

2018

Underlying Morality in Schneewittchen: A Fairy Tale for Adults

Maria Ardanova

Minnesota State University, Mankato, maria.ardanova@mnsu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/jur>



Part of the [German Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ardanova, Maria (2018) "Underlying Morality in Schneewittchen: A Fairy Tale for Adults," *Journal of Undergraduate Research at Minnesota State University, Mankato*: Vol. 18, Article 1.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56816/2378-6949.1211>

Available at: <https://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/jur/vol18/iss1/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly and Creative Works for Minnesota State University, Mankato. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Undergraduate Research at Minnesota State University, Mankato by an authorized editor of Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly and Creative Works for Minnesota State University, Mankato.

Maria Ardanova

Mentor: Dr. Krämer

Underlying Morality in *Schneewittchen*: A Fairy Tale for Adults

Schneewittchen in English *Snow White*, is one of the most famous fairy tales in the collection of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. It appeared first in 1812's collection of *Kinder und Hausmärchen* and the final version was published in 1857. Grimms' interest in publishing fairy tales came from their desire to pass down oral traditions of German story telling but in written form. From the first edition in 1812, and to the final in 1857, each was edited with precise attention to cultural and historical situations as well as the audience. The brothers Grimm never intended for their collection to be for children, and the evolution of the edition reflects growing influence of fairy tales on society, with children becoming an increasing audience in their later editions.¹ "As the audience for the tales changed, the need to shift the burden of evil from a mother to a stepmother became even more urgent" (Tatar *The Hard Facts* 142).

The Grimm brothers' purpose for collecting and publishing fairy tales was to unite and connect the German people to a common origin of the German heritage, but also teach about norms and expectations. They used simple language to make the tales accessible to common people (Saunders 62). As time went on, Grimms realized that the children audience was growing and made changes to the tale so that children would not fear their biological parents and would not be exposed to inappropriate material (Saunders 65). Earlier editions of fairy tales in the *Kinder und Hausmärchen* collection included themes of infanticide, incest, and cruelty.

¹ The 1812 version containing *Schneewittchen* was more gruesome with the biological mother trying to kill *Schneewittchen*. Additionally, *Schneewittchen* was resurrected in the end because the prince's servant got tired of carrying her and slapped her which resulted in the poisoned piece of apple falling out.

Schneewittchen reveals a lot of different themes that the Grimms subscribed to and thought were ideal behavioral models. Grimms' fairy tales show a window into the culture and social setting at the time they were alive (1780s – 1860s). *Schneewittchen* is a story that reveals a troubling conflict in a stepmother and stepdaughter relationship, making it easy to sympathize with Schneewittchen and denounce the stepmother queen. In general, fairy tales have a clear distinction about who is on the wrong and right side. In this manner fairy tales convey a message to the reader about appropriate behavior models. I will argue in this paper that the queen's murder attempts only make her appear evil, and that Schneewittchen's innocence and beauty suggests her goodness. In fact, I want to demonstrate that at the core of *Schneewittchen* there are two models of a woman's image: one that is innocent, beautiful, and submissive, and the other that is domineering, aggressive and shows anti-feminine traits. It is not just the attempted murder that makes the queen so evil, it is her overpowering character in a male-dominated society that goes against the socially accepted norms and warrants her destruction in the end.

Grimms' Schneewittchen

Schneewittchen is a fairy tale about a girl named Schneewittchen who is as white as snow, red as blood, and black like ebony, whose mother died shortly after she was born. Schneewittchen's father remarried to another woman, who was beautiful but evil in nature, always asking her magic mirror who is the most beautiful one of all. After learning from the mirror that Schneewittchen is the most beautiful one of all, the queen decided to kill her. However, because of the queen's unsuccessful attempt of convincing the hunter to kill the girl and bring back her liver and lungs as proof, Schneewittchen ran off into the woods and found shelter with the seven dwarfs. After severe attempts to kill Schneewittchen, the queen succeeds by giving her a poisoned apple. In the 1857 version of the fairy tale which I will be referencing,

Schneewittchen was resurrected by the prince while carrying her casket made out of glass, and the poisoned piece of apple fell out. The fairy tale ends with Schneewittchen's and prince's wedding, which the evil queen attended only to be put to death by dancing in hot iron shoes until her death.

Social Expectations and Values in the 19th Century

Cultural values and expectations are frequently reflected in literature of the time these texts were written. The vast majority of fairy tales with a female heroine and a prince end in a happy romance, because after all what is the woman expected to do? She must comply to social expectations set in place for women. These are: to be married, have children, run a successful household. Schneewittchen's easy submission to the prince is what is expected of her in that particular context. Rowe makes a point about fairytales that glorify passivity and such outcomes. "These tales which glorify passivity, dependency, and self-sacrifice as a heroine's cardinal virtues suggest that culture's very survival depends upon a woman's acceptance of roles which relegate her to motherhood and domesticity" (239). In the early 19th century and in earlier times the only role a woman had in life was to be a wife and mother. Women did not work outside the home and therefore could not have independence, especially financial, which prevented them from making life choices for themselves. Hence, women were reduced to lower and often subordinate human beings whose only purpose was to make sure the lineage was continued. Marriage was simply a financial benefit, a woman went from her father's household and married into another, her husband's. Domesticity was simply a desirable trait that made women more marriageable, and of course it was in a woman's best interest in finding a suitable husband who could provide for her. *Schneewittchen* is not the only fairy tale in which the woman gladly

accepts the prospect of marriage and submits herself to a man.²

Schneewittchen tale demonstrates the girl had no choice and had in fact no free will by being taken to the prince's castle in her glass coffin. While in the fairy tale it appears she gladly accepts the stranger's proposal, there is no way for her to deny the proposal. The cultural circumstances dictate that a woman's destiny is marriage and avoiding it would mean loss of financial stability and going against social norms. The moral of the tale show the path for a woman to be a married, domesticated woman, whether or not the choice was hers, and passively accept choices other males make on her behalf.

Many fairytales that were written in 18th and 19th century Europe reflected an image of an ideal woman, that was supposed to teach girls and young women how to prepare for marriage and running their husband's household. In addition, their ideal woman was subject to the high value of her looks (Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz 712). Such cultural associations of women's behavior and beauty standards explain why beauty in fairy tales is a central theme. Because of oppressive beauty ideals for women, which in fact subordinate them, beauty becomes the only asset that they can rely on in a society where they are otherwise silenced or expected to behave a certain way (Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz 714). These cultural norms are echoed in fairytales, which can explain why the stepmother queen was so upset when her beauty was threatened. In the eyes of a 19th century man, and attested through the voice of the magic mirror, beauty is the main prospect that makes a woman appealing. Ultimately, the conflict in *Schneewittchen* began because of one woman's jealousy of another's looks.

Grimms' and Cultural Influences

What is unknown to many is that the Grimms never intended for their fairy tales to be

² *Aschenputtel* (Cinderella) is another fairy tale in which the girl gladly accepts the prince's marriage offer despite barely knowing him.

children's literature. After original publications for adults in 1812, the brothers decided to cleanse their fairy tales of inappropriate content by the 1857 edition, such as real life adult struggles, and sexual innuendos. However, they were not successful at eliminating everything from the tales that would make them appropriate, and since many versions of their fairy tales including *Schneewittchen* were reviewed, edited and published years after their deaths, the tales did over time become more appropriate for a younger audience. While the Grimm brothers collected fairy tales, they had their own perception of the story, and during the editing process those tales were subject to Grimms' own biases. "Although vestiges of archaic societies, feudalism, and patriarchy remain in the Grimms' tales, the brothers also imbued them with certain qualities that correspond to the progressive aspirations of the German middle class and peasantry" (Zipes "Grimms and the German" 275). In addition, they reflected culturally appropriate ideas at the time they were being published. Grimms' fairy tales, while certainly a mirror into 19th century Germany's culture, were modified by the brothers to what they thought was appropriate.

