

2006

## The Loathsome and the Virtuous: An Examination of Sleeping Beauty and Snow White in Literature and Film

Heather Marie Birk  
*University of Northern Iowa*

*Let us know how access to this document benefits you*

Copyright ©2006 Heather Marie Birk

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/hpt>



Part of the [Modern Literature Commons](#), and the [Other Religion Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Birk, Heather Marie, "The Loathsome and the Virtuous: An Examination of Sleeping Beauty and Snow White in Literature and Film" (2006). *Honors Program Theses*. 605.

<https://scholarworks.uni.edu/hpt/605>

This Open Access Honors Program Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Program Theses by an authorized administrator of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@uni.edu](mailto:scholarworks@uni.edu).

**Offensive Materials Statement:** Materials located in UNI ScholarWorks come from a broad range of sources and time periods. Some of these materials may contain offensive stereotypes, ideas, visuals, or language.

THE LOATHSOME AND THE VIRTUOUS:  
AN EXAMINATION OF SLEEPING BEAUTY AND SNOW WHITE IN  
LITERATURE AND FILM

A Thesis  
Submitted  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Designation  
University Honors with Distinction

Heather Marie Birk  
University of Northern Iowa

May 2006

This Study by: Heather Marie Birk

Entitled: The Loathsome and the Virtuous: An Examination of Sleeping Beauty and  
Snow White in Literature and Film

has been approved as meeting the thesis or project requirement for the Designation  
University Honors with Distinction

5/4/06

Date Honors Thesis Advisor

5/8/06

Date

Jessica Moon, Director, University Honors Program

Fairy Tales captivate us in ways other stories cannot. They are the ultimate adventure of the mind, allowing us to escape reality, time and place. Our enjoyment of fairy tales is twofold and dependant upon when we encounter them in our lives. As adults we enjoy fairy tales for their simplicity, perhaps even for their nostalgia, because we recall the fantasies and dreams fairy tales made us believe as children. The impact of fairy tales is greater on children, because they not only realize fantasies and dreams through fairy tales, but they also find fulfillment in seeing the battle between good and evil play out ‘once upon a time.’ Indeed, there is not a better tool through which children can deal with inner turmoil and life changing events, than the fairy tale. Sheldon Cashdan, Professor of Psychology at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst explains:

Fairy tales are more than suspense-filled adventures that excite the imagination, more than mere entertainment. Beyond the chase scenes and last-minute rescues are serious dramas that reflect events taking place in the child’s inner world. Whereas the initial attraction of a fairy tale may lie in its ability to enchant and entertain, its lasting value lies in its power to help children deal with the internal conflicts they face in the course of growing up.

(Cashdan 10).

The way that fairy tales reach us is not through an intriguing plot—plot is the last concern of a fairy tale; rather fairy tales reach us through complex characters that blend virtue and vice, reality and magic. In identification with these characters children recognize their

own weaknesses and strengths, and are able to live vicariously through the characters without consequence. Entering the world of a fairy tale, for a child, is entering the world of possibility and imagination where children receive power, parents become subplots to the main story, and the complexities of good and evil are explored.

Unfortunately, this world of possibility and imagination is lessened by fairy tales' transition from written text into film. The introduction of Disney's animation drastically changes the way children and adults experience fairy tales, to the detriment of the imagination. With every film version of a fairy tale, we are asked to suspend our own beliefs and desires for those of a company. While that may seem like a small sacrifice for us to see the images on screen, in essence we are teaching children to give up on their own dreams, their own versions of the tales, for the tales of corporate America. More importantly, as Disney attempts to visually represent the tales it forfeits the complexities of the characters, leaving one-dimensional shells of characters with whom we used to identify. Consequently, shallow characters hinder children's ability to connect with the characters and face their own individual challenges.

In highlighting these points I am suggesting that written versions of fairy tales are superior to their film counterparts. Through a comparison of *Sleeping Beauty* and *Snow White*, in both film and written text, I will demonstrate that Disney fairy tales present the characters and story too simply, while allowing overly wicked and sexual connotations to discolor the tales. They render children incapable of using their own imagination, and what is worse, incapable of working through their own inner torments. On the other hand, written fairy tales present characters struggling with virtue and vice, and these

moral issues are imperative to children's understanding of themselves and the world around them.

In this analysis I look at the differences between written text and film fairy tales, and the extent to which they help children overcome moral complexities. There are two important ideas represented in written fairy tales that place fairy tales within a tradition of moral education for children. First, the relationship between prince, princess and the wicked fairy or queen resembles the relationship between Adam, Eve and Satan. This relationship is only visible in the written version of the tales, because it depends on the Princesses playing dominant roles as Eve played in Genesis. Second, the use of the Seven Deadly Sins will appear throughout all of the written tales, because they are the accepted expression of virtue and vice at the time period the tales are written. These sins also appear in the Disney films, but they are changed, in fact many of them are reduced in degree or taken less seriously by the characters. Consequently, children watching the films believe that behavior condoned in the films will also be condoned in real life. We watch the Disney films because they entertain us, and they make it easy for us to visualize the story, but they are vastly drier, simpler, and less imaginative than written fairy tales. If we want children to grow up decisive and confident, and in appreciation of their own imagination and ability to work through problems, then we must not only see the value in written fairy tales, but we must also return to them as the superior form of the tales.

### **Children in an Adult World**

To understand the great divide between written fairy tales and Disney tales, we must first put written fairy tales in their proper context. Today written fairy tales are

usually read to children, but when Charles Perrault and Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm originally wrote the tales children did not experience the same kind of ‘childhood’ as we imagine. Historian Roger Sale explains, “Indeed, fairy tales could not have been children’s literature originally, because, at least in our sense, children and childhood did not exist until recent centuries...Childhood was invented, and when it was, children’s literature followed quite naturally” (Sale 26). Sale continues that in the Middle Ages children of lower classes were mixed with adults at age seven. They cared for themselves and worked along side adults. In fact, many paintings of this time period depict children with small bodies and adult size heads, showing that they were perceived to be adults.

Since children were considered miniature adults, the content of fairy tales expresses adult themes and adult experiences. For instance, parents are non-existent in many tales, and for various reasons children often leave home at early ages. Fairy tales also dealt with moral issues in the form of good and evil, virtue and vice. Society understood these ideas as the Seven Deadly Sins—pride, wrath, lust, greed, sloth, gluttony, and envy—and fairy tales are full of representations of each. Other adult themes include rape and murder; in fact, one version of *Sleeping Beauty* actually involves the princess being raped, and giving birth to two babies while in her deep sleep (Sale 23). Today, such a story would never be shared with children, but again, historically, there was no censorship for young audiences. Children heard and lived through exactly what adults heard and lived through, and fairy tales merely captured that life with a few modifications.

Fairy tales of the Middle Ages allowed adults and children to live out their joys and fears, hopes and darkest desires without taking real action or facing real consequences.

The ageless quality of fairy tales also keeps them timeless, as many, if not all, fairy tales told centuries ago still exist today. As we begin the comparison between the Disney films and the written tales, pay special attention to the simplicity of the films, how each film exaggerates the romantic relationships, attempts to purify or condone certain vices, and leaves the audience with an overwhelming feeling of dissatisfaction when the tale ends.

### **In Waiting for *Sleeping Beauty***

The written version of *Sleeping Beauty* that I am analyzing is written by Charles Perrault, and translated by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch. His preface, Quiller-Couch says that Perrault, “Is usually considered the fountainhead of these charming French fairy-stories...I began by translating Perrault’s tales, very nearly word for word; because to me his style has always seemed nearly perfect for its purpose; and the essence of ‘style’ in writing is propriety to its purpose” (Quiller-Couch b). Quiller-Couch points out the importance of purpose, which cannot be forgotten when examining fairy tales. Every character, event, and detail, down to the exact word, has a purpose in a written fairy tale. The purpose is smudged in film for a Hollywood plot and ending, which we will see later. Right now, let us appreciate the fine craftsmanship of Perrault’s *Sleeping Beauty*.

