either giving birth to a child or mothering a child. Again, Talia is an exception to the rule as she performs both functions, making her doubly good. However, she is unaware of her role in the birthing process as she wakes up and finds herself with two children, thus only conceptually taking part in the mothering function.

Indeed, by identifying a distinction between different types of mothers it becomes evident that the one version of motherhood is tainted: the mother who serves only as a birthing vessel and lives thereafter, rejecting her role of 'mother' and caregiver. Rich points out the differences between what it means to 'mother' a child and to 'father' that same child. She argues that

To "father" a child suggest above all to beget, to provide the sperm which fertilizes the ovum. To "mother" a child implies a continuing presence, lasting at least nine months, more often for years. Motherhood is earned, first through an intense physical and psychic rite of passage – pregnancy and childbirth-then through learning to nurture, which does not come by instinct.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ Saguaro, 2004:6

¹⁶² Rich, 1986: 11

¹⁶³ See Rich, 1986: 13

¹⁶⁴ Rich, 1986: 12

Mothering, she argues, is not something natural to women. It is something that comes necessarily through learning and training – a kind of forced learning that is dictated by patriarchal society which identifies the female role as carer and nurturer, and that is thrust upon the woman after giving birth to a child that has immediate needs. This arbitrary signification is perpetuated by the misnomer 'to mother', and, 'In the most fundamental and bewildering of contradictions,' Rich writes, the institution of motherhood 'has alienated women from our bodies by incarcerating us in them.'¹⁶⁵

'A man', Rich argues, 'may beget a child in passion or by rape, and then disappear; he need not consider child or mother again.'¹⁶⁶ The mother, however, has no such option. The abandoning mother is the mother who neglects the duties outlined for her by the dominant doctrine and refuses the role of care-giver. The bad mother is the ultimate villain, the figure of evil who plagues every child's nightmares and who blurs the supposed internalised ideal of Rich's natural mother. It is the woman who subverts the 'natural' inclination for selflessness and in turn exploits selfishness in a direct contradiction of everything that she is *supposed* to stand for. Her very existence is a threat to the 'natural' order, and this threat can only be neutralised when she is murdered or tortured into compliance¹⁶⁷. She presents an alternative. She is the abject and as Hegel reveals, the Abject and the Slave, if not killed, finally return triumphant.

A Borderline Case: Abjection

Perhaps separating the positive and negative aspects of the mother into two different figures is a healthy way to channel childhood aggression towards the mother figure, as Bettelheim suggests, but this neglects the subjectivity of the persons involved. Warner argues that

Bettelheim's theory has contributed to the continuing absence of good mothers from fairy tales in all kinds of media, and to a dangerous degree which itself mirrors current prejudices and reinforces them. His argument, and its tremendous diffusion and widespread acceptance, have effaced from memory the historical reasons for women's cruelty within the home and have made such behaviour seem natural, even intrinsic to the mother-child relationship. It has even helped to ratify the expectations of strife as healthy and the resulting hatred as therapeutic.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ Rich, 1986:13

¹⁶⁶ Rich, 1986: 12

¹⁶⁷ For example, Snow White's mother, in the Grimm version, is forced to wear red-hot iron shoes and 'dance until she fell down dead' (Zipes, 2002: 188)

¹⁶⁸ Warner, 1995:212

Bettelheim's approach simply perpetuates the patriarchal division between the good woman who must be protected and the bad woman who must be killed. His explanation of fairy tales makes them 'safe' and explains away their historical significance as patriarchal propaganda under the umbrella concepts of 'healthy' and 'therapeutic'.

Bettelheim might argue that the two characters represent two conflicting aspects of the mother figure, but he neglects the fact that they present two sides of another person: the soon-to-be-wed passive princess who must abject her agency and potential rebellion so that she may fulfil the appealing role of wife and mother in a union with the prince. Indeed, it is the patriarchal protagonist who overcomes any potential rebellion in the figure of the witch and restores order so that he may marry the perfect subservient corpse-girl.

Beauty, then, is the 'I', the subject constructed in patriarchal terms, the natural woman. Everything of herself that she has to repress, remove, abject, in order to become the perfect woman becomes so monstrous that it manifests itself into a real *object*, the abject, the *unnatural* woman. Beauty's monstrous double is manifest through the figures of Maleficent, the Queen, the Step-Mother, the gendered other. Cixous writes that, '[e]ither woman is passive or she does not exist. What is left of her is unthinkable, unthought.'¹⁶⁹ What is left of her is *abjected*: the tangible manifestation is a direct result of the impossible limitations imposed on the woman and the difficulty of her compliance with the restrictions. Indeed, as Kolbenschlag argues, 'It is not power that corrupts, it is powerlessness.'¹⁷⁰

In defining the relationship between the object and the abject, Kristeva writes that '[t]he abject has only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to I.'¹⁷¹ When considering the various female villains in fairytale narrative,

It quickly becomes clear that stepmother, evil cook, witch and mother-in-law are different names for one villain whose aim is to banish the heroine from hearth and home and to subvert her elevation from humble origins to noble status. What at first blush appears to be a conspiracy of hags and witches is in the final analysis the work of a single female villain.¹⁷²

This single female villain is the abject to Beauty's self, and, like Kristeva's abject, 'It lies outside, beyond the set, and does not seem to agree to the latter's rules of the game. And yet, from its place

¹⁶⁹ Cixous, 1986:64

¹⁷⁰ Kolbenschlag, 1979: 22

¹⁷¹ Kristeva, 1982:1

¹⁷² Tatar, 2003:144

of banishment, the **abject** does not cease challenging its master.¹⁷³ Disney's 1959 filmic version of the sleeping beauty narrative also presents the female characters as occupying a dichotomous dialogue: Beauty, the passive princess, is plagued by her negated self which surfaces under the guise of Maleficent, the most powerful witch-fairy in the kingdom.

The Other; the Unnatural Woman.

The Disney version of *Sleeping Beauty* creates the ideal visual of the unnatural, other woman: Maleficent, the forgotten fourth fairy, is the

Margaret Hamilton as the Wicked Witch of the West in Victor Fleming's 1939 film, *The Wizard of Oz*

antagonistic female to Beauty's passivity. She is remarkably beautiful, although her conventional beauty is somewhat marred by her green colouring, pointed chin and devilish

horn-shaped hairstyle. Disney's Maleficent resembles the Wicked Witch of the West from 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz*, also figured in green and black, and is in direct visual contrast with the innocent persecuted Dorothy/Beauty whom she plagues. In fact, the sinister associations of

green and black have been used to visually reinforce the corrupt nature of this character. While the green, in the case of *Sleeping Beauty*, prefigures the unnatural monstrous and reptilian transformation Maleficent undergoes later in the film, the deeply mysterious, enveloping black and green colouring, combined with her distinct features and blood-red lips, is highly eroticised and provides a stark contrast to the simple, virginal aesthetics of white and blonde, invoking the corollary binary of good and bad. In fact, Maleficent's appearance alone presents one clear distinction: she is *not* Beauty.