During the collection period, Germany was not unified into a country that everyone knows today. Germany was fragmented, divided into different states each varying in power. "Fragmentation prevented the formation of a distinct German culture. Elements of German culture were present, but were not commonplace outside of the individual principalities" (Saunders 29). Such lack of unity weakened the region and loose ideas of what it meant to be German were present. Additionally, Germany was going through Napoleonic wars, and the people had struggles with national identity because of that. "Napoleonic policy in Germany represented a combination of the attempt to exploit the country for French interests with a missionary and civilizing aim to bring Germany the benefits of what Napoleon had selected from

the revolutionary heritage” (Pinson 32). People feared that their culture and identity would be erased with changing borders and outside influence. The Grimms thought it is their ultimate goal to preserve pure forms of German culture. They collected *Volksbücher* on German culture, beliefs and customs. The brothers felt that modern literature did not represent the *Volk*, and by collecting the *Volksbücher* they were connected to pure forms of German thought and tradition (Zipes *Enchanted Forests* 32). The Grimms had a strong love for Germany and their tales had a sense of how one should behave ethically. It is true that language can unite people, and the Grimms thought that through literature the *Volk* can be united, and feel part of a German culture. “They believed that a philological understanding of Old German literature would enable Germans to grasp connections between the customs, laws, and beliefs of the German people and their origins” (Zipes *Enchanted Forests* 34). However, the Grimms felt like to truly connect the culture one must go way back in time and look for original German traditions, that is why they loved medieval German literature and studied it religiously, as they thought it is the most pure, and not tainted by foreign influences. While they did collect stories from the lower- class people, they did “clean them up” to make them more expressive and symbolic (Saunders 36). That mainly had to do with oral and written language: the Grimms felt that certain oral vernaculars did not fit to the standards of potential readers, and rewrote the fairy tales to suit their agenda. The Grimms indeed felt a responsibility to unite German people through their publications of the fairy tales as pure cultural material. Why the Grimm thought that through their published tales people can unite, is because they realized that by publishing these tales they can educate people, that is educate them on true German values and norms.

The Grimms felt very strongly about their love for Germany and seeking out unity. “..part of Germany’s attempt to create national identity was because of the French” (Saunders 37).

According to Haase, the Grimm used their tales as a resistance tool, while Germany struggled in Napoleonic wars (385). It was Germany's attempt to relieve itself of French influences. "The 'country' essentially Hesse and Rhineland, was invaded by the French, and they were disturbed by French colonialist aspirations" (Zipes "Grimms and the German" 274) The tales were supposed to speak to the German people and connect them, but also teach them desirable model of thought and behavior. Haase continues by explaining that the lore and tales became a model of national character, because they came from ancient German myths, and were collected, because the ancient form of oral expression was the pure one, and only pure forms were used to reassert national identity (385). Essentially, Germany needed something to unite the people at a time where it was difficult to define what German really meant. Germany's boundaries are difficult to define because "its boundaries have always been fluid, either as a result of the push of foreigners into German lands, or more often as a result of the pressing onward German colonists..." (Pinson 2). Because of changing boundaries people found it hard to identify to being German as traces of other cultures were present. The Grimm relied on going back to oral tradition and publishing the tales to bring meaning to what it means to be German. *Schneewittchen* was just one of the fairy tales used as a cultural tool, that identified ideal behaviors and outcomes, traces of culture can be found in the tale.

German Values and Norms

Literacy rates in Europe were on the rise in the 19th century. People were able to read in German, and could trace their cultural background, and possibly unite people. In fact, the Grimm referred to their collection of tales as "*Erziehungsbuch*"³ and called it as that, implying such

³ An "educational book"

book would teach cultural norms and traditions (Zipes “Two Hundred” 65).⁴ However the Grimms, likely understood that through language a united national identity can be created, if the *Volk* speaks the same language.

The Grimm brothers were religious, and in their tales religious motifs can be found. This is evident in *Schneewittchen* and other fairy tales, where the patriarchal system and male dominance were reinforced, values that were supported by their Christian and Calvinist values. Many of their fairy tales were influenced by Calvinist values such as hard work and discipline. In those tales the hard working characters are always rewarded at the end (Zipes *Enchanted Forests* 34).⁵ For the Grimm, these tales represented a moral codex, and a sense of unity, however they were also infused with their own life experiences. “The Grimms took these products and infused them with their own psychological needs, utopian dreams, sexual preferences, and socio-political views” (Zipes *Enchanted Forests*, 29). Some of the common themes in their tales such as decline in social status, dreams of a better life, separation from family, fear and loss are real experiences that the brothers lived through, that made their way into the fairy tales. The values in their tales were influenced by religious ethics.

Saunders describes education and religion dynamics in Germany as playing a role in Grimms’ tales, since traces of both showed up in the tales (27). With an increased interest in education, literacy rose, and with literacy on the rise more people became increasingly religious with the ability to read the Lutheran translation of the bible in German. Religion found its way into *Schneewittchen* as well. “Grimm in their tales emphasized protestant values” (Saunders 28). Religious moral values of purity, obedience and hard work are evident in *Schneewittchen*, but so

⁴ The fairy tales were never referred to as “German” because they represent overall European oral tradition, and have a philological and historical relationship to the time period in which they were published.

⁵ *Schneewittchen* is hard-working in the fairy tale because she obeys the dwarfs and does chores for them. She receives her happy end.

is a lack of them.⁶ In the tale, Schneewittchen does not go to bed in the dwarfs' house before saying her prayers, signaling she does as a good Christian would do. Tatar in *Annotated Grimm* explains the evidence of religious morals in the context of the fairy tale: "The Grimms, intent on producing a 'manual of manners' made sure that Schneewittchen said her prayers before falling asleep" (*Annotated Grimm* 252). Religious references also explain why the stepmother is a "gottlose Königin" the godless queen, implying that she has no connection to God. If she did, she would be a pure character with a moral compass and not evil. There are some religious motifs in the fairy tale that are more hidden. For example, the number three plays an important role in *Schneewittchen* and in other fairy tales by the Grimm brothers. Schneewittchen's mother pricks her finger with a needle while wishing for a child and three drops of blood fell from her finger, she wishes for a child with three characteristics that she deems to be ideal, and in the story there are three attempts to kill Schneewittchen. In Christianity, the number three is associated with biblical events, the holy trinity, the father, son, and holy ghost. Furthermore, *Schneewittchen* illustrates themes of death and resurrection as in Jesus's life, somewhat like a rebirth, the start of a new life.

Scholars like Bettelheim and Tatar also point to the apple in *Schneewittchen* as being symbolic, for Schneewittchen did exactly as Eve did, she did something that was forbidden and in return was punished. In the bible and in the fairy tale the apple is the forbidden fruit and a source of great temptation, as both stories show temptations have radical consequences, especially when disobeying a given order. In both stories it is also a female who disobeys an order and receives a punishment, suggesting female disobedience is expected to be harshly punished. In the fairy tale the evil queen too, disobeys the order of things by going against a set

⁶ Schneewittchen's stepmother represents the anti-christian values of being impure, evil, domineering.

of behavioral expectations for females by being dominant and conniving.⁷ Lastly, the queen's punishment at the end in which she has to dance in hot shoes until she drops to her demonstrates the enormity of her transgressions since the punishment has to fit the crime. The queen who sinned by attempting to kill another human being out of vanity shall be put to death herself in a humiliating way, sending a message about what can happen if one goes against the natural order of things.

Grimms' Lives and Experiences

The experiences of the Grimm brothers were not unique to only them, all members of society experienced hardships that echoed in the fairy tales. Very often in their fairy tales, the protagonists experience some form of separation from family members by being on a quest.⁸ The Grimm brothers lost their father at a young age, which had an impact on them because it was very hard for a family to lose the breadwinner. Similar traumatic scenarios like loss of a parent are present in their fairy tales in which the father is absent or the mother is dead. The absence of a father in fairy tales is also a cultural motif in which raising a child is solely a mother's responsibility.