Every fairy tale hinges on a particular element to move the tale along, and ironically, in *Sleeping Beauty*, it is the element of waiting: “Well, they wanted one thing very badly, and the lack of it grieved them more than words can tell. They had no child. Vows, pilgrimages, all ways were tried; yet for a long while nothing came of it all, and the poor Queen especially was in despair” (Quiller-Couch 1). In the act of waiting we



realize how extraordinary the newborn princess will be; thus the beginning of the tale conditions us to believe, without ever seeing her, the virtue of the princess.

Our assumptions of her virtuous nature are proven correct once the princess is named: “A name had now to be found for the royal babe; and the King and Queen, after talking over some scores of names, at length decided to call her *Aurora*, which means *The Dawn*” (Quiller-Couch 2). The dawn is the rising of the sun, an everyday occurrence that signifies the start of a new day and new experiences. No better name could have been chosen for the beautiful princess, and Perrault must have realized the implications of such a name. Names in fairy tales often represent important characteristics that the audience is meant to understand as, storyteller and author, Marcia Lane explains:

In the classic fairy tales, characters frequently are nameless.

Or if they have names, those names are designations of a quality or talent or secret that the characters possess. The princess may be “Bellissima,” or “Rose Red,” but these are more accurately descriptions rather than proper names.

The same is true of the commoners. “There was once a miller who had a wife.” Through the rest of the story, these two will be referred to as Miller and Miller’s Wife. They are Everyman. (Lane 18)

Aurora signifies a new life for the King, Queen and the kingdom. As we wait for the sun to rise in the morning, so too do we wait for Aurora to prick her finger on the spindle, fall into a deep sleep, and arise before the sleeping kingdom.

Conflict must not be rushed, however, for the evil character has yet to be introduced. She comes at a joyous occasion, the christening of the princess:

But just as they were seating themselves at the table, to the dismay of everyone there appeared in the doorway an old crone, dressed in black and leaning on the crutched stick. Her chin and her hooked nose almost met together, like a pair of nut-crackers, for she had very few teeth remaining; but between them she growled to the guests in a terrible voice: “I am the Fairy Uglyane.” (Quiller-Couch 4)

In this text, the evil character is named for appearance, which is indeed ugly. There is no question in our minds of Aurora’s beauty and virtue and this fairy’s loathsome qualities. With Uglyane’s arrival, the metaphor of the dawn goes a step farther, for the dark night is threatening to stop the beautiful sun from rising in the morning: ““This is my gift to you, *Princess Aurora*,’ announced the hag, still in her creaking voice that shook as spitefully as her body. ‘I promise that one day you shall pierce your hand with a spindle, and on that day you shall surely die!’” (Quiller-Couch 6). Notice how *Princess Aurora* is emphasized as if proving that Uglyane fully comprehends the ugliness of her own name and the beauty in the name of the princess.

The reaction of the entire christening party is outrage and shock. Prior to this moment Aurora receives gifts from six fairies, and we might surmise they are virtuous gifts to combat any sinful temptation put before her, or so we want to believe. Yet gifts of beauty, grace, and skill cannot save a soul from death. The charmed feelings we had seconds ago vanish as the cruelty of Uglyane darkens the tale. Reactions grow angry,

just like the characters' reactions, and we wonder why? Why should the virtuous character be cursed to die?

Stepping back from the enchanted reader's perspective for a moment, much more is going on in Uglyane's curse than the average reader may see. Sale argues that many fairy tales, especially fairy tales about princesses, make the real battle between good and evil a battle between beauty and ugliness. Thus far Sale seems to be correct, because Aurora portrays the beauty of the sun while Uglyane portrays the evils in the night. However, Uglyane is not as aesthetically obsessed as she appears. With beauty comes power, and power is what every evil character desires. Before the christening we learn that Uglyane:

Had in fact been overlooked; and this was not surprising, because she lived at the far end of the country, in a lonely tower set around by the forest. For fifty years she had never come out of this tower, and everyone believed her to be dead or enchanted. That, you must know, is the commonest way the Fairies have of ending: they lock themselves up in a tower or within a hollow oak, and are never seen again. (Quiller-Couch 4)

Uglyane is powerless, doomed not to die, but to be forgotten. The fact that Uglyane waited fifty years—again we see the element of waiting play out in the tale—proves Aurora's virtue. In cursing Aurora to death, Uglyane attempts to harness power that she hopes will render her important once more, no longer to be overlooked.

Sale's theory of beauty as power makes the implications for children reading this tale more critical. The contrast between the ugly fairy and the beautiful princess may lead children to believe that only beautiful people are good, virtuous and powerful, and ugly people are envious and evil. This split between the beautiful and the ugly would not be such a problem if all children could recognize themselves in the beautiful character. In order for this to happen the beautiful character must struggle with problems, so that children can identify not only with the virtuous actions but also with the more sinful actions of the character. Cashdan writes, "By transforming splits in the self into an adventure that pits the forces of good against the forces of evil...fairy tales help children deal with the negative tendencies in the self" (Cashdan 28). If children are going to recognize themselves and their sin in Aurora, then Aurora's sins will have to be more identifiable to children.

We fall back into the story with this new understanding of Uglyane's motivation to get rid of Aurora, thereby regaining some power in the world. We find that her curse is lessened by one fairy still needing to present her gift to Aurora. Though this good fairy cannot undo all the evil in the curse, she turns the death into a long period of sleep: "The Princess must indeed pierce her hand with a spindle; but, instead of dying, she shall only fall into a deep slumber that shall last for many, many years, at the end of which a King's son shall come and awake her" (Quiller-Couch 6). This fairy's name is Hippolyta, who is oddly enough, a mythical character of the Greeks and Romans. Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons, has an uncertain story. She either died at the hands of Hercules or was conquered by Theseus and became his wife. Her ending in regards to this tale means nothing, but it is interesting that Perrault chooses to use a mythical character in this tale.

Perhaps the character reminds us not to tempt fate, which is something the Greeks and Romans did frequently. In the next few pages of the tale, we learn about the King's banishment of all spinning wheels in order to protect his daughter, but just as the Greeks and Romans learn time and again, one can never outwit fate or a curse. We know his attempt to save Aurora is futile, and we wait for the climax of the curse to surface.

The climax of the curse perhaps surprises us the most, for we want to believe that Aurora, in all her beauty and with all the gifts of the fairies, would not fall prey to her own curiosity. We want to believe that Uglyane would have to try something so mischievous and dark that it blindsides Aurora and us, but this is not the case:

“But how pretty it is!” said the Princess. “How do you do it? Give it to me and let me see if I can do so well.” She had no sooner grasped the spindle—she was over-eager perhaps, or just a little bit clumsy, or maybe the fairy decree had so ordained it—than it pierced her hand and she dropped down in a swoon. (Quiller-Couch 9).

Aurora's downfall can be attributed to her own inquisitiveness. Aurora's curiosity is recognizable to children, and her desire to try something new and be good at it is also relevant to children. Cashdan is correct when he writes that fairy tales allow children to work out the negative feelings in the self. Here we see that Aurora is not only filled with virtue, but also a little envious of the handiwork of the old woman spinning the thread. Aurora is not evil like Uglyane nor does she wish to hurt anyone with her curiosity. However, she has taken advantage of her parents' absence and gone somewhere she is not allowed. By the same token, children have the curiosity and rebellious desire to be

where they are warned not to go. We know that Aurora pierces her hand on the spindle, and we understand that the piercing is not only a fulfillment of the curse but also a consequence of her curiosity.