Maleficent as figured in Disney's 1959 film *Sleeping Beauty*

Her name is indicative of her action in the story – much like Beauty's name prefigures her narrative function, so does the bad fairy's name prefigure illogical, unfounded evil intent and malicious harm. The bad fairy thwarts traditional mothering roles and curses an innocent baby to an early death to spite her parents, and then continues to plague the child so that her curse may come true. Later in the film she reveals her true draconian nature through a literal transformation from powerful, female witch to massive, fire-breathing dragon. In the beginning, Maleficent's inner 'ugliness' and evil inclinations emerge through traces of her green skin and black drapery. The figure of Disney's Maleficent is particularly interesting because she renders in obviously visual and exaggerated terms

¹⁷³ Kristeva, 1982:2



the implicit monstrosity of the abjected mother-figures in previous versions: Talia's adversary is 'tyrant faced'¹⁷⁴, while Perrault's Beauty is plagued by an ogress with 'hideous appetites'¹⁷⁵, who was married only because 'she was very, very rich'¹⁷⁶. Warner notes Perrault's original footnote explaining the feminine of the term 'Ogre', Ogree, which is 'a Giant with long teeth and claws, with a raw head and bloody bones'¹⁷⁷. The appearance of Maleficent and her monstrous sisters does not come as a surprise. As Lieberman argues, '[e]ither extra-human race or extreme ugliness is often associated with female wickedness, and in such a way as to suggest that they explain the wickedness.'¹⁷⁸ That is, in a clear dichotomy of good versus bad, it is always the ugly character who is assigned the role of the 'bad', and the beautiful character that occupies the good position: as Glinda the Good Witch tells Dorothy, 'Only bad witches are ugly.'¹⁷⁹ Indeed, as Lieberman summarises, 'those women [...] who have power or seek it, are nearly always portrayed as repulsive'¹⁸⁰ and furthermore, '[w]hether human or extra-human, those women who are either partially or thoroughly evil are generally shown as active, ambitious, strong-willed and, most often, ugly.'¹⁸¹

In a society where women exist only to please men, beauty and physical attractiveness become a measure of moral worth. If Beauty is the epitome of goodness and aesthetic beauty, then Maleficent's ugliness and apparent evil is manifest through her lack of blonde curls, her green skin-colour, and her preference of black attire over the more feminine pink or baby-blue hues that Beauty is wont to wear. Indeed the vengeful female is so horrible that the Grimms found it necessary to divide Basile's narrative and isolate her in her own fragmented tale, titled 'The Stepmother' or 'The Mother-in-Law'¹⁸². The reference to mothers is no coincidence, for although Perrault and Disney portray her as a bad fairy or witch, the Maleficent character began life as a mother-in-law in Basile's account which further augments her horrific nature as she plagues the young child-Beauty.

¹⁷⁴ Basile, 1983: 13

¹⁷⁵ Carter, 1979: 68

¹⁷⁶ Carter, 1979: 67

¹⁷⁷ Warner, 1998:33

¹⁷⁸ Lieberman, 1989:196

¹⁷⁹ Glinda in *The Wizard of Oz*, Metro Goldwyn Mayer: 1939

¹⁸⁰ Lieberman, 1989: 197

¹⁸¹ Lieberman, 1989: 197

¹⁸² Zipes, 2002: 631

Maleficent is masked by her apparent ugliness, her unusual colouring and sharp features which makes her unattractive, undesirable and unequivocally evil. However, just as Kristeva argues that the abject 'does not respect borders, positions, rules'¹⁸³, so Maleficent finds herself refusing the absolute distinction in the binary between good and bad, beautiful and hideous, used to contain her. Chaucer's Wife of Bath tells a tale about a similar woman, a loathly lady, who is portrayed as horribly ugly. A Knight is found guilty of rape and is sentenced by the Queen to find the answer to the question, 'What do woman most desire?' After much fruitless wandering, he comes across his last hope, the loathly lady, who gives him the correct answer in exchange for a single request that she may make of him at any time. After the Knight has been pardoned, he returns and she demands that he marries her – a request that he must honour despite his repulsion at her appearance. She repeatedly describes herself as 'foul, and oold, and poore'¹⁸⁴ whilst he complains 'Thou are so loothly, and oold also'¹⁸⁵. After listening to her husband's complaints about her appearance, she grants him a choice: he can choose to have an old wife who is faithful or a young wife who is unfaithful. When he finally gives up and relinquishes agency to his wife with the words 'I put me in youre wise governance; cheseth youreself which may be moost plesance'¹⁸⁶, he soon discovers 'That she so fair was, and so yong therto'¹⁸⁷ and that she thereafter 'obeyed hym in every thyng'¹⁸⁸. It becomes clear that the loathly lady was simply a protective outer-layer that housed the prize wife underneath: the young and beautiful woman who was faithful to her husband and catered to his every need. The Wife of Bath finally delivers her warning to patriarchal males:

And eek I praye Jhesu shorte hir lyves
 That nocht wol be governed by hir wyves;
 And olde and angry nygardes of dispence,
 God sende hem soone verray pestilence!¹⁸⁹

Ugliness is used here to point to the binary of good and evil, but, it seems, that it reveals *not* a clear distinction but rather a moral ambiguity. As Umberto Eco argues in his chapter on 'The Ugliness of Woman between antiquity and the Baroque Period', ugliness in women is primarily seen as an indication of inner evil. This association changes, however, as ugliness takes on a new definition in a new historical context, and that which was once considered 'ugly' holds power for new readings¹⁹⁰. Not only is the Wife of Bath campaigning for gender equality and a social situation that undermines

¹⁸³ Kristeva, 1984: 4

¹⁸⁴ Chaucer, 1991:119, line 1063

¹⁸⁵ Chaucer, 1991:119, line 1100

¹⁸⁶ Chaucer, 1991:121, line 1231-2

¹⁸⁷ Chaucer, 1991:121, line 1251

¹⁸⁸ Chaucer, 1991:121, line 1255

¹⁸⁹ Chaucer, 1991:122 lines 1261 – 4

¹⁹⁰ Eco, 2007

the iron fist of patriarchy, she illustrates that sometimes the ugly is a sheath for something more beautiful underneath; that the ugliness is a type of curse inflicted upon woman by someone else. In Maleficent's case, her ugliness is a product of the patriarchal pen which writes her into a predefined role of evil which is to say, as Jane Ussher suggests, that 'this is not to say that the female body is abject or polluted, it has merely been positioned as such'¹⁹¹.

The loathly lady in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* also points to another aspect of Beauty's appearance: contrary to the logic implied in patriarchal fairy tale, beauty as an aesthetic quality does not necessarily entail good behaviour and passivity. In fact, in a reality removed from the fairytale world, beauty typically attracts a lot of attention and it was not uncommon to link physical attractiveness to sexual activity and even promiscuity – the Loathly lady offers her husband a beautiful wife who is unfaithful, or an ugly wife who is faithful. However, Beauty exists in the patriarchal fairytale world and, despite being raped, she retains a sense of her chastity through her passive non-participation in the sex-act. She remains idealised and virginal by abjecting sexual activity as a taboo, thus forcing it to manifest magnified in the figure of Disney's Maleficent.