During the 19th century heavy expectations were imposed on children from a young age. They were not expected to grow into adulthood, but transform instantly into persons who acted and worked like adults. Childhood lasted for a short period of time, as it was important for children to become independent quickly. The Grimms too, after the death of their father had to take on responsibilities of adults, and experienced similar situation as many other children faced in the 19th century, having to grow up fast. *Schneewittchen* is a fairy tale that

⁷ If *Schneewittchen* is compared to Eve in her disobedience, the evil queen is the snake, by providing the apple that puts *Schneewittchen* in her death sleep.

⁸ *Aschenputtel*, *Schneewittchen*, and *Rapunzel* all experience separation from their birth mothers.

serves as a prime example of a short childhood. At the age of seven, Schneewittchen is already seen as a rival to the queen, but luckily she simply gets left to fend for herself in the forest instead of being killed and eaten by the queen.

Infanticide and Mortality

While such homicidal scenario is unimaginable to 21st century readers. Centuries ago, the practice of infanticide was more common than people might think. People had no way to control the birth rate, there was no birth control, hence the result was a number of unwanted pregnancies. Without control of fertility some families had too many children that they could not afford to feed, and eliminating one for the sake of the rest of the family was a measure to solve the problem. Stepmothers who married into new families may have resented the children from a previous marriage and wanted to secure a future for their own. Schneewittchen being abandoned and having to fend for herself in the forest can be seen as a symbolism for harsh adult realities that 19th century children had to face. Additionally, children were subject to short childhoods because of high mortality rates. In the 19th century, medicine lacked a lot of the essential knowledge, many of people died from disease, and for women a common cause of death was related to childbirth. The absence of a birth mother in *Schneewittchen* is not exceptional since unsanitary living conditions caused many women to die young (Saunders 25). There was no need to wait to marry off children, as lives were significantly shorter and the need to reproduce was paramount. Additionally, a married child, particularly a daughter meant less mouths to feed in the family. Because many women died in childbirth, it was common for a father to remarry, and do so quickly. That explains why Schneewittchen's father remarries within a year after her mother's death, it was a common practice in 19th century Europe. There was little consideration for grieving and finding love if the main purpose of a marriage was to divide the labor between

spouses, and of course move a woman to a socially approved union.

The Grimms' *Schneewittchen* reflects social and cultural conditions at the time it was published in regard to the family dynamics, specifically mothers and stepmothers. As previously mentioned, the mortality rate for women was high and as a result men wasted no time finding a new spouse to fill the role in the domestic sphere. The presence of stepmothers in the fairytale is reflective of how people lived centuries ago. In the older 1812 version of *Schneewittchen*, the birth mother was evil and attempted to kill Schneewittchen, however that was later changed since "the ideal image of a woman as a birth mother had to survive, representing the good and the feminine side, the family and motherland" (Saunders 64). In 19th century Europe, the role of motherhood was likely the most important one for a woman, thus the image of the purity and goodness had to be preserved, and the evil birth mother edited out of the fairy tale.

Michelle Abate's article *The Fact and Fantasy of Filicide in "Snow White"* offers insight on stepmother-stepdaughter relationships of the 19th century, arguing that the story behind *Schneewittchen* is not that far from reality as one might think. In fact, Schneewittchen's stepmother's homicidal tendencies can be explained, but not defended. Stepparents might not feel the same way towards their new stepchildren the way biological parents do, sometimes creating feelings of dislike and in extreme cases hatred, seen in *Schneewittchen*. "That stepmothers treated the children of their husbands' first marriages badly- in part because they wished to preserve the patrimony for their own children, in part because they resented the idea of becoming enslaved to a previous wife's children- was more or less a fact of life in the era that gave shape to the tales recorded in Grimms' collection" (Tatar *Off With Their Heads*, 222). Because of a combination of these factors, such relationship could have easily led to violence. *Schneewittchen* reflects common murder methods typically done by women. Poisons like arsenic

were easily available in 19th century Europe, and a popular tool to kill was poisoning (qtd in Abate 189). In that manner the queen chose to poison Schneewittchen. To make things even more grim, the fairy tale is not far-fetched in the degree of cruelty, as killing children centuries ago was more common than people think, and many were victims of filicide.

Stepmother and Stepdaughter Relationship in *Schneewittchen*

Considering the antagonistic relationship between stepparents and their stepchildren and alarming rate of filicide, it is not surprising that the stepmother's and stepdaughter's relationship in Grimm's tales is often ruled by hate and jealousy. However, scholars like Bettelheim suggest that this type of relationship seen in the fairytales is oedipal in nature. "In actuality, as the relation of a child to his parent is full of problems, so is that of a parent to his child, so many fairy tales touch also on the parents' oedipal problems" (Bettelheim 194). What's compelling about the relationship between Schneewittchen and her stepmother is that the tale does not say what it was like before the girl reached the age of seven. All the information that is provided is about the queen being the fairest one. However, one day things changed. "Schneewittchen aber wuchs heran und wurde immer schöner, und als es sieben Jahre alt war, war es so schön wie der klare Tag, und schöner als die Königin selbst" (Grimm and Grimm 194).⁹ Most fairytale scholars agree that such relationship between stepmother and stepdaughter in fairytales *Schneewittchen*, *Aschenputtel* and others comes from the stepmother's hidden jealousy and insecurity. The young daughter is not only beautiful but youthful, she is threatening the stepmother's place in the home. Not only that, but the stepmother feels that the young daughter fights for the affections of the father and thus replacing her. Oftentimes such jealousy occurs when a girl reaches adolescence and starts to transform into a woman. In this moment, the

⁹ But Snow White grew up and grew up to be even more beautiful, and when she turned seven she was as beautiful as the clear day and more beautiful than the queen herself.

mother sees such transformation and becomes jealous and suspicious. The type of relationship dynamics demonstrates that Schneewittchen's stepmother tries to prevent her from entering adulthood and becoming a woman, who would become sexually attractive and desirable to men and specifically the king, her husband and Schneewittchen's father.

Since Schneewittchen is so young when she becomes more beautiful, it can be read that the queen has reached menopausal age and it is not Schneewittchen who becomes more beautiful than the queen, but rather the queen is losing her youth and in a way is becoming less beautiful because of age. The menopausal stage in queen's life is an indicator she has lost her fertility and is unable to serve the only purpose she has in her life which is procreation. The relationship then becomes threatened by transformations in age and beauty and also the queen shows a darker side of sexual jealousies, since she is becoming "useless". On the other hand, the girl really is starting to blossom into a woman. It affirms her status as the first woman in the king's court which sparks jealous rage in the queen. The evil queen's vanity and insecurity is seen through her need for validation by asking the mirror daily who is the most beautiful. Rather than being happy for her stepdaughter who is also becoming more beautiful and womanlike, she sees her as competition, a threat, and feels loss of control. A daughter's maturation into a woman is usually a sign that the mother's own beauty is waning (Rowe 241). However most mothers are accepting of this passage in life and even find joy in their daughters growing up and maturing into adults. Schneewittchen's stepmother's rejection of these changes, may be based on the fact that Schneewittchen is not her biological child, but rather her husband's. It is easier for the queen to find feelings of rage because the child is not her flesh and blood, and may have felt burdened by her.¹⁰ It seems irrational for the queen to fight for Schneewittchen's father's affections, she is his

¹⁰ Similar relationship dynamics are seen in *Aschenputtel*, but also in *Rapunzel* because she was given to a witch to be raised.

wife and Schneewittchen is his own child. It is difficult to understand why such competition for affection arises considering Schneewittchen is a child and her father is her biological parent. In the older, 1812 version of the fairy tale, Schneewittchen's birth mother is alive and she tries to kill her child out of jealousy. One explanation is, centuries ago, the incestual practices were not rare among family members, especially royal ones, relationships between close family members occurred.^{11 12}

Traditionally, the mother-daughter relationship is one where a strong bond exists, regardless of whether the parent and child are biologically related. It is the mother's purpose to be by her daughter through life's milestones and to guide her through them, especially adolescence. According to Rowe, in *Schneewittchen*, the stepmother queen tries to prevent her stepdaughter from reaching milestones such as reaching adolescence or sexual maturity. Rowe describes this family conflict as a "generational conflict as the stepmothers habitually devise stratagems to retard the heroine's progress" (241). Schneewittchen's maturation could signal her father's interest in her. This is how the queen sees the situation. Instead of providing Schneewittchen with love and protection, the stepmother is willing to put Schneewittchen's life on the line to eliminate the emergent problem of her daughter replacing her as the queen. Replacing the queen means two things: the queen's loss of status, and Schneewittchen becoming the new queen.