Aurora suffers from temptation just like Eve in the Bible. Both women are created pure and virtuous, but the moment temptation enters the story both women have a choice to make: either give into temptation or do not. Aurora lets her curiosity and envy get the better of her. Her surrender to temptation brings about the downfall of her kingdom, just as Eve's surrender brings about the downfall of humanity. In fact, both women are doomed to die if not for the saving grace of man. Now we wait for the second part of Hippolyta's promise to come true, a prince to awaken her.

The prince may be the hardest character for whom to wait, especially since we long to have a happy ending. Our anticipation is increased by Hippolyta's decision to put the entire kingdom to sleep: "The instant the Fairy Hippolyta touched them they all fell asleep, not to awake until the same moment as their mistress, that all might be ready to wait on her when she needed them" (Quiller-Couch 13). Vines grow up around the castle, preventing intruders and rendering the entire kingdom obsolete. The vines are an interesting choice in this tale, because they could be literally thought about as guarding Aurora's heart. They grow up around the kingdom to protect not only the people within the kingdom, not only the sleeping Princess, but also the purity and love within Aurora. I think this is quite a romantic illustration that shows children how they must guard their hearts until true love comes along. The tale does not give a precise number of years that the kingdom sits dormant, but we assume it is quite a while. This too teaches children a fair assessment of love, particularly that love does not happen overnight. Indeed, many

times finding true love happens after years of waiting, once all of the vines have finally been cut away from the heart.

Finally, after all our waiting, and the Princess's waiting, Prince Florimond finds the sleeping kingdom, and travels through the castle to find the princess that is rumored to be hidden within the vine covered walls. The word "florid" means rosy or reddish complexion and ornate, therefore we can picture this prince as a rosy-cheeked man ornately dressed. The tale keeps us in waiting as we follow the prince through the castle and into Aurora's chambers:

But she lay so still!...Prince Florimond drew near,  
trembling and wondering, and sank on his knees beside her.  
Still she lay, scarcely seeming to breathe, and he bent and  
touched with his lips the little hand that rested, light as a  
roseleaf, on the coverlet...(Quiller-Couch 20)

This scene becomes an important comparison to the Disney version of the tale, but for now we need only concern ourselves with Aurora's reaction to Florimond: "Is it you, my Prince?" she said. "You have been a long while coming!" (Quiller-Couch 21). Aurora understands, just as we do, the time she has spent waiting. As Aurora arises like the sun before her kingdom, there is talk among the Kings at the marriage of their children. Again, this scene will be contrasted with the Disney film, but it is important to note that while the Kings appear and discuss the marriage, they then quickly disappear from the tale.

Another character who completely disappears from the story is Uglyane. In fact, she has not been seen since cursing Aurora at her christening. This is an interesting fate

for an evil character in a fairy tale. Rather than destroy Uglyane the tale simply forgets her, which ironically is Uglyane's deepest fear. It seems too easy for Uglyane to vanish from the tale, yet it makes sense in this story. The real character of consequence, the one with whom children should identify, is not Uglyane but Aurora. I mentioned that children might share some evil feelings with Uglyane, so the only defense is to completely remove Uglyane from the story.

Perhaps the better question is why Uglyane does not die allowing children to see the evil of the world conquered: "In the end the child in the story emerges victorious: Jack vanquishes the giant, Snow White defeats the evil Queen, and Dorothy kills the Wicked Witch of the West...Once the witch dies, everyone lives happily ever after" (Cashdan 31). Cashdan points out that most fairy tales end with the death of the evil character, but not *Sleeping Beauty*. There is no complete answer for Perrault's decision to let Uglyane merely slip out of the story, but it does lead us to believe in the reality of the tale. No, most children are not royalty who are cursed to death, but children face small threats to their own kingdoms everyday. Bullies, outside forces, and inner desires can make childhood difficult, and the reality is that not all evil will be vanquished. Most bullies are superseded not because they die, but because something else steps in to help children forget them. Children may not have Hippolyta to reconcile all the evil brought upon them, but they have friends, and hopefully adults who will step in and ease the suffering. Uglyane's ambiguous ending teaches children that some evil is only as deadly as the amount of attention it is given.

Perrault's text shows us a virtuous Princess, who is not without sin, an evil fairy who disappears mysteriously and a prince who takes a subordinate position to the women



in the tale. Perrault gives us enough text to frame a story in our minds, but he does not overstep the boundaries of our imagination. We are allowed to see the characters and scenes as we want to see them. We get to choose the significance of the sins portrayed in each character and live out our own sins through them, but we are not beat over the head with their virtue or loathsome behavior. This frame changes as Disney reshapes the tale.

### ***Sleeping Beauty* Through Disney's Eyes**

Disney changed the world of fairy tales in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Instead of reading the tales in a book, Disney made it possible for audiences to see the story unfold in images and song. Professor Jack Zipes writes, "If children or adults think of the great classical fairy tales today, be it Snow White, *Sleeping Beauty*, or Cinderella, they will think of Walt Disney" (Zipes *Spell* 21). It is hard not to be enthused by Disney fairy tales, especially when they do so much of the work for us. Watching a film is far less straining than reading or listening to a tale. Disney realizes that for 86 minutes, the length of the *Sleeping Beauty* and *Snow White* films, we are hopelessly enthralled with what we see, making it incredibly easy for Disney to show us anything, to tell us any story, and make us believe any dream.

The dream Disney wants us to believe in is that of love-at-first-sight, and that the love can be true and everlasting. While Perrault's *Sleeping Beauty* hinged on waiting, all actions and events in Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* rely upon the romantic relationship between Prince Philip and Princess Aurora. These two characters become our hero and heroine. Without knowledge of any other versions of *Sleeping Beauty*, we believe they portray the ultimate man, woman, and relationship. However, further analysis proves

quite the opposite. We saw in the written version of *Sleeping Beauty* how important names are in describing characters, but Disney's version displays personality visually rather than imagined verbally through a name: "The pictures conceal the controls and machinery. They deprive the audience of viewing the production and manipulation, and in the end, audiences can no longer envision a fairy tale for themselves as they can when they read it" (Zipes *Spell* 33). The Princess is still named Aurora, so we retain our good and virtuous character, but the Prince is named Philip, which does not describe his character at all. Since we are given no verbal cues we must believe what we see with our eyes. Prince Philip is handsome, brave, and charming and Aurora is beautiful, virtuous, and young. The imagination of the audience becomes insignificant compared to the imagination of Disney. We have no choice in how we see Philip and Aurora. Philip must have brown hair and look strong, and Aurora must be blond with red lips and rosy cheeks. They are not representative of everyman, so we are allowing ourselves to believe in a narrow image as attractive and virtuous.

Names also help us distinguish the important characters from the unimportant characters. In the Perrault's version we are drawn to Aurora because her name means the dawn, and the dawn takes center stage. Uglyane's name clearly labels her as the ugly character, and Prince Florimond's name clued us into his ornate dress, but did not overpower Aurora. In naming the Prince something more concrete, as Disney chooses, the sense is that Prince Philip will be more important than Aurora, which he is ultimately. Disney names the evil character Maleficent, which means to do evil or harm. Disney takes the Uglyane character and exaggerates her vices so that even she becomes more

important than Aurora. Aurora is not given the powerful position that she has in the written version; in fact, that image is compromised for Maleficent and Philip's image.