Erotic Anxieties: Demonised, Sexual and Subversive

Patriarchal fairy tales with female characters, Seth Lerer argues, 'mark the girl as either dangerous or in danger: sexually predatory, or sexually vulnerable.'¹⁹² Beauty undeniably falls into the 'sexually vulnerable' category by virtue of her passivity: she is unconscious, unguarded, and is consequently the victim of rape. In fact, Beauty's erotic qualities are limited in appeal to those necrophiliacs who delight in sexual relations with corpses, or near-dead bodies. Maleficent and her sinister sisters, however, are not vulnerable characters but are rather actively predatory in nature. This is illustrated most pertinently in the visual representations of the eroticised bad woman. Indeed, as Warner points out, The Disney film 'concentrate[s] with exuberant glee on the towering, taloned raven-haired wicked stepmother; all Disney's power of invention failed to save the [prince] from featureless banality and his [heroine] from saccharin sentimentality.'¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ Ussher, 2006: 7

¹⁹² Lerer, 2008:231

¹⁹³ Warner, 1995:207

Prior to her transformation, Maleficent is figured as a potentially demonic, alluring force; her arrival is announced by a snaking bolt of lightning that strikes the ground, creating green flames which magically begin to dance as the form of Maleficent emerges from within them. Her slow, articulate speech is seductive, and she strokes the sleek black plume of her tamed raven as she casually pronounces her observations in the royal court. Her raven further emphasises her sinister appearance as it is a bird typically associated in contemporary Western society with death and misfortune¹⁹⁴. Maleficent provides a stark visual contrast to the sweet-natured, passive, sleeping baby Beauty who is cocooned in her mother's arms.

When comparing the images of the two grown women, Maleficent's high cheekbones, arched eyebrows, red lips and deep red nails are all highly eroticised, drawing on associations of whorish coquetry, and are in direct contrast to Beauty's apparent chastity. In fact, Basile presents his sleeping beauty, Talia, as so virginal and chaste that sleeps through her seduction, and awakes amazed to discover two small children that had been delivered to her through an almost-immaculate conception. Like the idealised Virgin Mary, who 'does not know that she has had intercourse or that she has conceived, has done so without pleasure and without sin'¹⁹⁵, Talia embraces her maternal role and, '[w]hen she saw the two jewels at her side, she clasped them to her breast and held them as dear as life; but she could not understand what had happened, and how she came to be alone in the palace with two sons'¹⁹⁶. Her confusion is indicative of her extreme passivity in the sex act, her chaste behaviour mirrors stereotypical Victorian sensibility which perpetuates the women's non-participation, or non-agency, in sexual release or enjoyment. In fact, in a different context and a different time, she might be seen as being blessed with divine progeny. It might be argued that the only reason why Talia lives is because she did not engage in the sinfulness of sexual activity, and consequently she should thank the King with affection, which she does, instead of chastising him when he reveals his violation.

'Despite their beauty and charm,' Zipes argues,

Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella, and the other heroines are pale and pathetic compared to the more active and demonic characters in the film. The witches are not only agents of evil but represent erotic and subversive forces that are more appealing both for the artists who draw them and for the audiences.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1996: 789

¹⁹⁵ Bettelheim, 1978: 228

¹⁹⁶ Basile, 1983: 130

¹⁹⁷ Zipes, 1994:90

Unlike Beauty, Maleficent is indeed the focus of the viewers' 'exuberant glee' because she suggests an erotic potential. Her ambiguous exterior is neither monstrous nor traditionally beautiful – it is strangely intriguing in its finely featured green surface. Her wild, animal potential lies within her, beneath the chiselled surface, and will emerge later as a powerful dragon-monster. This fragile border between *tamed* and *untamed* generates an enormous erotic appeal that is linked quite strongly to desire; desire for power and desire for sexual fulfilment. Indeed, as a fantastic inhuman figure, Maleficent fills the gaps left by the ideal natural but near-dead woman. As Rosemary Jackson argues, 'fantasy characteristically attempts to compensate for a lack resulting from cultural constraints: it is a literature of desire which seeks that which is experienced as absence and loss.'¹⁹⁸ Maleficent, here, is the imagined fantasy that exposes that which is experienced as absence and loss, specifically by the female figure – she is both subversive and erotic, she is precisely that which Beauty must completely abject in order to preserve her perfect passive princess femininity and retain her good reputation, as befits a princess.

Monstrous Mothers and Vagina Dentata

The two opposed ideas of female sexuality as good and bad, chaste and erotic, situate Maleficent and Beauty even further apart, reiterating their differences and perpetuating the divide between them. Rich argues that patriarchal mythology sustains this division, which is precisely how Maleficent and Beauty function in the narrative of Sleeping Beauty. Rich writes,

In order to maintain two such notions, each in its contradictory purity, the masculine imagination has had to divide women, to see us, and force us to see ourselves, as polarized into good or evil, fertile or barren, pure or impure. The asexual Victorian angel-wife and the Victorian prostitute were institutions created by this double thinking, which had nothing to do with women's actual sensuality and everything to do with the male's subjective experience of women.¹⁹⁹

Despite being a threat to children of both sexes, the demonization of the fecund female figure, Freudians argue, is rooted in the '*male* fear and infantile belief that the mother is castrated'²⁰⁰. In the same way that the definition of woman is only indicative of the male's subjective experience of women, so is the demonisation of the woman indicative of the intense male fear and uncertainty surrounding the unknown female sex.

¹⁹⁸ Jackson, 1981:3

¹⁹⁹ Rich, 1986: 34

²⁰⁰ Creed, 1993:1 My emphasis

The fear of the mother is the fear of the powerful life-giving female in a phallogocentric ideology that has no place for competing agency. Indeed, as Irigaray writes, '[f]emale sexuality has always been conceptualized on the basis of masculine parameters²⁰¹, and furthermore, '[t]he "feminine" is always described in terms of deficiency or atrophy, as the other side of the sex that alone holds a monopoly on value: the male sex.²⁰² This deficiency is illustrated best in terms of sexual difference and subsequently in terms of absence the phallus: the reduction of fear to the difference in sexualised genitals, that which is castrated and that which is not, is what Angela Carter refers to as 'the simplest expression of stark and ineradicable sexual differentiation²⁰³. She argues that in reductionist iconography,

the prick is always presented as erect, in an alert attitude of enquiry or curiosity or affirmation; it points upwards, it asserts. The hole is open, an inert space, like a mouth waiting to be filled. From this elementary iconography may be derived the whole metaphysic of sexual differences- man aspires; woman has no other function but to exist, waiting. The male is positive, an exclamation mark. Woman is negative. Between her legs lies nothing but zero, the sign for nothing, that only becomes something when the male principle fills it with meaning.²⁰⁴

The female genitals are figured in masculine terms as a *lack*, a nothingness void of any meaning and an inversion or absence of the phallus in a phallogocentric ideology. As Bienstock Anolik argues in *Horrifying Sex*, '[i]n transgressing the model of the normative male body, the female body is construed as monstrous by the horrified gaze of the patriarchy.²⁰⁵ Where the male body is the normative model, the female becomes the monstrous anomaly. Men demonise the woman because of their fear of castration that this monstrous lack represents; they control this lack through imposing themselves upon it and at once distancing themselves from it to make it 'safe'.