In the 1857 version of *Schneewittchen*, version, the biological mother dies after her wish of having a child comes true. In both *Schneewittchen* and other Grimm's tales like *Aschenputtel* the image of the biological mother is the completely opposite to that of the stepmother to whom

¹¹ In the 1812 version the incestual motif is that the prince is actually Schneewittchen's brother.

¹² *Allerleirauh (All Kinds of Fur)* is a fairy tale published by the Grimm brothers in which the father tried to marry his own daughter.

the father remarries. This mother represents maternal love and is supposed to give the child its beauty and virtues. The stepmother, however, represents female rivalry and competition. The significance of Schneewittchen's mother's death can be seen as a transference, eventually Schneewittchen receives all the goodness, beauty and virtue that her own mother once had. This in return reminds Schneewittchen's father of his first wife, which causes trepidation of his new wife, the queen.

The Evil Queen, a Beautiful but Proud Woman

The text shows that once Schneewittchen's mother died, her father remarried to a beautiful but proud woman. "Es war eine schöne Frau, aber sie war stolz und übermütig und konnte nicht leiden, dass sie an Schönheit von jemand sollte übertroffen werden" (Grimm and Grimm 194).¹³ The description of queen's pride is presented as negative despite her beauty. "In the queen's male dominated society, women's social values and personal power emanate from their beauty. The queen's loss of title as the fairest of all constitutes not simply as a threat to her ego but also as a threat to her influence, agency, and even socioeconomic means of survival" (qtd in Abate 185). The queen knows this, and as a result acts out and shows characteristics that demonstrate her rebellion and disapproval of a male-dominated society. She takes things into her own hands, and tries to eliminate her threat. In doing so, the queen displays male-like characteristics which are taboo in the cultural norms of the 19th century. "What is praiseworthy in males, however, is rejected in females; the counterpart of the energetic, aspiring boy is the scheming, ambitious woman" (Lieberman 392). The queen identifies her threat and decides to act on her homicidal wishes. She is clever in her plot to trick the naïve Schneewittchen. "Snow White's attraction to stay laces and combs, along with the fact that she is easily duped, have been

¹³ She was a beautiful woman, but she was proud and conceited, and could not stand that anyone would surpass her in beauty.

seen as signs of her immaturity” (Tatar *Annotated Grimm* 255). The queen also knows how to appear as an ideal woman: innocent and nurturing by dressing up as an old peasant woman. She is intelligent and understands how to “play” the ideal woman according to social norms, yet she is manipulative, aggressive and free-willed. She displays these virtues instead of making them part of her character.

The stepmother is dominating and powerful, she is not afraid to do what she wants, and this goes against patriarchal norms. The absence of the king in the fairy tale is also a hint that he is not in control. The queen controls family life and what happens to the king’s daughter. After her incipient dislike of the stepdaughter, the father does nothing to protect his young daughter. The king fails as a father and protector as well as the master of his house, since he is weak and afraid of his new wife, because he is unable to control his own family’s life.

The queen displays male-like characteristics, that go against the conventions of female behavior. This aspiration to men’s power and liberties makes her evil. A combination of a powerful but good woman in fairy tales is one that is rare. “Women who are powerful and good are never human, those women who are human and who have power or seek it, are nearly always portrayed as repulsive” (Lieberman 393). A woman who displays such characteristics goes against not only cultural but also Christian values. Such distinctions in literature divide women into ideal and repulsive. The essence of good and evil in the female characters of this fairy tale, is that the stepmother goes against the male dominated order, but Schneewittchen does not.

Biological Mother, the Female Reinforcer of the Patriarchy

Little is known about Schneewittchen’s mother, all that is known is that she died shortly after giving birth to her daughter. The text only reveals that she has desires for her future daughter to be “...so weiss wie Schnee, so rot wie Blut und so schwarz wie das Holz an dem

Rahmen” (Grimm and Grimm 193).¹⁴ Schneewittchen’s biological mother seems to understand what kind of attributes will make her daughter successful in life and that is why she did not wish for her daughter to be smart, brave or powerful. The biological mother wishes for her daughter to have virtues that align with an understanding of success and stability: to be married and have children.

The real birth mother in that way reinforces the patriarchal system and its values by wishing for the same female qualities for her child. Her image as the birth mother in the fairy tale is maintained as pure, because she gave birth to a child who is innocent obedient, and she is not capable of committing any sins like the new stepmother. There is no rivalry as she never gets to see her daughter grow up, and Schneewittchen is her biological child. The Grimm too, saw motherhood as something that should not be touched in a negative way as that image had to stay pure. Schneewittchen is an embodiment of her mother because both of them fulfill obligations to the male orders and neither of them expressed the desires to rebel against it.

Schneewittchen’s Main Virtue: Passivity

Schneewittchen is the Grimm’s typical heroine - beautiful, innocent, good spirited and passive. Most importantly she is submissive to any male in the story rather than being a dominant character. Schneewittchen is the perfect representation how a 19th century woman should behave and which virtues she must have in order to get married. Besides her beauty she displays one more important trait: passivity, it makes her the model for a perfect woman.

After Schneewittchen’s exile from the castle she became a well-received guest at the dwarfs’ residence. Schneewittchen shows her domestic qualities by being a good housekeeper, and being dependent on the dwarfs to learn from and for protection. Schneewittchen displays her

¹⁴ As white as snow, as red as blood, and as black as the wood of the frame.

passive transitions from one male household, her father's, to the dwarfs', and finally to her husband's. She does what she is told and does not question male authority. Schneewittchen is the epitome for a pure, good, chaste character in the fairy tale. Not only is she attractive, she is also innocent, but most importantly she is the complete opposite of the evil queen. She is both naïve and kind which is why she gets tricked by the queen. She lets things happen to her, in contrast to the queen who allows herself to do anything to meet her goals of destroying Schneewittchen.

Schneewittchen's physical characteristics point to her being pure and chaste. Her "white as snow" appearance makes her innocent. The "red as blood" however, gives the heroine a more sexualized appearance which would make her more attractive to males. What makes Schneewittchen most attractive is that she accepts her destiny to be married off without questioning it. She does not defy any standards or norms by making her a pure and passive future wife. Because Schneewittchen does not show any "undesirable" characteristics such as having her own will, ambitions and desires and she accepts circumstances as they are, there is no question she has no personality and is not able to challenge a man's authority.¹⁵

Schneewittchen as well as other popular fairy tales with a female heroine and a prince charming often portray the heroine as someone the reader can sympathize with, which is ultimately a helpless, defenseless girl waiting for the prince to come and rescue her someday. Because fairytales are a good indicator of what is expected behavior in a society at a particular time. Men are the saviors and women cannot be fulfilled until rescued by them (*Zipes Enchanted Forests* 152). In *Schneewittchen* this means that the prince resurrected Schneewittchen from the dead and gave her life again. Had the prince not been part of the tale, the story would have

¹⁵ The instances in which Schneewittchen does show desires all lead to unpleasant consequences. She disobeys the dwarves by letting the disguised queen in and accepting objects she is tempted by.

turned out differently: without being saved and marrying the prince, Schneewittchen would have remained dead in her casket and she would have remained on the side of the mountain for the dwarfs to look over her forever. In her glass casket Schneewittchen's youth and fertility would be wasted. Hence, the prince, or male character, is essential to set the stagnated plot into motion to lead Schneewittchen to her destiny: wife and motherhood.