Not only do we have no choice in the physical images on screen, we also have no choice in the relationship between Aurora and Philip, which in the film starts prematurely in the woods. Disney does not make the audience wait for prince and princess to set eyes upon each other at the end of the tale. Aurora and Philip have a secret rendezvous in the forest, where we see lustful desires build. Once Aurora and Philip meet we immediately see the attraction and lust between the two. They have barely said three words to each other, yet we are supposed to believe in their deep love for one another. This relationship presents children the idea that love happens within seconds of meeting someone. While it may be a nice version of the tale, it is definitely romanticized and even exaggerated from the written tale, where the concentration is on waiting for Prince Charming. We see that Disney is championing the idea of man and woman being together and at a young age. In the film we know that Aurora is to prick her finger when she turns 16, and this meeting in the forest happens on her birthday; therefore, we know that Aurora is no more than 16 years old when she meets and falls in love with Philip. To fall in love so young is a lovely idea, but not always realistic. Rather than help children understand how to deal with feelings for the opposite sex, Disney actually gives children something new to desire, a relationship. It teaches children two things: one, that they will only find fulfillment when they find a mate; two, that if they wait too long to find a mate, they will end up alone. The second point is illustrated through the four other women in the film. The three fairies and Maleficent are all single older women who focus their attention on

Aurora, because she is beautiful. These images of women tell children that beauty receives all the attention.

Continuing to look at the exaggerated relationship of Aurora and Philip, Disney actually allows the relationship to become physical rather quickly. While in the forest the two hold hands, and Philip even puts his arms around Aurora. They have only just met, and already they are displaying their feelings physically. At the end of the tale Philip kisses Aurora on the lips calling to attention his lust for Aurora. We can only imagine that Philip wanted to kiss Aurora from the moment they meet in the woods, which means there had to be some kind of lustful desires in his heart. In some respects, Disney's version teaches children to desire physical pleasure over emotional connection. While that may be an important part of a relationship it should not be the only part of the relationship. Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* does not allow children to imagine their ideal of a perfect relationship, but instead makes them believe a perfect relationship is only as it appears on screen. Film robs children's imaginations of choices and trades them for an adult's vision of life and love.

Thus far we have seen how Disney puts romanticized ideals of love in children's heads, and how these ideals do not allow children to be as imaginative or make their own decisions about love. Now let us turn our attention to the evil character in *Sleeping Beauty*, the one who threatens the couple's happiness. Surprisingly, even the evil fairy in Disney's eyes is not an ugly character, but rather, an intoxicatingly seductive woman dressed in black. Her high cheekbones and long pointy fingers are a far cry from the hag we see in the written version. Once again, this is another character that the audience may not imagine alone, and her motivation is definitely unclear in the film. Maleficent

appears at Aurora's christening, angry that she was not invited to the event. As punishment she bestows a curse that Aurora will prick her finger on a spindle and die. It seems like a particularly harsh punishment for the neglect of an invite, and we probably recognize that Maleficent's anger springs from deeper wells; we just do not know which ones.

For a moment I want to hypothesize about Maleficent's motivation to kill Aurora, which we can understand even better from the knowledge we already have after analyzing Perrault's version. I want to pay particular attention to the fact that Disney creates Maleficent as an attractive middle-aged woman and how this characterization exaggerates wicked qualities. Obviously Maleficent is envious of the attention being paid to the princess, and she is angry at the neglect of an invitation to the christening. Still, her own beauty leads us to believe she cannot be envious of a baby's beauty. This is where we are wrong. Sale helps us understand Uglyane's position in Perrault's *Sleeping Beauty* and now he will help us understand Maleficent's position in Disney's tale. Sale explains:

The fear here is not a the wish for beauty, but of the power of that wish when separated and isolated from love, from handsome princes; the wish is that beauty will not be thus isolated...It offers one of the best and starkest views of the world in which fairy tales were made that we can find...in fairy tales the primary task for women is bearing children, and childbearing was often fatal; whatever other power women had lay in youth and beauty. After a brief

blossoming people grew old rather quickly, and most of the palliatives against a grim and crimped existence were controlled by men. (Sale 42)

Sale's theory of beauty and power describes a continuum where youth is the highest form of beauty and power, and old age is the lowest. According to Sale, the evil characters and the good characters in fairy tales are really the same person split into two. There is a cycle in which the evil character at one time held all the beauty and power her youth could afford her, and as time passes she loses beauty and thereby power. The unfortunate thing is that without reading *Sleeping Beauty*, we would never see the continuum in full form. Close examination of Sale's theory helps us understand Maleficent's anger and envy of the power Aurora will possess because of her youth and beauty, but the film does little to lead us to this conclusion. Uglyane's name tells us that we must pay attention to her appearance, but the film asks us to see Maleficent's vices and wickedness without understanding what drives her.

If we were armed with the knowledge of the power that beauty holds for women, especially in fairy tales, then we might have a better understanding of Maleficent's struggle throughout the rest of the film. Unfortunately, without the text backing the idea up, we miss this important piece of information, and Maleficent's struggle against Aurora becomes trivial. Trivial, yet fought to the death, proving how much Disney exaggerates her wicked qualities. In the written version Uglyane surrenders, but in Disney's version Maleficent's presence lurks throughout the entire film. Because Maleficent is attractive she has more power to lose so she must fight harder to keep her power, which presents a greater threat to Aurora. Perhaps the greatest exaggeration of Maleficent's wickedness is

seen in her transformation into a dragon. All of the evil is manifested into a black fire-breathing beast, who is then slain by Philip, a departure from Uglyane's character who disappears from the rest of Perrault's tale. Suddenly, the fight between a good woman and evil woman turns into a fight between an evil woman and good man. With this shift we realize that Maleficent is not trying to save her power but her life, because if Philip succeeds in saving Aurora, then Maleficent will become as insignificant as Uglyane's character. It is an all or nothing battle, either life with power or death.

It becomes increasingly noticeable that Disney's Aurora is really one-dimensional. The major difference between Perrault's Aurora and Disney's Aurora is the existence of sin. Perrault's Aurora falls prey to her own sinful curiosity and envy of the old women's skill at the spinning wheel. Disney's Aurora is not allowed to sin, because she is led to the spinning wheel in a trance. If children are supposed to use fairy tales to help them work through their inner conflicts, what good can it do to have the leading character powerlessly transfixed? It is almost as if Aurora's potential to sin is removed so that her virtuous qualities are not harmed. Children are not given the opportunity to identify with Disney's Aurora because she seems one dimensional, showing only virtuous qualities. In essence, she seems too good to be true. She is also a prize to be won in Disney's eyes. According to Lane, "One of the most frequent criticisms from modern storytellers concerns the treatment of women. The political reality of the Middle Ages is that women of high birth were valuable commodities" (Lane 28). Man slays woman and claims the Princess for his own. From this ending children believe that man is not only a hero and savior, but also dominant over women.

Thus far, we have looked at the instances of lust and envy that the Disney film offers, but the sins do not stop there; Disney adds in pride and gluttony throughout the film. The three fairies who hide Aurora all depict pride as they fight over what color her dress will be, who will make her birthday cake, and who will be stuck with cleaning the cottage. One fairy's selfish desire to prove herself better than the other two fairies leads her to use her magic, which all three fairies vowed against. These fairies are not meant to be evil and in fact they add comical moments with the best of intentions. When all of their bickering comes to a halt at the arrival of Aurora, her dress is a conglomeration of two different colors, and the cake is a drippy mess; children see through this scene how pride can affect the outcome of even the smallest tasks. This scene is actually quite good for children to watch, because it does deal with issues of pride. The problem is that the fairies do not learn from their mistakes. Pride is the hardest sin to overcome. According to John Cassian, writer of *The Institutes*, pride "is a savage beast, fiercer than all those previously mentioned, greatly trying the perfect and ravaging with its cruel bite those who are nearly established in the perfection of virtue" (Cassian 255). Cassian writes from the 5<sup>th</sup> century; however, his comments on the sins are still relevant today. Pride really is the sin to end all other sins; we see it in the evil characters of every fairy tale, and now we see it in characters that are also good. The problem with pride is that once one has conquered all of the other sins they will undoubtedly feel pride at the accomplishment, and that can consume the individual. We want to see the characters struggle with the issue of pride, especially if children are to learn how to deal with pride themselves. The sad thing is the film uses this pride comically with no attempt to render the situation in the end. The fairies still struggle with pride even at the end of the film, as



the fairies continue to change Aurora's dress color while she dances. The idea is funny at first, but where do we draw the line for children? How much pride can be shown before it stops being an exception and becomes the rule? Since the film treats pride in a humorous manner, it leaves the impression that pride interfering with goals is not necessarily a bad thing. While this may be true in some cases, the film illustrates how pride can be taken too far.

