

## Rhymes with 'Bitch': The Real Heroine of Fairy Tales

Donna Lee Fields  
(Universitat Internacional Valenciana)

Profiling. Usually associated with criminal or racial profiling. Police detaining suspects on the basis of skin color, race, dress, or apparently suspicious actions. Stored in their minds from repetitive briefings, they have specific images and a list of characteristics that direct them towards singling out probable provocateurs, people they are paid and sworn to get off the street.

But what seems, at first, like a reasonable missive can quickly become macabre. Our minds flit to the only some of the repercussions this profiling has caused, such as the thousands of citizens of Japanese descent singled out and imprisoned for years in concentration camps in the United States during World War II, the treatment of the French police toward Algerian immigrants in the 1960s; the photos of Steve Biko and Rodney King after being brutalized by police; the daily battle between the British and the Irish, and of course, any man of Middle Eastern descent in this day and age, who needs to think twice about entering most public buildings. Profiling is, in fact, another way of saying "prejudice", though connotation is everything in this age of "military action" versus "war", and "permissible force" rather than "physical abuse".

We are all guilty of profiling and much more than we may want to admit. We judge people on the basis of their title, their clothes, their skin color, their professions. And though many of us will be fortunate enough never to be on the wrong side of its violent consequences, we are programmed and influenced by its long-reaching tentacles, though we be conscious of it or not.

How does this apply to fairy tales, seemingly as far away from the insidious world of racially motivated segregation and police brutality as one might expect? The answer is simple: they both reflect societal trends. The criteria used for social profiling and the prejudices we have about mythical figures are the same: they both originate from a community's need for a physical outlet of its admiration and fears, and the perpetuation of these sentiments to justify the actions taken in their regard. Is it melodramatic to examine folkloric characters with the same microscopic techniques we use in scrutinizing the preconceptions and violent repercussions suffered by minorities throughout history? Absolutely not, as folktales are in fact bench marks of prejudices and protests borne by a myriad of distinct populations throughout the centuries. They are the screams of the injustices endured by poor communities straining under the weight of the arrogant demands of their overlords. Hiding behind the guise of fiction, storytellers, over the centuries, have converted their abusers into, for instance, exaggeratedly comical or sinister monsters whose sole motive is to destroy whole villages, corrupt and selfish counselors who delight in the suffering of the people, narcissistic queens who seem indifferent to the plight of their subjects, beautiful yet thoughtless princesses whose disconnectedness is only surpassed by their subservience and helplessness, and stepmothers, ogres and witches who personify all of the fears, forebodings and terrors of the day. All these are balanced against the prince who will ever come valiantly to the rescue of these downtrodden people.

However, as is so often the consequence of familiarity with even the most horrific of topics, the irony behind these characters has become obscured by their very popularity. The repetition of the stories has not only obscured the original purpose of voicing

collective grievances through personification, but has also created comfortable expectations of the role of each character, which transcend both country and culture. And yet, just as we obliviously ignore the social profiling that we learn from our families and ingest through the media, without conscious reflection of the messages behind the fairy tales and myths, without taking active responsibility in recognizing the root of our assumptions, we not only permit ourselves to become more entrenched in the prejudices we have absorbed, but we teach our youth to do the same. Likewise, instead of using storytelling as a vehicle to enlighten our children, we perpetuate the misunderstandings that now celebrate what were personifications of oppressors; we accept, to our own detriment, the representation of seemingly bi-dimensional figures with no other purpose than to entertain.

The fascination we have for fairy tales is undeniable; their ubiquitous presence is testimony to our insatiable appetite for them (Zipes 1987). They are reinvented in movies, used as the basis of epic songs, are the central themes in one advertising campaign after another, and of course publishers never tire of producing new editions and collections of them. Just as the attraction of these tales is universal, the reasons for the study of folklore are vast and infinite. They are treasure troves of historical footnotes which delightfully supplement volumes of dry research, they present provocative cultural secrets, they contain a wealth of anthropological trivia, and from a psychological point of view, they are reflections of our own psyches, each character representing different facets of our own personalities (Bettelheim 2007). For, though it may seem that our attraction for these characters lies on a purely superficial level, their draw truly lies in what we subconsciously intuit from reading them. The reason they hold such allure for us, is that each folkloric character represents a facet of ourselves and those around us. We marvel at the king's honor, wisdom and loyalty to his people, and believe that in celebrating him, the same qualities will surface from within us. We love the fairy tale queen because in this age of large-company avarice and egomaniacal politicians, we wish that our leaders were as selfless and gracious as she. The appearance of the impossibly beautiful princess provokes in us a collective sigh, for, though we are conscious of her fragile existence, she helps us forget, at least for a time, the ugliness of the world around us; she helps us dream of a life of luxury and privilege equal to hers. We take joy in despising the witch, (or the stepmother, or the stepsisters, or the ogre), for we need a focal point, someone to blame, for our misfortunes, our miseries, the reason for our insecurities, for those little evils in our lives over which we seem to have no control.