When a princess in a tale gets swept away by the prince it is seen as a desired outcome, it is the role of the prince to come "rescue" the maiden, making the reader believe this is the ultimate outcome for female protagonists. Rowe asserts that fairy tales promote female passivity, dependence on a male, and also support female subordination while deeming it as romantically desirable and inevitable (250). The good female character is beautiful, youthful, innocent, obedient, and most importantly passive.

The prince's resurrection of the girl sends a cultural message that a woman must be rescued and in return must absolutely submit to the male hero. This pattern is seen in countless fairy tales by the Grimms as well as other fairy tale writers, and continues being reinforced even in contemporary stories and films where the prince or a husband is still the desired outcome for a female.¹⁶ The tale of Schneewittchen suggests when the prince is falling in love with Schneewittchen, she owes him her hand in marriage. The contemporary Western understanding that a woman can decide her partner was completely irrelevant at the time the tale was published in 1812 and 1857 respectively. Women had no control in choosing a life partner. Schneewittchen too, had no choice and passively accepts the prince's offer, as that is the only thing she can do. The prince who found Schneewittchen on the side of a mountain fell in love with her immediately as she lay unconscious in her glass casket: Schneewittchen had to do absolutely

¹⁶ Many of Grimms' fairy tales have been remade into animated films by Walt Disney and continue being remade into films.

nothing, but be beautiful and lay still to attract the attention of a prince. Schneewittchen lying motionless in a casket is metaphoric of the idea that women should passively wait for a prince charming and only coming to life through marriage, without doing anything, but passively waiting. Such norms of a passive woman were glamourized by the culture at the time the fairy tale was written. The fairy tale deems it as appropriate for the male figure to have control over Schneewittchen while she is unable to wake up, appearing to be dead. The fairy tale also suggests that this is a romantic move on the behalf of prince who was love-struck by seeing the dead heroine, wanting to take her as his beloved object so he could look at her every day. Upon seeing Schneewittchen the prince says: "So schenkt mir ihn [den Sarg], denn ich kann nicht leben, ohne Schneewittchen zu sehen, ich will es ehren und hochachten wie mein Liebstes" (Grimm and Grimm 203).¹⁷ The casket is made of glass because the primary function of it is to see who is in it. The golden letters on the casket saying the girl in it is the king's daughter, further implicates that the content in the casket is valuable, that requires honor and respect. Even while Schneewittchen is unconscious, she is still bound to a man, because the prince makes the decision to take her despite her lack of consent, like a transaction for which he vows to respect her highly. The dwarfs gave her away to the prince who initially wants to exchange Schneewittchen for material possessions. "Laßt mir den Sarg, ich will euch geben, was ihr dafür haben wollt" (Grimm and Grimm 202).¹⁸ This quote suggests the respect and honor turns material to emotional gain.

After Schneewittchen wakes up, because an apple got accidentally dislodged from her mouth, she immediately seems pleased to be found by the prince and quickly falls in love with

¹⁷ Give the coffin to me, as I cannot live without seeing Snow White, I will honor and treasure her as my prized possession.

¹⁸ Let me have the coffin, I will give you whatever you want for it.

him too. Schneewittchen's quick acceptance of the prince's love and her own sudden affections demonstrate that to fall in love or not is not a choice for female heroines, it is just destined to happen.

Beauty in Schneewittchen: A Cause for a Conflict

In *Schneewittchen*, beauty has a darker side. While it helps Schneewittchen through hard times it is clearly the catalyst for attempted murder by her own step mother. Princesses and female characters in fairy tales are often characterized by their beauty. Grimms' fairytales and their adaptations in forms of films and cartoons follow the same pattern of gender and beauty representation. The female characters often have desirable physical features such as white skin, youth, long hair, and feminine clothing by wearing a dress. However, Schneewittchen's beauty can be seen as a blessing and a curse at the same time. She is as innocent as she is beautiful, and the innocence is closely connected to her beauty. Age too is an important factor in Grimms' tales as the heroines are often very young, as young as seven in *Schneewittchen*.¹⁹ The *Schneewittchen* tale however, poses an exception: the evil queen is also beautiful along with her stepdaughter. The main difference in physical appearance between them is in their age. Had Schneewittchen not been a European tale, she may not have been "white as snow", but in this cultural context her skin color makes her more pure, beautiful and appealing.

While Schneewittchen's biological mother wished for her daughter to have only physical characteristics and not independence, intelligence or will, it is the evil queen who shows these same characteristics while still being beautiful. "What seems clear is that the messages in the Grimm's fairy tales, especially those that have been reproduced often, are consistent with other messages that women and girls receive about the importance of feminine beauty" (Baker-Sperry

¹⁹ The young age of a girl may have something to do with short childhoods, but especially because Schneewittchen is a princess, she is seen as a potential bride from a young age.

and Grauerholz 724). Such wish by Schneewittchen's birth means for her child to be successful because if she is ugly she will not be able to secure a suitable husband. In the end of the tale, Schneewittchen is more beautiful than her stepmother because of her physical beauty and the display of her submissive behavior and lack of an independent will that pursues other feats than her beautification.

Therefore, in the fairy tale of *Schneewittchen* along with many others collected by the Grimms demonstrate a divisive relationship with beauty. While Schneewittchen's birth mother wishes for her child's beauty, the evil queen and stepmother is no less preoccupied with beauty. However, she is obsessed with her own looks and has narcissistic tendencies which ultimately lead to her death at the end of the tale. The mirror in this fairy tale caters to the new queen's obsession with looks by tending to her ego, by answering her that she is the most beautiful one of all.²⁰ The queen would ask the mirror "Spieglein, Spieglein an der Wand, wer ist die Schönste im ganzen Land?" (Grimm and Grimm 194).²¹ For the stepmother queen to be satisfied the mirror would answer truthfully every day, telling her that she is the most beautiful one of all. The mirror would answer her, "Frau Königin, Ihr seid die Schönste im Land" (Grimm and Grimm 194).²² In the story, the queen's ego is satisfied until Schneewittchen reaches the age of seven, when she surpasses her stepmother's beauty. Once the mirror reveals that Schneewittchen is a thousand times more beautiful, the queen turned green from jealousy. "Da erschrak die Königin und ward gelb und grün vor Neid" (Grimm and Grimm 194).²³ This description of the queen's emotional state shows that Schneewittchen's beauty frightens her, since green is popularly associated with being sick and yellow with envy. Naturally, the queen is anxious and frightened

²⁰ In the English translation it is who the "fairest" one of all is.

²¹ Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the most beautiful one of all?

²² My queen, you are the most beautiful one of all.

²³ The terrified queen turned yellow and green from envy.

because her only desirable and valuable asset is beauty which is threatened by the seven-year-old step daughter. After all, the only thing she has to hold on to is her beauty, losing her looks means losing her power in her role as a wife and a mother. Beauty plays a vital role for Schneewittchen. It makes the hunter succumb to it and spare the girl's life. The evil queen sent out a hunter along with Schneewittchen demanding that he kills her and as proof bring her liver and lungs for her to consume. The queen's cannibalistic desires expose her to be even more evil and desperate to attain the qualities Schneewittchen has since consuming her stepdaughter's organs would transfer the beauty to her. The story could have ended there but the hunter felt so bad for the girl and spared her because she was so beautiful. "Und weil es so schön war, hatte der Jäger Mitleid und sagte: 'So lauf hin, du armes Kind'" (Grimm and Grimm 194).²⁴ Mercy is given to those who are beautiful and innocent, qualities that adhere to the cultural norms of women yet also undermine orders given by the evil queen. This also suggests that the hunter sees Schneewittchen as innocent and worthy of being spared, and he does not see the queen as being in the position to give orders to a man.