Another area that the film takes liberties with is the role of the parents. Perrault's tale mentions the King and Queen in the beginning and at the end, but in between the focus is on Aurora piercing her hand and the Prince awakening her. In Disney's *Sleeping Beauty*, the father of Aurora and father of Philip play a more integral role in the plot as they plan the marriage of their children. The story jumps from the two kings to the two lovers and back again. Putting more emphasis on the parents is understandable from a cultural perspective. Literary fairy tales originally targeted adults, but film fairy tales target children; thus, the role of the parent must appear as a stronger force in the tale. Children must learn to obey their parents and elders. From Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* we can see how good children act towards their parents. This aspect of the film is not solely a bad one. It shows the importance of family connection in American culture, a connection that did not exist in Perrault's day. However, the film also shows the Kings indulging in food and drink, making them gluttons. At one point the two Kings attempt a conversation, which involves hiccups and gibberish. Again, there is comedic relief in this scene, but it also champions the idea of drinking to the point of goofiness. The film makes overdrinking look fun, and there is no message for children to act responsibly while drinking.

Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* seems to be a big trade off. While it does allow children to work through some inner sins, it shows them in characters that should not be the focus. Certain sins that children would easily relate to, like envy and curiosity, are traded for more adult sins of lust and gluttony. More importantly, we see that the female character is pushed to the side with the introduction of the Prince, and he becomes the true hero of the tale. Aurora takes a submissive position with Philip, pricks her finger while in a trance, and then spends the rest of the movie in a deep sleep while Philip lives the adventure. There may be plenty of sins represented in the film, but we do not have a choice in how they are portrayed or how the characters deal with them, and we lose our strong female character. In the end of the film we learn that some evils, like Maleficent, must be dealt with head on, but we also learn that a man must deal with them while the woman sleeps.

### **Sinful Snow White**

We see in *The Sleeping Beauty* a few of the sins that characters either overcome or fall prey to, and how recognition of those sins helps children deal with their own inner conflicts. The *Snow White* tale by Wilhelm Grimm and Jacob Grimm is an even better illustration of sin for children. In fact, while Perrault's *Sleeping Beauty* focused on waiting within the tale, *Snow White* focuses on sins that corrupt, debilitate and even ruin the characters. When Disney creates the film version of this tale, these sins are elaborated upon, perhaps to the point of disbelief. In order to meaningfully evaluate the Disney film, we must first understand the imagination, morality and sin found in the *Snow White* text.

Analysis of the *Snow White* text should begin with the names, just as it did in Perrault's tale, because the names distinguish the good from the evil, the important from the unimportant. The name Snow White easily identifies this little girl as the virtuous character in the tale. We often associate the color white with purity, and since this is the heroine's name, we conclude Snow White is also pure. Realistically, Snow White's name owes less to her nature and more to her mother's wish:

And as she was sewing and looking out the window, she pricked her finger with the needle, and three drops of blood fell on the snow. The red looked so beautiful on the white snow, as red as blood, as black as the wood of the window frame! (Grimm 181)

It is because of her mother's wish that Snow White is born as beautiful and pure as snow, and because she must captivate the audience with her virtue, all other characters neglect to receive names. The evil stepmother is known as Stepmother or Queen and the prince is known as Prince. Not even the dwarfs are given names in the text. As we move from names to sins, we see that every character in *Snow White* suffers from sinful affliction. In many respects, showing each character facing a particular sin, and sometimes many sins, allows children to see that sin affects everyone. Sin cannot be escaped, and if ignored it will consume an entire being.

The first and perhaps most obvious illustration of sin in *Snow White* is seen in the Queen. Snow White must face the Queen's challenge of death leading the audience to believe Snow White is the heroine of the tale. James McGlathery explains: "Older women are of course never the heroines in romantic folktales" (McGlathery 113). Of

course, we recognize this already from analyzing Perrault's tale, where Aurora is the heroine and Uglyane is the villain. In *Snow White* the Queen portrays the villain consumed by something: "Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who in this land is fairest of all?" (Grimm 181). Pride and vanity drive the Queen to look into the mirror and assume that she will be the fairest of all, and when she is mistaken, it is her pride that turns her heart yellow and green with envy, blinding her with hate:

The Queen took fright and turned yellow and green with envy. From that hour on whenever she looked at Snow White her heart turned over inside her body, so great was her hatred for the girl. The envy and pride grew even greater, like a weed in her heart, until she had no peace day and night. (Grimm 182)

As we see in Perrault's *Sleeping Beauty*, what is really at stake in *Snow White* is the Queen's image, not in the mirror but in society. She boils her entire existence down to appearance, and when she loses that, she believes she loses everything.

Unfortunately, the Queen chases after an image to which she is no longer entitled: "What is stressed is the anger and fear that attend the Queen's realization that as she and Snow White both get older, she must lose" (Sale 41). At this point the Queen is not only full of pride but also envious. According to Webster's dictionary, envy occurs when one longs after something someone else has achieved. In this case, Snow White achieves the status of being the most fair, and the Queen envies her for it. The Queen's destiny is to grow old and ugly and to watch Snow White's beauty develop. This is how fairy tales work: beauty resides in young women; older women envy the young and

pursue whatever means necessary to make the young women disappear. Interestingly, the Queen could use her sexuality to gain more power by attracting a handsome prince, but instead the Queen chooses to get rid of her competition. This is envious behavior, because if the Queen merely desired to obtain Snow White's beauty but accepted it nonetheless, then she would simply be jealous. On the contrary, the Queen feels the mirror wrongfully overlooks her, and that feeling of being wronged makes her envious of Snow White.

Consequently, wrath becomes the next noticeable sin in the Queen, because she does not want Snow White to only go away, she wants her to die. Cassian writes:

In the fourth struggle it is the deadly poison of anger that must be totally uprooted from the depths of our soul. For as long as it resides in our hearts and blinds our mind's eye with its harmful darkness, we shall be able neither to acquire the judgment of a proper discretion nor to possess a good contemplative vision or a mature counsel. (Cassian 193)

The Queen finds her judgment and mature counsel compromised the moment she decides to have Snow White murdered in the woods: "She summoned a huntsman and said to him, 'Take Snow White out into the woods. I never want to see her again. Kill her, and as proof that she is dead bring her lungs and her liver back to me'" (Grimm 182). The Queen's wrath seems hard to understand, especially since Snow White is considered pure and innocent; however, Snow White is not really who the Queen is after.

We must recognize that the Queen desires an image, one that Snow White happens to possess. If the mirror had named another girl as the most fair, then the Queen would be chasing that girl instead: “In a sense, the most important quality of the Queen’s passion is that it is impersonal, aimed at anyone the mirror might name as her rival” (Sale 40). While the Queen is indeed envious of Snow White’s image, limiting the Queen’s desire to the constraints of appearance misrepresents the Queen’s ultimate goal. Beauty brings power, and it is power that the Queen truly desires; every year the Queen ages, and her beauty fades her power diminishes. The Queen’s struggle against Snow White is more accurately a struggle against time and the aging process. Just as Maleficent and Uglyane show two phases of the aging cycle in which power fades as beauty fades, so too can we see this cycle represented in the Queen.