As children, we can permit ourselves this abandonment of emotions because we know that the prince is just a heartbeat away, ready and able to rescue the damsel in distress, and in doing so, he symbolically saves us as well. But as we mature, we need to make a choice. Do we continue to read these tales with the mono-vision of our youth? Or do we instead, as with our family, friends, co-workers, world leaders, reconsider them with a more analytic and perhaps an even more compassionate eye? Can we set aside the prejudices we have been taught, and the profiles which are enforced by daily exposure to all outside influences, and look beneath the surface to see if there is a deeper truth within the folktales that fascinate us so consummately? At a lecture given in Beijing in 1932, Raymond D. Jameson, the well-known scholar of comparison Chinese and European folklore, poked fun at the inexplicable attraction which has led noted historians, sociologists, anthropologists and psychologists, to immerse themselves in the

world of fairy tales and self-deprecatingly mocked the hold that these stories have over us:

The study of folklore is a dangerous adventure. Many of the folklorists who are not mad are foolish. Nor is the resentment and suspicion with which folklorists are greeted by simple men entirely without foundation. (Swahn ii)

These tales, some dating back thousands of years, created by peasants to help alleviate the monotony of their daily toils through the frigid cold of winter, the sweltering heat of summer and the dark, impenetrable nights, were, in part, diminutive pieces of rebellion in the face of insupportable authority figures, and in part historic remnants of idiosyncratic cultural and ethnological traits of communities throughout the world (Zipes 2002). They set out guidelines that the members of different communities had to (and must) follow to be accepted in their societies, and they outline the consequences for those who do not, but they are also vibrant, malleable, living records of social changes and sentiments. These tales not only mark the changing cultural patterns, but are barometers of social unrest and tolerance. Explaining the essential role they have in measuring our transformations, folklorist Rafael Beltrán comments: “El folklore és sempre un process en constant evolució funcional. Això vol dir que quan un fenomen folkloric deixa de tenir funció o vigència –sentit o paper- dins una comunitat, mor” (Beltrán 20).

In her study of the Aarne-Thompson-Uther (ATU)<sup>1</sup> tale type 510B, author Helen Pilinovsky writes:

The original purpose of folk stories was not only to entertain but to teach: to show listeners that they were not alone, to communicate societal attitudes towards topics deemed unspeakable in open society.... (Pilinovsky 43)

What folklorists and scholars of myths, legends and fairy tales<sup>2</sup> have discovered is that these deceptively simple narrations are really road markers which measure and calibrate the evolution of the world at distinct points. Working in reverse as well, they teach our children to emulate the norms and judgments hidden in the twists and turns of their plots, and the plans and schemings of the characters (Cashdan 1999). Their breadth of influence cannot be underestimated. In her in-depth study of Iberian literature, Mercedes Cano writes:

Las experiencias de nuestros antepasados, transmitidas de generación en generación en forma de leyendas, han tenido siempre un fondo práctico, activo. Fueron los libros los que reivindicaron y permitieron en una cultura en la que la lectura y escritura estaban vedadas a la mayoría, que la misma se mantuviera viva, pese a los intentos de las capas sociales “cultas” por eliminarlas, tachándolas de “supersticiosas”, “peligrosas” o “ingenuas”. Ocultas a los ojos y oídos de las clases dirigentes disfrazadas como cuentos y leyendas, consiguieron traer hasta nuestros días personajes del mundo mágico-religioso de épocas anteriores al cristianismo. (Cano 9)

---

<sup>1</sup> This refers to the Aarne–Thompson–Uther tale type index, which identifies recurring plot patterns in the narrative structures of traditional folktales, enabling folklorists to organize, classify and analyze tales in a consistent manner.