Schneewittchen holds further influence other than subverting the commanding power of the queen. Her beauty saves her in the dwarfs' home into which she broke in. Under normal circumstances it is not acceptable to enter a stranger's home and make yourself comfortable, however this tale suggests it is permitted. The dwarfs, first outraged because their house was made messy by Schneewittchen, upon discovering her, they immediately changed their perception of events. "'Ei du mein Gott!' riefen sie, 'Was ist das Kind so schön!' und hatten so grosse Freude an Schneewittchen, dass sie es nicht aufweckten" (Grimm and Grimm 196).²⁵ The

²⁴ And because Snow White was so beautiful, the hunter felt pity for her and said, "Run away, you poor child!"

²⁵ "Oh my god!" Cried the dwarfs "That child is so beautiful!" They were so happy about Snow White that they did not wake her.

dwarfs were taken away by the intruder's beauty and decided to let her sleep. This is another instance where mercy is given to those who are attractive, yet also who become ultimately domesticated in the house of the seven dwarfs in preparation of her womanly duties in marriage.

Schneewittchen's Transformation and Death in the Forest

The character of Schneewittchen at the beginning of the story is very simplistic, she is viewed as simply a child who has no choices and no control over her life. Throughout the tale her character does transform, from a child to an adolescent woman, however it does not change the fact that Schneewittchen cannot control her own life. Her life with the dwarfs in the cottage is what transforms her, but also leads to her premature death. The decisions to not listen to the dwarfs is what set her up for the poisoned apple at the end.

The only choices Schneewittchen makes are in the forest while living with the dwarfs in their cottage. In many fairy tales, the forest is an enchanted place where climactic situations take place, and the character's life is changed in some way. The forest plays a very important part in Grimm's tales that is always enchanting and transforms people in some way (Zipes, *Enchanted Forests*, 44-5).²⁶ Schneewittchen's life in the forest can be seen as a climactic transformation of her character because it is during this time does she make choices for herself. The forest is a place of unknown and full of dangers. Schneewittchen undergoes her transformation to being an ideal woman but because of the transformation and maturing, the decisions she made, lead to her death.

The dwarf's offer to Schneewittchen to let her live with them is in some way provisional. She has to do chores for them in order to stay. It is implied when they say, "Willst du unseren Haushalt versehen, kochen, betten, waschen, nähen, und stricken, und willst du alles ordentlich

²⁶ The Grimms also thought of the forest as the place German people needed to enter to find essential truths about German culture. (Zipes *Enchanted Forests* 45)

und reinlich halten, so kannst du bei uns bleiben” (Grimm and Grimm 196).²⁷ Essentially, the dwarfs give her a list of conditions in form of domestic chores, to which she must comply in order to stay. Even though Schneewittchen is only seven years old when she starts living with the dwarfs, she is expected to perform duties of an adult hausfrau. Because Schneewittchen has nowhere else to live, she accepts the offer and allows herself to be domesticated by the dwarfs. Even though Schneewittchen is a princess, she has no right to make any demands of her own, because she is reduced to a domestic servant who is supposed to stay at home and take care of men and the household. This domestication of Schneewittchen makes her an ideal partner and woman according to standards of 1800s Germany.

Schneewittchen does mature while living with dwarfs and enters her adolescent years that come with its own physical and mental transformations. Her temporary home with the dwarfs can be seen as transition period, in between leaving her parents’ home and before entering a new one- her future husband’s. The life with the dwarfs is preparatory for a new rite of passage for Schneewittchen.

Schneewittchen is easily lured by material objects. It demonstrates that she thinks of her own physical appearance and is aware of things that could generally improve it. In the story she falls for the lace and the comb, both are for the most part feminine objects that are used for making a woman more attractive. She is tempted by them when the queen disguised as an old woman attempting to sell them to her. “Die ehrliche Frau kann ich hereinlassen, dachte Sneewittchen, riegelte die Türe auf und kaufte sich den hübschen Schnürriemen” (Grimm and Grimm 198).²⁸ ²⁹ It is no wonder the disguised queen offered her those objects that a woman of

²⁷ If you keep house for us, cook, make the beds, wash, sew and knit, and keep everything neat and orderly you can stay with us.

²⁸ “Sneewittchen” is the Low German spelling of Schneewittchen.

²⁹ I can let the honest woman in, thought Snow White. So she unlocked the door and bought the laces.

her age would be interested in. Schneewittchen's eagerness to accept the lace at first, shows how she is possibly aware of her figure and allows the queen to lace her up. The awareness of her own body shows that she is a maturing person who has left the childhood phase. Schneewittchen was easily seduced by objects that help her beautify herself. It shows that she has a growing interest in being physically and sexually appealing, however she is naïve and does not learn from her mistakes. These episodes demonstrate that Schneewittchen has something in common with the queen: the same fixation on beauty but in varying degrees. It can be justified that two women are concerned with their looks, but the key is moderation.

Magic Mirror: The Male Gaze

The mirror in Schneewittchen is an important character in the story. It has an essential function: it speaks, tells the truth and is a physical object that is very important to the queen, as she seeks answers from it as a confidant on a daily basis. In a way, this is a dependent relationship, the queen being attached to her mirror only to hear what she wants, as a dose of affirmation for her ego. The mirror is a catalyst for queen's rage, as her self-obsession is undermined when she is no longer the fairest one of all. The mirror reveals the queen's extreme self-admiration, opposite of the more humble Schneewittchen.

The mirror on the wall in *Schneewittchen* serves several functions: it is the truth teller, it is a reflection of the queen's insecurities, and it is also the male gaze that compares the stepmother and Schneewittchen. The queen looks to the mirror as a truth teller and something to soothe her ego with. The mirror reflects more than her physical appearance but a state of the soul. It is a tool for foreshadowing, but also reflecting on the state of relationship between Schneewittchen and her stepmother. Whatever the queen feels inside, she sees. The queen demonstrates masculine, "wicked" traits such as decision making, aggression, and plotting, so

the mirror reveals that Schneewittchen is a thousand times better than the queen, a girl who follows the feminine and submissive norms. The mirror in *Schneewittchen* can be seen as an important indicator of enforced patriarchy in the fairy tale, and a reflection of male dominated culture at the time the story was collected. This mirror judges the women side by side, creating feelings of jealousy, hatred, and competition

Barzilai interprets the mirror as reflecting the relationship between Schneewittchen and her stepmother as such that the queen's authority is undermined, and as she ages and is losing control of her stepdaughter. Schneewittchen grows into a woman, becoming complete without her, while the queen is degenerating by showing physically unattractive qualities but also unattractive qualities within. "The mother loses control over the beauty, the creation that seemed an extension of herself. The mirror reflects disintegration without a possibility of regeneration" (Barzilai 530).

Giradot sees the mirror as a reflection of different relationship dynamics between Schneewittchen and her stepmother. "The mirror that always speaks the truth first reports that the stepmother is the 'fairest of all', the truth of which is verified by the fact that in this early period of childhood Schneewittchen is not fully a person and is wholly identified with the mother" (288). In this quote Giradot explains that the mirror is reflective of the stepmother and stepdaughter relationship, because the mirror represents a self-realization instrument, which reflects what is inside a person who stands in front of it. Schneewittchen did not pose a threat to the queen because she was too young. However, once Schneewittchen started maturing and becoming more beautiful, that development was verified by the mirror. The reflection of what the queen was seeing but also feeling is what pushed her to attempt to kill Schneewittchen.