Perhaps the most extreme manifestation of this fear of the female genitalia emerges in the concept of *vagina dentata* – female genitals with *teeth*, a sexualised entrance that will literally castrate the male in the moment of climactic release. 'The myth about woman as castrator,' Creed writes, 'clearly points to male fears and phantasies about the female genitals as a trap, a black hole which threatens to swallow them up and cut them to pieces.²⁰⁶ This castration is both a figurative castration, one that separates the child from the mother and other forced emotional disconnections, but also a physical castration which forcibly removes male genitals with horrifically sharp razor-teeth.

²⁰¹ Irigaray, 1985: 23

²⁰² Irigaray 1985: 69

²⁰³ Carter, 2000:4

²⁰⁴ Carter, 2000:4

²⁰⁵ Bienstock Anolik, 2007:9

²⁰⁶ Creed, 1993: 106

To make the monstrous matters worse and reinforce the negative stereotype of the cunning female, the *dentata* typically operate duplicitously and the phallogentric man imagines that the castration 'might take place during intercourse when the penis 'disappears' inside woman's 'devouring mouth',²⁰⁷ the unknown; indeed, in the myth of the castrating woman, the female always seduces the male and the castration happens in an act of copulation²⁰⁸. *Vagina dentata* are particularly terrifying because they strike at precisely the one moment where man loses his power, in the climax, *le petit mort* which becomes the final death. It is this precise moment that the monstrous *dentata* wait for – ready to kill – subverting the natural function of the sex act and reversing the procreative intentions into brutal murder. This is the fear of what happens when man lets his guard down. The most literal translation of this monstrosity manifests through characters such as Milton's Sin in his epic *Paradise Lost*:

The one seemed a woman to the waist and fair
 But ended foul in many a scaly fold
 Voluminous and vast, a serpent armed
 With mortal sting. About her middle round
 A cry of hell-hounds never ceasing barked
 With wide Cerberian mouths full loud and rung
 A hideous peal. Yet when thy list would creep
 If aught disturbed their noise into her womb
 And kennel there, yet there still barked and howled
 Within unseen.²⁰⁹

Like Ovid's Scylla, the maiden whose lower body was replaced with snapping heads with many rows of vicious teeth, Sin's sex is defended by a 'cry of hell-hounds' with razor-sharp teeth. She is also equipped with a phallic 'mortal sting' that will kill those seduced by her top half which 'seemed' to be a beautiful maiden.

Furthermore, Creed points out that 'Sleeping Beauty' is the 'perfect illustration' of the *vagina dentata* theme, 'the suitors who wish to win Briar Rose must first penetrate the hedge of thorns that bars their way. Only the prince who inspires true love is able to pass through unharmed'²¹⁰. The

²⁰⁷ Creed, 1993: 6

²⁰⁸ Creed lists various examples of the seducing castrating woman in myth in her chapter titled 'Medusa's head: the vagina dentata and Freudian Theory' (Creed, 1993: 105-121) and she also remarks on contemporary film – the most obvious example of this is the 2007 film [made fourteen years after Creed's examination] directed by Mitchell Lichtenstein titled *Teeth*, a film about a teenager whose vagina dentata wreak revenge on all who try to misuse her sexually.

²⁰⁹ Milton, 2005: 44 lines 650-59

²¹⁰ Creed, 1993: 107

Grimms record that soon after the princess fell asleep, a brier hedge began to grow around the castle. Their version states that,

From time to time princes came and tried to break through the hedge and get to the castle. However, this was impossible because the thorns clung together tightly as though they had hands, and the young men got stuck there. Indeed, they could not pry themselves loose and died miserable deaths.²¹¹

It is only in the instance of 'true love' that the man is able to defeat the thorns/teeth and meet with his princess. In this version, the sleeping princess is protected from potential defilement and sexual abuse by her thorned hedge, her *vagina dentata*.

The link between the mother and the *vagina dentata* is rooted in the notion of incorporation, or rather, re-incorporation; a threat which is understood by females and males. Creed offers two explanations for the proliferation of the toothed mouth – one, that the child who feeds from the mother fears being fed on by the mother and two, that the *vagina dentata* is an expression of the dyadic mother, the archaic mother, 'the all-encompassing maternal figure of the pre-Oedipal period who threatens symbolically to engulf the infant'²¹². The evil mother, or evil stepmother in Beauty's case, is the ultimate monstrous figure; a woman who is supposed to nurture her child through implicit trust and maternal bonds instead turns on her in a violent rage of cannibalistic greed and attempts to murder her, consume her and force her back into the darkness of the womb from whence she originated. Carter describes this in her tale 'The Tiger's Bride' when her protagonist notes her fear at approaching the very real, very threatening beast: 'Nursery fears made flesh and sinew; earliest and most archaic of fears, fear of devourment.'²¹³

Both explanations of the horrific castrating female originate in motherhood. In the first, the child is preyed on upon the mother figure, much like Talia's step-mother who attempts to eat her and her two small children. In the second, the horrific mother harkens back to the theory of the archaic mother, who Creed defines as 'the parthenogenetic mother, the mother as primordial abyss, the point of origin and of end'²¹⁴. The mother is a constant victim of hostility directed through the mistrust and unsettling envy of her of productive, life-giving powers in a patriarchal, phallogocentric ideology.

²¹¹ Zipes, 2002: 174

²¹² Creed, 1993: 109

²¹³ Carter, 1995: 168

²¹⁴ Creed, 1993: 17

The visual image of the *vagina dentata* is strongly reiterated in popular vampire myth. Indeed, as Creed argues in relation to contemporary horror film about female vampires, 'we are given close-up shots of woman's open mouth, pointed fangs and bloodied lips – a graphic image of the *vagina dentata*'²¹⁵ In one of the most powerful rewritings of the Sleeping Beauty narrative, Beauty loses her proxy *dentata* hedge and gains a genuine set of her own: Angela Carter rewrites the tale of Sleeping Beauty into a tale about a vampiric countess, daughter of the Count Nosferatu and the eponymous 'The Lady of the House of Love'²¹⁶.

Psychoanalysis manifested: One foot in the grave with Angela Carter's 'Lady of the House of Love'

The tale of Sleeping Beauty has engendered many retellings in contemporary society, but perhaps the most interesting of them all is Angela Carter's version which disrupts the naturalisation of feminine archetypes in patriarchal fairy tale in order to examine and explode the state of the sleeping princess locked into her role as the perpetually beautiful virginal delight. The Countess Nosferatu, like Beauty, 'has the mysterious solitude of ambiguous states: she hovers in a no-man's land between life and death, sleeping and waking, behind the hedge of spiked flowers'²¹⁷. As a vampire, the countess is both a corpse-woman and an undead being at once – a 'girl who is both death and the maiden'²¹⁸, and in this description she represents the archaic mother as origin and abyss, as outlined by Creed. As a princess, the countess is described as being incredibly beautiful, and, like Beauty, is also destined to be the shadow behind the living thing, 'a ghost in a machine'²¹⁹ always dressed in her dead mother's wedding gown, waiting for a man to wake her and wed her so that she can take her mother's place in the patriarchal cycle of feminine life. She has an 'unnatural beauty' which is 'a symptom of her disorder, or her soullessness'²²⁰, and, like Beauty, she is doomed to be confined within her predefined role as she 'helplessly perpetuates her ancestral crimes'²²¹.