The Queen’s wrath also leads to gluttony and greed. The connection to these two sins is perhaps not as obvious as the transition to the other sins. The Queen initially wants the huntsman to bring Snow White’s lungs and liver back to her. When she receives what she believes to be Snow White’s organs, she has them salted and prepared and then she eats them. The Queen is gluttonous for Snow White’s organs, because in eating them she hopes to consume the thing that makes Snow White fairer than she: “The Queen’s desire to eat Snow White’s lungs and liver implies only her desire to include Snow White’s beauty and power within herself” (Sale 41). Once the Queen learns of Snow White’s survival, her wrath becomes greedy as she pursues three more attempts to murder Snow White. Each failure makes her more angry and more willing to take her wrath to the next extreme: the Queen tries to suffocate her, stick her with a poison comb

and finally gives her a poisoned apple. The Queen is greedy, because there is no limit to how far she is willing to go to murder Snow White.

The final sin the Queen represents is lust, though it is not represented in the way one might expect. In fairy tales older women affect the plot in one of two ways: one, they either lose their beauty and become a fairy godmother, thereby helping the maiden; two, they lose their beauty and become wicked witches, thereby hindering the maiden (McGlathery 113). The Queen is the latter of the two, and though she is not lustful, the Queen shares a commonality with lust. Lust traditionally associates with sexual feelings and desires, but the Queen interestingly does not have these feelings: “There is, for instance, no suggestion that the Queen’s absorption in her beauty ever gives her pleasure, or that the desire for power through sexual attractiveness is itself a sexual feeling” (Sale 41). If the Queen’s desire is not sexual, then it cannot be lustful; however the argument is not that the Queen is lustful but that she operates in the same manner as lust: “As we have seen, they [older women] most often represent the obstacle or opposition that young love must overcome if it is to be fulfilled” (McGlathery 113). While lust undoubtedly deals with sexual desire, it is more useful in this example to think of lust, like the Queen, as the obstacle impeding the recognition of love. To further this idea, theologian Alexander Pruss writes that lust “does not love the other person for what she is, but for what one can get the other to do for one...Lust is connected with taking” (Pruss 73). The Queen also is connected with taking, not only of Snow White’s life, but of her beauty and the power that accompanies it. In doing so, she attempts to live a life she is no longer able to have: “The older woman was left to participate vicariously, whether as matchmaker or envious villainess” (McGlathery 129). The Queen faces an impasse, for

she is past her prime years of beauty, but she envies Snow White's youth. When the Queen eats what she believes to be Snow White's organs, the Queen proves she is defeated, and the only way she can have what she desires is to take it from Snow White and consume it herself. In this light, the Queen and lust are equal companions.

Such an evil Queen makes it hard to believe other characters could be as sinful. The seven dwarfs, however, rise to the challenge offering a greedy, lustful view of life: "Now this little house belonged to a family of dwarfs, who toiled all day in the gold mines, deep within the mountains" (Grimm 182). Little men toiling away in the gold mines may not seem greedy, but the description of their home reveals a different perspective:

Inside the house everything was small, but so neat and clean that no one could say otherwise. There was a little table with a white tablecloth and seven little plates, and each plate had a spoon, and there were seven little knives and forks and seven mugs as well. Against the wall there were seven little beds, all standing in a row and covered with snow-white sheets. (Grimm 182)

The dwarfs' house in a meager dwelling not expected of gold miners, which leaves one questioning where all of the wealth went. The answer is that these dwarfs are greedy, spending only what is necessary and hoarding the rest.

More astonishing than the dwarfs' greed is how they subject Snow White to a subordinate role. The Grimms' refer to the dwarfs as "masters of the house" (Grimm182), which means the tale needs a servant: "The dwarfs said, 'If you will keep



house for us, and cook, make beds, wash, sew, and knit, and keep everything clean and orderly, then you can stay with us, and you shall have everything you want” (Grimm 183). Women prior to the Twentieth Century found their place in the home under patriarchal rule. Therefore, this servant image of Snow White would not bother audiences of that period. However, today we find this image outdated and even degrading to women. Continuously showing this image to children circulates the idea that women need to serve and obey men, thus, limiting the capabilities of girls to be equal to men. The contrast between the dwarfs’ image of Snow White and the Queen’s image of Snow White is amazing; the Queen sees her as beautiful and wants her dead, while the dwarfs see her as beautiful and want her as a maid. Neither situation seems ideal for Snow White, and both make her the object of someone else’s desire.

While there is never any sexual desire mentioned with the dwarfs, they help create a desire in men’s hearts. Male audiences see Snow White dutifully accept the dwarfs’ supposed generosity, and suddenly Snow White is the epitome of womanhood. Consequently, Snow White becomes an image after which men lust. In *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*, Jack Zipes writes, “Snow White is given instructions which are more commensurate with the duties of a bourgeois girl, and the tasks which she performs are implicitly part of her moral obligation. Morals are used to justify a division of labor and the separation of the sexes” (Zipes *Subversion* 53). Fairy tales, like *Snow White*, lead audiences to unrealistic desires. Every girl grows up thinking she will find a prince charming, and every boy grows up thinking he will find a submissive housewife. In fact, tales about princesses portray the heroine in some type of household setting cleaning day and night, and in the end marrying the prince. These desires are lustful for two reasons:

one, they involve receiving pleasure from someone else—the men enjoy having the housework done by women; and two, they do not exist in reality: “Lust is innately tied to unreality because it fails to see the other person truly as the person she is...but to see this person as she is not” (Pruss 10). Audiences want these images to exist, which is why fairy tales are so popular, no matter how untrue.

The dwarfs’ greed and objectification of Snow White multiplies at the end of the tale when they make Snow White an object for the prince to buy: “But the dwarfs answered, ‘We will not sell it for all the gold in the world.’” The gesture sounds sweet, yet preposterous. The dwarfs cannot accept anything for Snow White’s body, because they do not own her. She cleans for them, but that gives them no right to her. They are greedy and realize that letting Snow White go means they no longer have a right to her.

Wrought with sinful characters, it is clear *Snow White* is not pure. The case of Snow White’s character, however, seems in favor of purity. Now the tables turn as Snow White’s impurity surfaces, and she is recognized for her true nature, a dichotomy of virtue and sin.

We know Snow White’s mother wishes for a beautiful daughter, which points out how Snow White is born into vanity. Her mother is not wishing for an average child but one of beauty and delicacy like snow. Thus, Snow White’s character, like the Queen’s, is based solely in appearance; the only difference is that the Queen recognizes the power in beauty while Snow White does not. In fact, Snow White is the only character in the tale who does not see her own beauty, even though it is both her source of torment and salvation. For example, the Queen envies Snow White’s beauty so much she is willing to murder Snow White, but her beautiful image saves her in the woods: “Because she was

so beautiful the huntsman took pity on her” (Grimm 182). Unaware of her beauty, Snow White’s purity and virtue idolize her in children’s eyes; however, just as we needed to see fault in Aurora, we must also see fault with Snow White.

As Snow White matures from a girl to a young woman her desires change. On the Queen’s first visit to the dwarfs’ home, she brings a lace bodice, enticing Snow White with its beauty. A truly pure and virtuous woman would not be seduced by such a material object, but something in Snow White wants the bodice, just as she wants the comb and the poisoned apple: “It is clear that what Snow White wants is to be laced, to have her hair combed, and finally to eat the poisoned apple. Her attention is directed toward what will make her beautiful, what will make her sexual even” (Sale 42). Shockingly, Snow White might actually desire to be beautiful and sexual, something hidden from the initial reading of the tale. The bodice, comb, and luscious apple give Snow White a chance to indulge in her own vanity and gluttony, which for the entire tale have been ignored except for the other characters’ desires and intentions.