The queen, while still beautiful, is no longer maturing but losing qualities that make her

young, physically attractive, and youthful. Rather than accepting this natural course of life, she turns vicious instead. In a world where a heavy emphasis is placed on a woman's appearance, this bitter reaction can be understood, because the queen is losing the only positive asset she has: her looks.

Male Characters and their Role in *Schneewittchen*

In many fairy tales male figures are present, and their function is usually that of a protector or aggressor. In *Schneewittchen*, the male figures play a specific role, each having a unique relationship to Schneewittchen. Fathers make frequent appearances in tales that involve parents and children, hunters are also significant in fairytales and appear not only in *Schneewittchen* but also in *Rotkäppchen*, playing a role of the protector, which the father seems unable to fulfill. The dwarfs are not unique to *Schneewittchen* fairytale, and in fact they are not seen as fully male in this fairy tale, they are not fully developed and have no names. At last, the princes appear in majority of Grimm's tales for an obvious reason: he is the protector and savior ready to sweep the female protagonist off her feet and live happily ever after.

Schneewittchen's Father: Powerless King

The father in *Schneewittchen* is absent, all that is known about him is that he exists and he remarried after Schneewittchen's mother's death. He does absolutely nothing for his daughter, such as trying to defend her against the new stepmother, nor does Schneewittchen come to him for help. In fact, he is barely mentioned. Such relationship dynamics are unusual, because men are traditionally seen as protectors but also heads of the household, suggesting the new queen is domineering, not allowing the father to step in. The absentee father of Schneewittchen is oblivious to what is going on between his wife and his daughter.³⁰ The Grimms generally

³⁰ In *Aschenputtel* there are similar dynamics, where the father does not defend his daughter against the evil stepmother and stepsisters.

portray male figures as protectors or protagonists with some exceptions, in which a reader can make a clear distinction between who is who, however the father in *Schneewittchen* seems to not fit either category.³¹ This suggest the irrelevance of the father, because he is neither good nor evil. It is unknown why in *Schneewittchen* he does not intervene in the mother-daughter conflict, nor shows concern once the girl vanishes. One could read this as Schneewittchen's father is suppressed by the dominant queen, and being under her control his role as a father and protector breaks down. This position condemns male weakness and female dominance. At the end of the tale the queen gets punished for her sadistic and dominant behavior. Her public punishment is meant to humiliate her, but also draw attention to the crime, showing what can happen if you are too dominant as a woman. However, is it unclear what happens with the father, as he too is partially responsible for Schneewittchen's misfortunes, since he is too weak to help her.

The absence of the father suggests that the male sphere of influence had nothing to do with childrearing, as it was considered a woman's domain. In *Schneewittchen* his character is not an important one, because it is a woman's responsibility to do the childbearing. An uninvolved or absent father reinforces the woman's reproductive role, which makes him free of any obligations to the woman or the child once it is conceived and born.

Hunter the Protector

The hunter in *Schneewittchen* plays two roles in this fairytale: the protector and an extension of the father figure. "A male who can be viewed as an unconscious representation of the father appears- the hunter who is ordered to kill Schneewittchen" (Bettelheim 204). Out of all the characters in this tale, it is the hunter who feels most empathy towards Schneewittchen and saves her life. The hunter appears to have more moral aspects to his character than the girl's

³¹ The dwarf in *Rumpelstilzchen* and the wolf in *Rotkäppchen* are with their own agendas and more villain-like.

father and stepmother, as he feels distraught by the queen's request to murder the girl and bring back her liver and lungs as proof. The presence of the hunter's moral compass suggests that the tale does in fact denounce two of the biggest universal taboos: murder and cannibalism.

Schneewittchen's protector serves a parental function, by protecting her from the wicked queen, as it normally is a father's moral obligation to protect a child from dangers. Seeing the hunter as a protector in this tale seems obvious, hunting is usually associated with strength, and ability to provide, which is attributed to be a male activity, thus making the hunter an ideal father substitute. However, what the hunter fails to do is to take a strong stand against the dominant queen. He does not obey her, by refusing to execute her orders, and instead lies to her and brings back organs of an animal instead of confronting her. The hunter does not fully protect Schneewittchen, as he leaves her alone in the woods, knowing she could get killed by wild animals. In a sense, this substitute father is almost as flawed as Schneewittchen's biological father, because neither male succeeds in protecting the girl from the queen and her evil plans. However, the main difference between the hunter and Schneewittchen's biological father is the hunter's ability to resist to some degree the domineering queen's orders. It shows that he rejects the beautiful queen's orders but only by the overriding power of Schneewittchen's beauty, but he cannot fully stand up and confront the queen's authority.

Dwarfs: Seven Stunted Men

The dwarfs in fairytales typically fall into two categories, good or evil. In *Schneewittchen* they are kind and helpful, and become Schneewittchen's admirers. "Their diminutive stature makes them sexually unthreatening, even as their sevenfold admiration of Schneewittchen's beauty magnifies her attractiveness" (Tatar *Annotated Grimm* 252). By not giving the dwarfs names and not differentiating between them suggests they are not considered to be of great

importance. In addition, it deprives them of human qualities. Despite the fact that Schneewittchen enters their home without permission, they feel compassion towards her and allow her to stay with them. They are her friends or even brothers, who are willing to help her but also give her advice to protect herself from the queen. In the Grimms' version of the tale, the dwarfs have no names and little is known about them except for they are hard workers who live in the forest and work every day in the mountain.³² The dwarfs in *Schneewittchen* serve the function of helpers, such characters are seen throughout tales in other forms such as fairies who help the protagonist. Because they are the helpful companions, which is socially acceptable, they also save Schneewittchen from dangers of the forest. The peaceful cohabitation of Schneewittchen and the seven dwarfs is likely because they are not sexually threatening. Bettelheim suggests that they are "eminently male, but males who are stunted in their development" (210). In a way, the dwarfs are not really male, but are more like mythical creatures who have no origin but they simply exist in the forest, not showing fully developed male-like characteristics, for example being tall in stature and sexually mature into adults. A passage describing the dwarfs' house indicates that they will not develop and are done growing, because everything in the house is described as diminutive and in a mawkish way. "...da sah es ein kleines Häuschen und ging hinein, sich zu ruhen. In dem Häuschen war alles klein, aber so zierlich und reinlich, dass es nicht zu sagen ist" (Grimm and Grimm 195).³³ It is because of their lack of masculine attributes, that they accept Schneewittchen and care for her as a dear friend.

Schneewittchen's seven sidekicks are also essential in her transformation from a child into adulthood and her rebirth (Girardot 290). The dwarfs allow Schneewittchen to stay with

³² In Walt Disney's *Snow White* the dwarfs are given human-like characteristics by giving them individual names.

³³ She saw a little house and went inside to rest. In the house everything was so small, but neat and tidier than one can say.

them only under the condition that she cooks, cleans, sews and keeps house for them. “In carrying out domestic chores, Snow White moves into a new developmental stage, demonstrating her ability to engage in labor and carry out the terms of a contract” (Tatar *Annotated Grimm* 254). By staying with the dwarfs, they train her how to be a maturing housewife by asking her to do chores for them. This will prepare the girl for marriage by making her an ideal partner. In this transition period, Schneewittchen therefore shows maturity and legal adulthood by engaging in agreements and contracts preparing her for marriage. It is in that way, the dwarfs transform Schneewittchen from a child into a domesticated woman.