When the Countess talks to the visiting English Officer, he notes that 'her voice is curiously disembodied' and 'she is like a doll, he thought, like a ventriloquist's doll, or, more, like a great

²¹⁵ Creed, 1993:107

²¹⁶ Carter, 1995: 195

²¹⁷ Carter, 1995: 205

²¹⁸ Carter, 1995: 195

²¹⁹ Carter, 1995: 202

²²⁰ Carter, 1995:196

²²¹ Carter, 1995: 195

ingenious piece of clockwork.²²² Indeed, the English Officer's observation situates Beauty firmly in the world of waxworks where the only necessary functioning for the corpse-woman is that she has colour on her cheeks and that she breathes. Like the Madame Tussaud's model, Beauty and the Countess both function, in this respect, as the ideal patriarchal female – a charming clockwork toy on which the patriarchal gaze rests, often lustfully. The Officer thinks later that the Countess in her bedroom reminds him much of a cheap brothel recommended to him where, for just ten louis, the customer can enjoy the multi-sensual experience of the haunting melodies of the gothic hymn *Dies Irae* (ironically, the 'Day of Wrath'), the 'perfumes of the embalming parlour' and of taking 'his necrophiliac pleasure of a pretend corpse'²²³. The body of the corpse-woman, in this case, hides the reality of the working woman who must subject her outer-self to the visual pleasure and desires of the man because she is paid to do so. In the Countess's bedroom, however, the corpse-woman is an undead monster who turns the tables of expected sexual behaviour and seduces the unsuspecting man to his death, reducing him to a mere 'mortal parcel'²²⁴, a corpse-man, who will later be buried by the domestic helper in a feminised hole in the garden mimicking a reverse-death, a return to the womb of the archaic mother.

Although beautiful and innocent in her guise, the Countess has the 'the most seductive and caressing voice'²²⁵, curiously disembodied²²⁶ so as to distance it from her angelic appearance. This distancing is the product of the feminine dichotomy which keeps the sexualised, eroticised aspects of her person distinct from her passive corpse behaviour. However, Maleficent's sexualised red lips are mirrored by the Countess's, and we learn that the young Officer was 'disturbed, almost repelled, by her extraordinarily fleshy mouth, a mouth with wide, full, prominent lips of a vibrant purplish-crimson, a morbid mouth.'²²⁷ Indeed, it is a mouth full of vampiric teeth 'as fine and white as spikes of spun sugar'²²⁸, illustrating the monstrous power hiding beneath the frail surface. Like the devouring, castrating *dentata*, '[a]ll claws and teeth, she strikes, she gorges'²²⁹, and after supping on mortal men, 'her keeper probers her fingernails for her with a silver toothpick, to get rid of the fragments of skin and bone that have lodged there.'²³⁰ Like Maleficent, the Countess is figured as a beast or animal that attends to the basest natural instincts rather than a person who has an agenda governed

²²² Carter, 1995: 204

²²³ Carter, 1995: 207

²²⁴ Carter, 1995: 198

²²⁵ Carter, 1995: 202

²²⁶ Carter, 1995: 204

²²⁷ Carter, 1995: 202

²²⁸ Carter, 1995: 196

²²⁹ Carter, 1995: 197

²³⁰ Carter, 1995: 198

by sensitive, sophisticated thought processes. The beast-woman hunts her prey, feeds off it, and is even contained within her castle and attended to by her 'keeper' to reinforce the animal aspect of her existence.

Despite the untamed associations of animal instincts, the *vagina dentata* give the Countess a hold over masculine, penetrating power which complements her powerful aristocratic position as 'Countess' in Carter's version, as the most 'senior ranking fairy'²³¹ in Perrault's version, and the Queen, the most senior-ranking female in the realm, in Basile's version. Power in itself is erotically appealing, and the bad fairy becomes the physical manifestation of that authority: she controls minions, wields a large, phallic staff and stands erect over Beauty's inert form. Maleficent embodies the masculine, phallic power which, combined with her physical appearance and wicked nature lends her a *demonic* quality. The intonation is clear: powerful, masculine women in this world are unnatural, evil and sinful, more aligned with the minions of Lucifer than with the angels of God. Indeed, in the strict dichotomy adhered to by Jesus in Matthew 12:30 when he says that '[h]e who is not with me is against me,' Beauty is aligned with the angelic aesthetics of those who fall into the ranks of godliness, and Maleficent is doomed to join Lucifer in wanton sinfulness.

The Monster and the Maiden

Maleficent's lack of wings, unlike her fairy counterparts in the Disney narrative, is also indicative of her apparently evil inclinations and 'fallen angel' nature; she is like Lucifer, the most notorious fallen angel who acted against God and was consequently damned for all eternity. Furthermore, her sinful nature is augmented by her quite obvious sense of *pride*, *suburbia*, which, like Eve's transgression, is the sin from which all other sins originate. Indeed, the Perrault and Disney narratives ensue from her wounded pride at not being invited to the christening banquet. While Beauty attempts to align herself with the virginal Mother Mary by refusing agency and wakefulness, the active, unnatural Maleficent is doomed to recreate the sinful moment of Eve's transgression through the very virtue of her active and evil nature. Furthermore, reiterating the association, Maleficent desires power and knowledge, blatantly exhibits her pride, and often draws on the associations of the tempting serpent in one of her guises to fulfil her evil deeds. Indeed, as Warner writes, 'The serpent lurks in the reflected image of every daughter of Eve.'²³² The Queen in the tale of Snow White, for example,

²³¹ Carter, 1979:60

²³² Warner, 1998:90

famously mirrors the serpent's actions, and subsequently Eve's actions, and tempts Snow White with a poisoned apple which Snow White cannot resist.

The biblical Garden of Eden is home to perhaps the most notorious serpent in literature: the cunning snake which convinced Eve to eat an apple from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Consequently, the serpent in modern times is associated with deceitfulness, trickery, and evil. It is also widely held that the serpent was the devil in disguise, which derives a further association that the serpent is often representative of the male or masculine. However, contrary to the notion of masculinity, the snake is often portrayed as having a female's face or even a slithering female body in Medieval Christian art and architecture²³³. The ambiguous nature of these two associations is fused to result in the androgyny suggested by the snake-woman's body: she is a woman who undergoes a transformation into an androgynous female-snake hybrid and finally into a serpent or dragon, the embodiment of masculine power.