To further explore Snow White’s sinful side, she can be compared to Eve in the Bible whose fall into sin parallels Snow White’s. In the beginning, both women are pure and faultless, until tempted by the antagonist: “Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made” (Genesis 3:1). The Queen, like the serpent, is crafty and ready to trick Snow White in order to steal her power. The Queen and the serpent also suffer from pride as Michael Ramses points out, “The first Deadly Sin is Pride. Most likely this sin is listed first since this is the sin that resulted in Lucifer's fall from grace” (Ramses 3). Thinking about the Queen and the serpent in the same light makes Snow White and Eve even more alike. The serpent and the Queen

essentially trick the women into eating a piece of fruit, and both women are supposed to have eaten an apple; however apples do not originate in the area where the Garden of Eden is said to be located, yet people assume Eve ate an apple. Yet the fruit, perhaps, is the most crucial aspect of each woman's downfall: Eve bites into the forbidden fruit and sin enters the world; Snow White bites into the poisoned apple and dies. Consequently, each woman's saving grace comes from men; Jesus saves Eve while the Prince saves Snow White. Both Snow White and Eve suffer death for giving into their desires and eating the fruit.

Even in death, Snow White illustrates a blending of virtue and sin. After Snow White's presumed death, the dwarfs place her in a glass coffin:

They said, "We cannot bury her in the black earth," and they had a transparent glass coffin made, so she could be seen from all sides. They laid her inside, and with golden letters wrote on it her name, and that she was a princess.

Then they put the coffin outside on a mountain, and one of them always stayed with it and watched over her.

(Grimm 6)

The dwarfs feel the black earth will somehow taint their princess, and because they do not want to hide her beauty, they idolize her in glass. In this instance, Snow White is both a depiction of purity and an object of lust. Notice that this portrayal of a woman is far more sinful than we received in *Sleeping Beauty*, and as analysis turns to the ending of the tale we also see how Snow White gives children a different perspective of punishment for evil characters.

The wedding of Snow White and the Prince is a huge celebration in the kingdom.

At the celebration the Queen finds her eternal punishment:

She had to go and see the young Queen. When she arrived she recognized Snow White, and terrorized, she could only stand there without moving. Then they put a pair of iron shoes into burning coals. They were brought forth with tongs and placed before her. She was forced to step into the red-hot shoes and dance until she fell down dead.

(Grimm 7)

What seems most intriguing about this scene is that the Queen is actually punished, killed in fact, rather than merely disappearing like Uglyane. If Perrault's *Sleeping Beauty* shows children that sometimes evil does not find an end, then Snow White shows that sometimes it does. From a Christian perspective, punishment of wrongdoers lies with the Lord. In Snow White's position, her lord is the Prince; therefore, punishment lies in his hands. Uglyane's presence is definitely less threatening than the presence of the Queen, which leads us to believe the Queen needs punishment. This conclusion teaches children that some evils may be punished, and through punishment the evil dies.

The Grimm's version of *Snow White* helps children work through sin by providing plenty of examples of sin in different characters. As I state earlier, sin does not dodge people in real life, but neither does it turn people entirely cruel. The wonderful thing about Snow White is even in her sin, she can still be a beloved character. The blend of her virtue and sin make her more real to us and more worthy of our attention.

## Disney's Snow White

Disney's version of *Snow White* exaggerates the sins of the characters to an extreme, leaving less to the imagination. I begin with the Queen, because she is the first character we see in the movie. From the beginning we must understand that Disney's *Snow White* is darker and more intense than the text ever made us feel. What we see in the film is the beautiful Queen who does not merely look into her mirror and ask a question. It is more ominous than that. The Queen looks into the mirror and calls upon the dark forces of magic to attend to her. It is to the dark forces she asks, "Mirror, mirror on the wall" (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* 1937), and it is the dark forces that answer her. Even I admit, as I sit watching the film, I feel a little uneasy with the demonic spirit facing the Queen in the mirror. I can only imagine what children must think when they see this scene. While the film is not directly advocating the use of magic and conjuring spirits, showing the Queen in this activity can be misconstrued by children.

The movie diverges from the text, similar to *Sleeping Beauty*, in that the Prince and Snow White meet each other in the first few scenes of the film. Appropriately enough, they meet at a wishing well, which becomes the underlying theme in the film. Unlike the text, the film capitalizes on this early meeting and encapsulates it in Snow White's wish that she will marry the Prince one day. We see a shot of the Queen peering down at the wooing couple, and we immediately feel the Queen's envy of Snow White. In the text we believe in the Queen's desire to rid Snow White of her beauty. The film blatantly makes this obvious as the Queen disgustedly shuts the curtains on the lovers. Again we see Sale's theory of beauty as power pop up even in the film version of the tale: "The queen is not only jealous that Snow White is more beautiful than she is, but she also

sees the prince singing to Snow White and is envious because her stepdaughter has such a handsome suitor” (Zipes *Spell* 36). The fact that Prince appears at the beginning means that Disney’s *Snow White*, just like Disney’s *Sleeping Beauty*, will be more focused on a lustful love and the saving Prince than on the Snow White. Snow White’s character exudes submissive and docile behavior even more so than she did in the Grimm’s tale.

The Prince changes the entire flow of the tale, because seeing Snow White with the Prince makes Snow White seem weak and in need of protection. She seems so virtuous, sweet and pure in love that finding sin in her seems impossible, and frankly it is impossible. When Snow White reaches the cottage of the seven dwarfs she immediately sets about cleaning the house while singing, “whistle while you work” (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* 1937). If the Grimm’s tale pushes the idea of a submissive housewife, then Disney turns that idea into reality with song, dance and a happy attitude. She has not even met these dwarfs, yet as a submissive woman she is willing to clean their home with a cheerful attitude. For children watching this scene the message is clear: women are to happily serve men in every situation. Children, especially girls, find no sinful quality to identify with in Disney’s Snow White character. She truly is pure as snow, and it’s sickening.

To compensate for Snow White’s perfect character Disney uses a plethora of detail to show other characters as sinful. For instance, the dwarfs, whom we recognize as greedy and lustful in the text, are even more so in the film; of course that depends on who is analyzing the film. Zipes argues, “They are the mysterious characters who inhabit a cottage, and it is through their hard work and solidarity that they are able to maintain a world of justice and restore harmony to the world. The dwarfs can be interpreted as the

humble American workers, who pull together during a depression” (Zipes *Spell* 37). I disagree with Zipes’ reading of the dwarfs, especially in the Disney film. In the film dwarfs sing a “working” song as they mine for their precious stones in the mountains. The song actually says, “It ain’t no trick to get rich quick” (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, 1937). They cart all of their found treasure to a vault and lock it as they leave. I do not see the humble American worker; I see greedy hoarding men.

To make the image worse, one of the dwarfs, Grumpy, spouts off demeaning comments about women throughout the film: “Females are full of wicked wiles.” (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, 1937). It does not really matter that these comments are made irrelevant by Snow White’s actions, because children hearing these comments will believe them. More importantly, these comments are true of the Queen, and greatly overshadow Snow White’s purity. Sadly, these dwarfs are also characters with whom children identify. Snow White accepts the position of cooking and cleaning, taking on the role of the dwarfs’ mother, thereby making the dwarfs children. She even checks their hands to make sure they have washed before dinner. There is a strange dual role at work in this film, where the dwarfs treat Snow White as both sexual object and mother. It seems almost Freudian in nature, and definitely too complicated for children to understand what they watch.