Prince, the Hero and Savior

The prince in the fairytale falls into one of the two previously mentioned categories for males, he is the hero and the protector figure in this story. The tale must end in matrimony, as the goal is for Schneewittchen is to become a wedded woman and to bear children. The prince just reinforces the goal of making Schneewittchen a complete woman who voluntarily submits herself to a man and becomes a housewife. Frequently in Grimms’ tales love at first sight happens. The prince conveniently appears at the end of the tale when Schneewittchen has gone through her transformation from a child into an adolescent woman, signaling it is the right time for her to have a partner. The tale would not be complete without this male counterpart because there are expectations that princesses be married off. Rowe writes on marriage in fairytales and what it teaches “marriage is an enchantment which will shield her against harsh realities outside the domestic realm and guarantee everlasting happiness” (250). The prince who marries Schneewittchen is an essential component to her wellbeing and happiness. His role is to reinstate Schneewittchen’s role in the domestic realm, reminding the reader that women do not belong outside the house or outside of a marriage.

In the fairy tale, things take an eerie turn when the prince's love for Schneewittchen's beauty overrides consent. After being put in a glass casket on the side of a mountain as if Schneewittchen was an object of beauty and glory, a prince finds her. Once again, Schneewittchen's striking beauty attracted a partner even though she apparently died. The prince's desire to take the casket with Schneewittchen with him shows the objectification of women. Schneewittchen's beauty struck the prince so much he absolutely had to take her as if she were an object. Schneewittchen of course had no way to consent, and dwarfs felt pity for the love-struck prince and gave her away, for then the prince could feel better by staring at his beautiful love object. In the fairy tale, the prince justifies his desire to take Schneewittchen by saying he cannot live without seeing her. It is clear that Schneewittchen's beauty is the main motivation for the prince to take her, and he must own her.

Conclusion:

The Grimm brothers wanted to convey a message to the 19th century German people when publishing the fairy tale collection meaning and truth. The written language and the various messages those fairy tales conveyed were meant to give the reader guidance about ideal outcomes and expectations for women of the 19th century. At first glance, the *Schneewittchen* fairy tale reveals a conflict between a stepparent and her stepchild in which the stepmother queen is in the wrong. The stepmother is portrayed as evil because she tried to kill Schneewittchen and eat her liver and lungs. However, Schneewittchen's stepmother's evil nature and her actions are a reflection of common practices of the 19th century: in a culture obsessed with female beauty she had to take things into her own hands and eliminate the competition that threatened her status.

This obsession in the mid-19th century in Germany speak volumes about how beauty is the most and only essential thing a woman owns. This idea is reflected in the collection of

Grimms' fairy tales. In literature, witches are typically characterized as being both evil and ugly. They essentially do whatever they want, they do not confine themselves to social norms. In addition, they are unmarried, demonstrate evil and desire for dominance. Schneewittchen's stepmother is an exception, she is both beautiful and married yet she is an embodiment of a witch, because of her aggressive actions, according to cultural standards. These characteristics stand in stark opposition to the projected ideal of a woman by not adhering to submissive cultural norms. In that way, Schneewittchen's stepmother is a free woman, she may be evil but she has free will and is unconventional.

Attractiveness of a female protagonist is frequently emphasized in texts. Hence, evil women in fairy tales meet an unfortunate end, suggesting they are not physically attractive to men, not making them worthy to be saved. In *Schneewittchen*, beauty is initially what gets the young protagonist of the tale in trouble but it is ultimately what saves her, sending a clear message: beautiful women who subordinate to the prince are the ones who will get a happy end, but beautiful women who have their own agenda and express dominant tendencies, and a lack of desire to submit to a man receive a public punishment at the end.³⁴

The queen's out of line behavior along with homicidal tendencies justify her public punishment at the end, sending a message that disobedient, non-submissive and aggressive women will be met with force. The brothers Grimm "expressed the values of the German social structure out of which these fairy tales grew, by holding up specific models of behavior as essential and necessary and exhibiting terrible punishments as the just fate of the wayward and dilatory" (Bottingheimer 129). Schneewittchen's step mother's end is a message to those women who refuse to be dominated by men, sit quietly at home, and accept anything that comes to them.

³⁴ Schneewittchen's plotting stepmother receives her punishment in front of everyone at her stepdaughter's wedding.

The women who defy social standards are a disgrace and will be publicly shamed, but in the case of a fairy tale publicly shamed and put to death.

The fairy tale of the brothers Grimm continue their legacy: they keep being published and edited to the standards of the contemporary time. Modern-day versions of their fairy tales are sanitized and shift the focus on the prince and princess as the center of the plot, with them coming together being the single ultimate goal. The Grimms' original tales wanted to express more than just that. However, lot of the themes still remain relevant: marriage between the princess and the prince, femininity and helplessness of the female character, men's ability to save and revive women from the dead. The famous 1937 animated version of Snow White, called *Walt Disney's Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* glamorizes ideals of a happy end and female docility, in this version the prince is even more prominent in the plot development than in the Grimms', suggesting increasing importance of a man throughout the tale not just at the end.³⁵ Grimms' Schneewittchen continues being remade in films and pop culture sending a similar type of message: with the happy end between a heterosexual couple, but without the cruelty to fit the standards of the 21st century reader or viewer. However, in its essence the tale has not changed much: the happy end between a submissive woman and a strong, brave man is the desired outcome.

³⁵ In Walt Disney's version of *Snow White*, the focus is on the romantic aspect of the fairy tale because Schneewittchen gets revived from his kiss.

Works Cited:

Abate, Michelle Ann. "You Must Kill Her: The Fact and Fantasy of Filicide in Snow White."

Marvels & Tales, vol. 26, no. 2, 2012, pp. 178-203.

Baker-Sperry, Lori and Liz Grauerholz. "The Pervasiveness and Persistence of the Feminine

Beauty Ideal in Children's Fairy Tales." *Gender and Society*, vol. 17, no. 5, 2003, pp.

711–726.

Barzilai, Shuli. "Reading "Snow White": The Mother's Story." *Signs: Journal of Women in*

Culture and Society, vol. 15, no. 3, 1990, pp. 515-534.

Bettelheim, Bruno. *The Uses of Enchantment: the Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*.

Alfred A.Knopf, Inc, 1976.

Bottigheimer, Ruth B. *Fairy Tales and Society: Illusion, Allusion, and Paradigm*. University of

Pennsylvania Press, 1986.

Girardot, N. J. "Initiation and Meaning in the Tale of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs." *The*

Journal of American Folklore, vol. 90, no. 357, 1977, pp. 274–300.

Haase, Donald. "Yours, mine, or ours? Perrault, the Brothers Grimm, and the ownership of fairy

tales." *Merveilles & Contes*, vol. 7, no. 2, 1993, pp. 383–402.

Grimm, Jacob, and Wilhelm. *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. Edited by Ludwig Richter,

Bardtenschlager Verlag, 1967.

Lieberman, Marcia R. "'Some Day My Prince Will Come": Female Acculturation through the

Fairy Tale." *College English*, vol. 34, no. 3, 1972, pp. 383-395.

Pinson, Koppel S. *Modern Germany: Its History and Civilization*. Macmillan, 1966.

Rowe, Karen E. "Feminism and fairy tales." *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, vol. 6, no. 3, 1979, pp. 237-257.

Saunders, John Hanson. *The Evolution of Snow White: A Close Textual Analysis of Three Versions of Snow White the Fairy Tale* Dissertaion, Pennsylvania State University, 2008.

Tatar, Maria. *The Annotated Brothers Grimm*. Bicentennial ed. By Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm. W.W. Norton, 2012.

Tatar, Maria. *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales*. Princeton University Press, 1986.

Tatar, Maria. *"Off with Their Heads! Fairy Tales and the Culture of Childhood."* Princeton University Press, 1992.

Zipes, Jack. *The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World*. Routledge, 1988.

Zipes, Jack. "The Grimms and the German Obsession with Fairy Tales." *Fairy Tales and Society: Illusion, Allusion, and Paradigm*, edited by Ruth. B. Bottingheimer, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986, pp. 271-285.

Zipes, Jack. "Two Hundred Years After Once Upon a Time: The Legacy of the Brothers Grimm and Their Tales in Germany." *Marvels & Tales*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2014, pp. 54-74.