<sup>2</sup> While the distinction between myths, legends, folktales and fairy tales fills volumes, for our purposes, and to simplify the argument, we take the liberty of referring to them fairly indiscriminately, distinguishing between them only by saying that the latter is a written form of the former.

If this is true, and the plots of the stories continually change form from one community to another and from one culture to another, then why do the roles of the characters stay so determinedly fixed? The answer is two-fold: 1) is because we need them to be. It is what we expect from them, and so what we see, and 2) because these “archetypes”, as Jungian psychologists call them, these representations of a collective consciousness that goes back as far as life on the planet took hold, are used by storytellers as shortcuts, molds, around which they can formulate their stories (Franz).

A tale begins, “Once upon time there lived a king and a queen...” and we are immediately oriented; though in a matter of lines we may be swept across ten kingdoms, we have been given an anchor from which point all the action will evolve. In the traditionally patriarchal world of fairy tales, we recognize the king as the figure in the story from whence all power will flow, and the queen, who is forever and staunchly by his side, who validates his authority by her ostentatious subservience. And to the great joy of these two folkloric figures, “[...] soon to them was born a beautiful girl, a princess...” So signals the arrival of she who will ostensibly have little to do with the movement of the story, but will, in fact, be the inspiration for all actions and decisions made by those around her. Next, “and it came to pass that one day a prince was hunting nearby...”, and so enters our dashing hero who will soon resolve all dilemmas and overcome all obstacles, he who will effortlessly save the helpless princess and, if necessary, her kingdom. “Next door lived a witch...” and we need to look no further for the source of the evils the prince will have to fight, and the dilemmas the rest of the ensemble will have to confront.

With an introduction of four lines and five characters, we now know from whence will come the forces of “good” and on whom to focus our contempt. The profiles are as old as storytelling itself, and yet, as the tale unravels, without veering fundamentally from the traditional plot structure, the story will still beguile. Nevertheless, their very familiarity serves to deceive us in two principle ways. Firstly, what was once a cast of characters which represented the voices of oppressed peasants (Bottingheimer 1987) are now seen no more of than as innocuous caricatures of themselves. Secondly, the labels that these folkloric characters carry detract a deeper truth of the true nature of each character’s role in the story; we see innocence in what is truly antagonism, and malevolence in what is, in fact, philanthropy. For there is an unsung hero in the fairy tales who represents those elements in our own lives which challenge us, which might make us miserable for a time, which threatens and provokes us, but which in the end makes us stronger and better people. It is this very figure that we now deign to uncloak.

To do this, we must battle profiling - both in folklore and in history – and we begin by questioning the presumptions that titles provoke. As an example, we hear the word “king” and have been taught to trust whatever he might decree. And yet historic scholars know that the truth lies in perspective, and he who is considered a wise and fair king by some is seen as despot by others. We read “queen” and the image of a comely and loyal, but also passive and mute consort comes to mind. However, how many Elena Ceausescus, Imelda Marcoses or Asma al-Assads have there been throughout history? The prince gallops onto the scene and we are spellbound by his supposed brilliance, holding our breath in anticipation of the altruistic deeds he will perform. Nonetheless, biographical studies of royalty throughout the ages offer us contrary images of these privileged sons, exposing their egocentric and sordid pastimes.

In this same light, when the witch enters the scene we cringe, anticipating with morbid pleasure the form of evil she will spew forth, but above all, relishing the foreknowledge

of her sure and impending doom. Yet, how often, when we permit ourselves a moment of honest introspection, have we realized that a person in our lives, who challenges all of our beliefs and patience, has, in the end, forced us to change and be better people? How often have we interpreted an event that seemed insurmountable or one that seemed sent to destroy all of our dreams, when in the end it turned out to be providential or turned us to a different road filled with new hopes and dreams? It is time to rethink the assumptions we make about the fairy tale characters we are so familiar with yet truly know so little. In doing so, we might also rethink not only the people we see around us, but also the obstacles in our paths that only seem to stop us from moving forward.