The association of the snake-woman draws strongly on a tradition of beautifully deceptive fairytale females who take on a monstrous snake/dragon/reptilian form. Angela Carter records a version of the Kashmiri tale 'The Chinese Princess' in her collection *Angela Carter's Book of Fairy Tales*²³⁴. In this story, an all-powerful snake-woman disguised as a Chinese Princess makes her way into the heart and home of the kind King Ali Mardan Khan. Ali Mardan falls dreadfully ill and the loyal Guru suspects that his new bride is the cause. The 'monster'²³⁵ is then tricked into being burned alive and Ali Marden recovers fully. The mystical Lamia, as the monster is called, is noted as being 'very fond of assuming the form of a woman,'²³⁶ thus linking the female form with the monstrous beast who 'kills' the male protagonist. The tale of Biancabella, as mentioned earlier, is recounted by Straparola and tells of a beautiful princess who is born with a snake coiled around her neck which made everyone 'much affrightened'²³⁷. The snake-sister, Samaritana, bestows on the princess many magical gifts, and later reveals herself to be a 'maiden of lovely aspect,'²³⁸ hidden by the snake-skin of a serpent in a twist of the loathly lady narrative. Perhaps the most well-known tale of the serpent-

²³³ For example, the entrance to Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris features a sculpture-carving of Adam and Eve at the Tree of Knowledge with a female serpent in the tree seducing Eve. This is prevalent in literary illustrations as well, such as Theodore de Bry's depiction of Adam and Eve in front of a large tree around which a serpent/female/devil creature is curled while pointing to the apple.

²³⁴ Carter, 2005

²³⁵ Carter, 2005: 153

²³⁶ Carter, 2005: 153

²³⁷ Straparola, 1894: 126

²³⁸ Straparola, 1894: 135

woman comes in the form of Disney's adaptation of Andersen's 'The Little Mermaid', where snake and woman are married into a single beautiful form as Ariel embodies the power and form of the fish-tail phallus whilst retaining her femininity. Ariel, or The Little Mermaid, gives up her sinuous fish-tail, phallic in form, and siren's voice to assume a pair of human legs so that she might be near her Prince. Ariel is successful and is happily married to the prince, whilst earlier versions of her tale see her dying or dissolving to become a 'Daughter of the Air'²³⁹.

All of these tales point to the proliferation of the serpent-woman character in fairytale narrative, and harken back to one of the best-known French fairy tales, 'Mélusine', a tale about a fairy-woman who builds magical cities and is cursed to take serpent shape on Saturdays. She marries the young knight Raymond on the condition that he will not gaze upon her on Saturdays, for, as she knows, should she be looked upon while in serpent shape she will be cursed to retain that shape for all eternity instead of living and dying like a mortal. She gives birth to ten sons, all of whom are 'strange and wonderful'²⁴⁰ and who all won great riches for themselves and have become highly respected individuals. Goaded on by his envious brother, Raymond peers in through Mélusine's door on a Saturday and beholds that 'down to her waist she was the wife he knew and loved, but the rest of her was the body and the tail of a serpent, covered with blue and silver scales.'²⁴¹ When Raymond realises his fault he confesses to Mélusine who then abandons him.

A.S. Byatt explores the myth of Mélusine in her 1990 novel *Possession*, in which Christabel LaMotte, the fictional Victorian poetess, rewrites the tale into an epic poem related in the novel. Fergus, one of the characters, relates the tale of Mélusine,

And in the end, of course, [Raymond] looked through the keyhole – or made one in her steel door with his sword-point according to one version – and there she was in a great marble bath disporting herself. And from the waist down she was a fish or a serpent, Rabelais says an 'andouille', a kind of huge sausage, the symbolism is obvious, and she beat the water with her muscular tail.²⁴²

The beautiful mother maiden figure that Raymond knew was replaced in this moment by a monstrous snake-woman with a huge, phallic sausage-tail. In a discourse that favours the phallus, Mélusine and her snake sisters have given up their 'inert open space' and have opted for the 'exclamation point' of power and agency instead.

²³⁹ Andersen, 1958: 142

²⁴⁰ Picard, 1955:102

²⁴¹ Picard, 1955:106

²⁴² Byatt, 1990:33

However, depicting female agency in phallic terms is as problematic as the Countess Nosferatu hopelessly trapped in her predetermined fate by her phallic teeth: despite the appearance of freedom, female agency gained through the phallus becomes a product of masculine dictates and is always restricted under its control. Carter argues that recourse to a mythical figure or mother goddess obscures the real conditions of female agency:

If women allow themselves to be consoled for their culturally determined lack of access to the modes of intellectual debate by the invocation of hypothetical goddesses, they are simply flattering themselves into submission (a technique often used on them by men). All the mythic versions of women, from the myth of the redeeming purity of the virgin to that of the healing, reconciling mother, are consolatory nonsenses; and consolatory nonsense seems to me a fair definition of myth, anyway. Mother goddesses are just a silly notion as father gods. If a revival of the myths of these cults give women emotional satisfaction, it does so at the price of obscuring the real conditions of life. This is why they were invented in the first place.²⁴³

The problem with fairy tales like the Sleeping Beauty narrative is that they do not acknowledge the reality of socio-political conditions that affect women in a patriarchal domain, thus perpetuating the naturalisation that constructs women as either passive or monstrous. Indeed, Carter argues that '[a]ny glimpse of a real man or a woman is absent from these representations of the archetypal male and female.'²⁴⁴

The Woman Behind the Monster: a Mask of Madness

One of the most pertinent examples of the denial of reality is the assumption that all of the female villains in fairy tales are not only monstrous, but crazy as well. Some of them are power-crazy, resisting the natural events that would replace an older, widowed queen with the younger bride of her son, whilst others are crazy with the desire to be the most beautiful such as Snow White's stepmother. As such, the demonization of women does not only manifest itself physically through vampires and monsters, but psychologically as well through madness and mental instability.

Basile's Queen, for example, is portrayed as a monstrous woman who attempts to murder, cannibalise and pillage her victims without any rational justification. However, the narrative does provide a motive: she is defending her station and her reputation against the damage caused by her

²⁴³ Carter, 1975:5

²⁴⁴ Carter, 1975: 6

husband's infidelity. The King is unashamed of his transgression and his power and sovereignty prevent him from state persecution; in a situation where the only person who can condemn bad behaviour is corrupt, the Queen is left with little choice but to take matters into her own hands. From the King's perspective, the Queen does not exhibit the 'right' kind of behaviour in this situation. When faced with a similar situation, Patient Griselda accepts her husband's request for a divorce and even serves his young 'bride-to-be' and her former husband on their wedding day:

With so glad chiere his gestes she receyveth,
And so konnyngly, everich in his degree,
That no defaute no man aperceyveth,
But ay they wondren what she myghte bee
That in so povre array was for to see,
And koude swich honour and reverence,
And worthily they preisen her prudence.²⁴⁵

This submissive and 'loyal' behaviour (remembering her pledge to her husband) is rewarded as the Marquis uncovers his plot, expresses that he now knows her steadfastness, and exclaims: 'Thou art my wyf, ne noon oother I have,/ Ne nevere hadde, as God my soule save!'²⁴⁶ However, there is no such luck for Basile's Queen: the Marquis was simply testing his wife's fidelity to her promise, whereas the King has already violated his marriage vows and has fathered two children out of wedlock.