At one point the dwarfs ask Snow White to tell them a story, and she reveals a story about her Prince Charming. It is at this moment we need to analyze the relationship Disney is asking us to buy into through the film. We have already seen how the Queen and the dwarfs sin to the extreme, and while we might expect that Snow White’s own sin would finally peer through her virtuous shell, it does not. In the text Snow White’s sin



manifests through her vanity and greed for material objects; however, Disney attempts to purify Snow White's desire for material things by making it about finding her prince. The audience assumes she wants to fall in love: "Snow White is an overt commercial for marriage, carrying with it the message that all that matters in a woman is her appearance" (McGlathery 151). Finding a prince is never mentioned in the Grimms' tale. The prince, of course, appears, but Snow White's stated intention is not to discover or fall in love with him. In fact, the Grimms' prince is not mentioned until after Snow White dies: "In the first edition (1812), the Grimms' made a young prince, not the father, the rescuer of the princess" (McGlathery 132). The prince is so captivated by Snow White's beauty, that he "had it [the coffin] placed in his parlor, where he sits by it the whole day. If he must go out, the servants have to carry the coffin along" (McGlathery 132). Perhaps Disney believes this kind of obsession for a Princess who the Prince has never met is too extreme. Instead, Disney provides a version of *Snow White*, where after meeting the Prince, she makes a wish to be with him forever; thus, when the Prince sees Snow White in the coffin, the audience feels prepared to recognize their mutual love for one another.

This romantic relationship seems too perfect, and has powerful repercussions for children. In Disney's *Sleeping Beauty*, we see the dream of a "love-at-first-sight" relationship, which children grow up desiring. In Disney's *Snow White*, we see this dream as well. Again, the lack of sin in Snow White makes her an impossible character to epitomize, thereby making her love for the Prince and his love for her unattainable. Fairy tales need to provide an opening for children to enter the story, but Disney blocks the opening. If we buy into this unbelievable love, we ultimately find our own love lives unsatisfying.

The last issue to deal with in the film has to do with the ending of the tale. The Grimms' tale killed the Queen by Prince's decision. Her death is positioned as the last scene of the tale. In the film the Queen plummets to her death off a cliff when a bolt of lightning strikes the rock on which she stands. She dies before the Prince finds Snow White in the coffin. This ending tells children that sometimes evil is dealt with by the forces of nature, not by people. A final twist in the movie is the revival of Snow White. The Grimms' have the dwarfs stumble while carrying Snow White's coffin, which causes the apple lodged in her throat to shake loose and she can breath again. Disney relies on physical means, once again, and has the Prince kiss Snow White to awaken her. This kiss not only symbolizes the lust and physical connection we recognize in *Sleeping Beauty*, but it is the fulfillment of Snow White's wish for her Prince to find her again.

### **Conclusions**

I have gone in depth into two fairy tales, examining both the literature and film versions. We see in the written versions of fairy tales strong characters dealing with virtue and vice. Female characters, especially, have more depth, vibrancy and struggle to deal with conflict. These meatier characters provide children excellent opportunities to make decisions, use their imaginations, and deal with their own conflicts. The reliance on emotional relationships over physical ones helps children understand realistic parameters of love that does not revolve around instant gratification. They see how long each character must wait for true love, and how their hearts are guarded until true love comes along. The written versions also do not try to condone any of the sins. The sins are presented alongside virtue, but there are no moral decisions made for children, which leaves them free to explore options and feelings at their own discretion.

On the other hand, Disney films simplify the characters, especially the women, to the point of being too perfect. Identification with characters becomes almost impossible when they are presented as only virtuous; in fact, the characters seem unattainable. Disney also strips the heroine title from the female characters, giving it to the male characters instead. By trading the heroine for a hero the female characters become prizes for the heroes to claim in the end of the tales. This image makes children believe that women are not supposed to fight their own battles, but rather be submissive. The submissive image is highlighted even more in the relationships between Prince and Princess, because they concentrate on finding a mate, not on female character development. By the end of the Disney tales it is clear that Aurora and Snow White are only in the tale to provide motivation for the Princes, and for us to feel sorry for them. The relationships between Prince and Princess teach romanticized ideals of love that may not happen for everyone, but because we see it on screen, we believe the love must be true. While the written tales let our imaginations grow and we are able to make our own choices about events within the tales, Disney takes all our imagination away, causing us to pay attention only to the images on screen. Even the sins are sometimes condoned in Disney's tales, using humor as a way to trick us into believing that sins can be made insignificant.

This analysis is in no way meant to discourage viewing the Disney films. Disney certainly has its place in society and the entertainment industry; however, if we want our children to grow up with a greater understanding of themselves and how to deal with moral issues, then we must offer them the best tools for the job. Reading fairy tales to and with children gives us as Adults a better understanding of the conflict children face,

and how they are being taught to deal with this conflict. It is a bonding moment between child and parent that will benefit both parties' interests more than limiting fairy tales to only film versions. Let us return to the written fairy tales as the superior versions of the tales, appreciate them for their richness and illustration of conflict, and let our imaginations run wild.

Works Cited

- Bettelheim, Bruno. *The Uses of Enchantment*. New York: Vintage Books, 1975.
- Cashdan, Sheldon. *The Witch Must Die*. New York: Basic Books, 1999.
- Cassian, John. *The Institutes*. Trans. Boniface Ramsey. New York: The Newman Press, 2000.
- Concordia Self-Study Bible: New International Version*. Ed. Robert G. Hoerber. Zondervan Publishing House, 1984.
- Doniger, Wendy. *The Implied Spider*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.
- Giroux, Henry A. *The Mouse that Roared*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999.
- Grimm, Jacob and Wilhelm. "Snow White." *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*. Trans. Jack Zipes. New York: Bantam Books, 1987. 181-186.
- Heinz Mallet, Carl. *Fairy Tales and Children*. Trans. Joachim Neugroschel. New York: Schocken Books, 1984.
- Lane, Marcia. *Picturing the Rose*. New York: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1993.
- Luthi, Max. *Once Upon a Time*. Trans. Lee Chadeayne and Paul Gottwald. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1970.
- Luthi, Max. *The Fairy Tale as Art Form and Portrait of Man*. Trans. Jon Erickson. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984.
- McGlathery, James M. *Fairy Tale Romance*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991.
- Perrault, Charles. "The Sleeping Beauty." *The Sleeping Beauty and Other Fairy Tales*. Trans. Sir Aurthur Quiller-Couch. London: Odder & Stoughton. Preface and 1-26.

- Pruss, Alexander R. "Not out of Lust but in Accordance with Truth." *Logos* 6.4 (2003) 51-80. Expanded Academic ASAP. InfoTract. University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA. 6 Oct. 2005.
- Ramses, Michael. "The Seven Deadly Sins." *Achrimony*. 3 (2003).  
<[http://www.acrimony.org/article\\_The\\_Seven\\_Deadly\\_Sins.php](http://www.acrimony.org/article_The_Seven_Deadly_Sins.php)> 1 Dec. 2005
- Sale, Roger. *Fairy Tales and After*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1978.
- Sleeping Beauty*. Dir. Clyde Geronimi. Perf. Mary Costa, Bill Shirley, Eleanor Audley, and Verna Felton. The Walt Disney Company, 1959.
- Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Perf. Harry Stockwell, Adriana Caselotti, and Lucille La Verne. The Walt Disney Company, 1937.
- Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*. New York: Barnes and Noble Publishing Inc., 2003.
- Zipes, Jack. "Breaking the Disney Spell." *From Mouse to Mermaid*. Ed. Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas, and Laura Sells. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995. 21-42.
- Zipes, Jack. *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*. New York: Wildman Press, 1983.
- Zipes, Jack: *Fairy Tales as Myth, Myth as Fairy Tales*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994.
- Zipes, Jack. *When Dreams Came True*. New York: Routledge, 1999.