The idea of the monstrous woman as mad woman is interestingly contested in the 2007 Walt Disney film *Enchanted* which presents a dragon-woman who asserts her mental stability despite being presented as a bad figure. This undermines the absolute distinctions inherent in the patriarchal fairytale model. Subsequently, by allowing Princess Giselle to cross over from her fairytale kingdom into the real New York City, the film highlights the falsity of the natural woman and thus the difference between the fairy-tale world and the real world; Giselle finds herself confronted with the reality of New York City which is juxtaposed with the simplified, idealised and happily-ever-after setting of the fairytale world. Giselle is pursued by her Prince Edward and Edward's stepmother, Queen Narissa, who wishes to keep Giselle and Edward apart so that she may remain Queen. Queen Narissa soon assumes a dragon form like Maleficent, and targets the real-world prince, Robert, as the object of Giselle's affection. They grapple at the top of a tall building and Robert yells, 'You're crazy!', to which Queen Narissa calmly corrects him, 'No. Spiteful, vindictive, *very large*, but never crazy.'²⁴⁷ Speaking for all of the fairytale witches and fairies who have been wrongly accused of

²⁴⁵ Chaucer, 1991:150, lines 1016-22

²⁴⁶ Chaucer, 1991:151, lines 1063-64

²⁴⁷ *Enchanted*, Disney: 2007

mental instability, Queen Narissa illustrates perfect level-headedness and a clear sense of logic as she exacts her revenge on the helpless Robert.

Perhaps the most iconic picture of patriarchally-defined feminine madness is apparent in the figure of Bertha Mason, from Charlotte Brontë's 1847 novel *Jane Eyre*. She is a woman imprisoned in her unfortunate marriage and also literally imprisoned in the attic of her husband's home. She is the ghostly abject who constantly taunts Jane, dancing at the edge of her vision. Bertha does not accept her demarcated role as 'wife' and so Rochester hides her and seeks to replace her with someone more acceptable to his patriarchal standards. She is considered 'mad', but, just as Basile's Queen is silenced, the reader is never exposed to her side of the story. Her madness, then, is indicative of her desire to test the boundaries set in place by her patriarchal husband. The reality of the feminine situation is lost when it is discussed or analysed within patriarchal constructs. When limited to passive princesses and active monsters, the real woman finds no space to articulate her agency and express her existence. Bertha Mason inspired the revolutionary 1979 study *The Madwoman in the Attic: the Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. In it, Gilbert and Gubar argue that the 19th century woman writer (and indeed, the writer prior to the 19th century as well) is confined to creating female characters that are either passive or aggressive, that figure as either angels or monsters. Like Beauty and Maleficent, these constructs present a problematic dichotomy that operate well within the realm of patriarchy, which is why Gilbert and Gubar argue that these characters should be abandoned and a third representation pursued. Indeed, Irigaray reiterates,

For what is important is to disconcert the staging of representation according to *exclusively* "masculine" parameters, that is, according to a phallogratic order. It is not a matter of toppling that order so as to replace it – that amounts to the same thing in the end – but of disrupting and modifying it, starting from an "outside" that is exempt, in part, from phallogratic law.²⁴⁸

It is essential that this 'third representation' of the feminine does not simply perpetuate the mistakes inherent in the phallogratic doctrine, but that it embarks on a new sense of definition. Butler writes, '...if I have no desire to be recognized within a certain set of norms, then it follows that my sense of survival depends upon escaping the clutch of those norms by which recognition is conferred.'²⁴⁹ The task, then, is to escape those norms that naturalise the dichotomies of pure and impure, of good and bad, of victim and villain. Once this is realised, it becomes evident that, as Dworkin argues,

²⁴⁸ Irigaray, 1985: 68

²⁴⁹ Butler, 2004:3

that “man” and “woman” are fictions, caricatures, cultural constructs. As models they are reductive, totalitarian, inappropriate to human becoming. As roles they are static, demeaning to the female, dead-ended for male and female both. Culture as we know it legislates those fictive roles as normalcy.²⁵⁰

Abandoning these cultural constructs through rejecting the notion that the phallus is the benchmark of moral worth and that mothering is the only way to reach a state similar to the neutral existence of man, the woman is left more-or-less undefined in such fairy tales as Sleeping Beauty.

A Different Approach

The tale of Mélusine holds the potential for challenging boundaries, and for presenting a new way forward for women in fairy tales, and particularly for women in the kind of fairytale roles delineated by the Sleeping Beauty narrative. Although she appropriates a phallic 'sausage' tail, Mélusine's power comes from something that is not phallic: it comes from androgyny, in her role that defies concrete definition in a system that only respects the dichotomous definitions of 'man' and 'woman'.

In symbolic terms, the she-serpent

is the invisible serpent-principle which dwells in the lower levels of consciousness and the deeper strata of the Earth. It is secret and equivocal, its decisions are unpredictable and as swift as its transformations. Ever ambivalent, it toys with its own sexuality; it is both male and female, twins within the same body, like so many of the culture-heroes who are always depicted initially as cosmic serpents.²⁵¹

In this form, Mélusine embodies an androgynous dual sexuality. As Saguaro argues, 'being as replete and complete as she is [...] she *is* 'the phallus'. It is not that she *has* the penis, but rather that she *is* phallic: originary, upright, potent, entire.²⁵² Mélusine is at once the phallus *and* the mothering female, and illustrates her double nature as an androgynous being who has no need for man, sexually or otherwise. Kevin Brownlee suggests that 'the figure of Mélusine may be seen as a striking treatment of the problematic relations between the female body and power.'²⁵³ Like the Archaic Mother, the serpent-woman is both the monster and the mother in a celebration of self-sufficient femininity on a middle ground that precludes any need for the definition of “man” or “woman”. The androgynous mythical image, Dworkin argues,

is a paradigm for wholeness, a harmony and a freedom which is virtually unimaginable, the antithesis of every assumption we hold about the nature of identity in general and sex in particular.²⁵⁴

²⁵⁰ Dworkin, 1974: 174

²⁵¹ Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1996: 845

²⁵² Saguaro, 2000:6

²⁵³ Brownlee, 1994:19

²⁵⁴ Dworkin, 1974: 175

Whilst in her hybrid form, Mélusine built castles²⁵⁵ in an appropriation of the masculine role of builder and creator, but also gave birth to ten sons, assuming the role of the feminine mother. Thus she physically enacts this androgynous nature of her secret appearance through her dual role in both male and female creative realms. Mélusine's double nature embodying male and female, and consequently the ultimate binary of good and evil, is further emphasized by views represented in Byatt's novel by the fictional collection of feminist essays on Christabel's poetry, including an essay featuring the descriptive title: "Mélusine and the Daemonic Double: Good Mother, Bad Serpent"²⁵⁶. The nature of Mélusine's goodness as a mother is directly derived from her ability to adhere to the boundaries set in place by social norms. That is, in a patriarchal context, Mélusine is considered good and female only inasmuch as she maintains her role as the gentle mother, as well as 'bad' when she transcends these roles and adopts more masculine behaviour such as building castles and demanding time alone on Saturday nights.

The ambiguous nature of Mélusine's appearance is further emphasised by Ellen Ash's observation, upon reading LaMotte's *The Fairy Melusine*, that, "Perhaps the most surprising touch is that the snake or fish is beautiful."²⁵⁷ Thus Mélusine retains the feminine associations of Beauty despite being half-phallus/snake and half-woman. Her final transformation into the dragon/serpent is mediated by the fact that she can reform herself into a human female mother to attend to her children, thus reiterating the dual serpent/mother role which defiantly questions the nature of the boundaries set in place by those social norms that attempt to force women into the binary opposition occupied by Beauty and Maleficent. Mélusine is able to be both male and female in her appearance and her actions, and provides the necessary ambiguity needed to push the boundaries that Butler identifies in order to present the possibility of difference and change. Possibility, Butler argues,

is an aspiration, something we might hope will be equitably distributed, something that might be socially secured, something that cannot be taken for granted, especially if it is apprehended phenomenologically. The point is not to prescribe new gender norms, as if one were under an obligation to supply a measure, gauge, or norm for the adjunction of competing gender presentations. The normative aspiration at work here has to do with the ability to live and breathe and move and would no doubt belong somewhere in what is called a philosophy of freedom. The thought of a possible life is only an indulgence for those who already know themselves to be possible. For those who are still looking to become possible, possibility is a necessity.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁵ Byatt, 1990:33

²⁵⁶ Byatt, 1990:37

²⁵⁷ Byatt, 1990:121

²⁵⁸ Butler, 2004:31

It is evident that Mélusine is the physical embodiment of this possibility of freedom in gender: although she is unable to see her husband after he breaks his pact, she is a self-sufficient being as both female and male, both mother and serpent. She embodies the 'new voice' that emerges through the vehicle of the literary fairy tale, the voice that disrupts and alters the fabric of the patriarchal fairy tale to make way for a new articulation of feminine identity.

Thus it becomes Mélusine's task to question these boundaries by enacting something different from that which is expected. She fulfils the same role of the transgendered individual in the contemporary political realm, who, as Butler argues, makes us question the reality of these norms:

They make us not only question what is real, and what "must" be, but they also show us how the norms that govern contemporary notions of reality can be questioned and how new modes of reality can become instituted. These practices of instituting new modes of reality take place in part through the scene of embodiment, where the body is not understood as a static and accomplished fact, but as an aging process, a mode of becoming that, in becoming otherwise, exceeds the norm, reworks the norm, and makes us see how realities to which we thought we were confined are not written in stone.²⁵⁹

Mélusine, as a transgendered woman-serpent, is 'becoming otherwise' and transcends the predefined role for woman as mother, maiden or monster. She presents an alternative to the passivity of the sleeping princess and to the malice of the witch figure by embodying a more complex and profound role; exhibiting a hybridisation of male and female roles that constantly challenges the boundaries set forth in society's norms. She is a fantasy, which Butler argues is

part of the articulation of the possible; it moves us beyond what is merely actual and present into a realm of possibility, the not yet actualized or actualizable. (...) Fantasy is not the opposite of reality; it is what reality forecloses, and, as a result, it defines the limits of reality, constituting it as its constitutive outside. The critical promise of fantasy, when and where it exists, is to challenge the contingent limits of what will and what will not be called reality. Fantasy is what allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise; it establishes the possible in excess of the real; it points elsewhere, and when it is embodied, it brings the elsewhere home.²⁶⁰

Thus Mélusine transcends the world of the actual through the nature of her body as a half-serpent, half-woman as well as in the nature of her being, by fulfilling her role as mother to ten sons and going beyond that to build magnificent masculine castles. She identifies the boundaries of what is presented as 'reality' and challenges them, questioning the exclusive predefined roles of female as mother, maiden or monster and points towards the possibility of moving beyond these defined roles.

²⁵⁹ Butler, 2004:29

²⁶⁰ Butler, 2004:19

Gilbert and Gubar call on Clément and Cixous as a way forward into this 'third representation' of woman: 'There is a voice crying in the wilderness, Catherine Clément and Hélène Cixous say – the voice of a body dancing, laughing, shrieking, crying. Whose is it? It is, they say, the voice of a woman, newborn and yet archaic, a voice of milk and blood, a voice silenced but savage.'²⁶¹ This woman is the triumphant abject, the aspects of woman excluded from the passive princess model, coming forward and defying man's definitions for the role and function of patriarchal woman. Gubar asks, 'Is she not the one who erupts at, and disrupts, the edge of female consciousness, the liminal zone between sleeping and waking?'²⁶² Indeed, the woman who is neither sleeping like Beauty nor awake like Maleficent occupies the liminal zone between the two – a more *real* presentation trying to break through the *representation*. This highlights that analysing women in patriarchal fairytale texts does not link to the real women behind the stories, simply to the simulacra offered, accepted and internalised by the fairy tale. Fairy tales, Duncker argues, 'reflect the myths of sexuality under patriarchy, have been and still are used as the text books through which those lessons [of the dichotomous role of women and of patriarchal domination] are learned. Thus the tale, especially the fairy tale, is the vessel of false knowledge, or more bluntly, interested propaganda.'²⁶³ Duncker appears to dismiss *all* fairy tales, but what she is dismissing is the corpus of learned tales that force woman into occupying one of two delineated roles: good and subservient, or evil and dead. Irigaray argues that 'to speak *of* or *about* woman may always boil down to, or be understood as, a recuperation of the feminine within a logic that maintains it in repression, censorship, nonrecognition.'²⁶⁴ Thus it becomes imperative that women writers put down their perpetuating patriarchal pens, dismiss the association of women's chatter as 'meaningless' and 'idle sin', and release the woman from her imprisonment within these predefined roles set out by the superlative inequalities inherent in fairy tales. No longer speaking of women, Irigaray argues, it is time to speak *as* women, to dismiss the patriarchal condemnation of female speech and to uncover the real woman trying to get out of the attic of representations that she has been chained to. We continuously read and retell the familiar fairytale narratives that force women into alignments with the naturalised view of women as either good or bad, but that leaves little room for the actual woman. Duncker writes,

We cannot fit neatly into patterns or models as Cinderellas, ugly sisters, wicked step-mothers, fairy God-mothers, and still acknowledge our several existences, experience or imagined. We need the

²⁶¹ Gilbert, 1986:ix

²⁶² Gubar, 1986:x

²⁶³ Duncker, 1984: 4

²⁶⁴ Irigaray, 1985: 78

space to carve out our own erotic identities, as free women. And then to rewrite the fairy tales – with a bolder hand.²⁶⁵

By working the woman out of the Galatean role defined for her by man, the woman writer is able to forge a new space of existence for the female character. She is neither Beauty nor Maleficent, object nor abject, but rather a curious combination of the two that explores the multifaceted existence of actual women in contemporary society. Cixous offers the first step forward in this project of exploration as she remarks on one of the most well-known serpent-mothers: 'All you have to do to see the Medusa is look her in the face: and she isn't deadly. She is beautiful and she laughs.'²⁶⁶ Disrupting the naturalised characterisation inherent in the patriarchal fairy tale makes room for the Medusa to rise again in a new articulation of female identity, rejecting the chains of the binary representations used to contain her previously; once considered hideous and deadly, the Medusa is now able to defy patriarchal representations and embrace her beauty, intelligence and individuality that was once denied.

²⁶⁵ Duncker, 1984: 12

²⁶⁶ Cixous, 1986: 266

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