Using the Aarne-Thompson-Uther tale type 310, “The Maiden in the Tower” (Uther 190-191) as a model, the inconsistencies between the preconceptions we have of the five central folkloric figures, and the roles they actually portray in the drama, becomes vividly apparent. Most of us are familiar with the plot of “The Maiden in the Tower”, and the most familiar of its versions, “Rapunzel”. A princess lives alone in a tower completely enclosed but for one aperture, usually at the roof, with her only contact being the witch who has imprisoned her there. One day a prince, hunting nearby, hears the girl singing, and, immediately beguiled, quickly learns how to gain access to her chamber by calling for her to lower her long, thick braid which he will use as a ladder. After calming the girl’s initial anxieties over his unexpected visit, the two become intimate. Soon the girl becomes pregnant and after inadvertently revealing her clandestine relationship to the witch, the older woman cuts off the girl’s hair and sends her to a desert. Later, the prince climbs up the tower expecting to gaze upon the familiar face of his lover, but to his surprise, he is instead greeted by the witch. The shock causes him to fall backwards off the tower and land in a thorny bush at the bottom; in so doing, he blinds himself when two of the thorns pierce his eyes. After years of wandering, he serendipitously finds the princess and their twin daughters who she has birthed in her desert exile. She cures his blindness with her tears of joy, and with their children they go to his kingdom where they live happily ever after.

Told in this light, it is logical to feel great pity for a princess who has lost the joys of childhood within the walls of a stone tower, (and indeed empathy for the absent king and queen, unjustly deprived of raising their daughter), marvel at the bravery of a prince who puts his life at risk to save a helpless maiden, and repugnance for the cruelty with which the witch has acted towards all the above.

Nevertheless, such conclusions are hasty, for, as is usual in most crime stories, there is more to the story than at first meets the eye. Though the most familiar opening to this tale type omits any mention of the parents, but instead begins with the girl already in the tower controlled and guarded by the witch, in the earliest variants there is a prelude which tells the manner in which the princess comes to reside with, and becomes a ward of, the sorceress. In the first publication of stories collected by the Grimms brothers, in their effort to record and archive what they professed to be authentic German folktales, (Bottigheimer) “Rapunzel” (Tatar 107-116) begins with the queen (mother) pregnant with a long-desired child, gazing into a neighbor’s garden, which is filled with hundreds of bellflowers, (in German “rapunzel”, ergo the eponymous names of both the story and princess). Unable to support the cravings that these plants provoke in her, the queen makes her husband’s life miserable until he, after weighing his options, decides that the potential reprisals from his wife for not complying with her wishes exceed the dangers of trespassing upon the property of the resident sorceress next door. The king’s first expedition into the interiors of the sorceress’ garden is successful; however, the queen’s

cravings do not diminish but rather multiply and she insists that her husband return for more of the plant. This time the monarch is discovered by the owner of the property, who is not amused at his transgression, and will not pardon him until he agrees to what she considers a just compensation her for that which he has so deceitfully acquired: she demands the unborn child the queen carries. With no opportunity to consult his wife on other negotiable options, the king agrees to the trade, and so, once born, the new princess is summarily handed over to the witch.

With this prelude, it is now difficult to feel compassion for two people irrefutably responsible for their child's fate. Although in some versions, such as Andrew Lang's "Prunella", (Lang 287-195) the witch is clearly the aggressor and takes the girl by stealth and by force, most versions with a preamble which outlines the princess' extradition to the home of the sorceress, clearly present the parents as the responsible party. Buttressing this idea is the oldest known published version, Giambattista Basile's 17<sup>th</sup> century version "Petrosinella", (Basile 41-60) in which the pregnant woman herself is the one caught by the neighboring ogress. The woman pleads clemency, citing the catch phrase of the day by insisting that it was the Devil who tempted her to pick the parsley that she so desired. Even so, there is no escaping her culpability. Yet, missing information such as the removal of the prelude to the story is not the only means with which the many versions of "The Maiden in the Tower" have led us to form prejudices about its folkloric characters. The deliberate manipulations of the scribes and editors who have published these tales, also carry the blame. These businessmen realized early on that, for instance, presenting narrations which portrayed the biological mother as anything other than selfless and magnanimous was detrimental to the popularity, (and so returns), of their publications. This was remedied easily and literally, by a stroke of the pen, replacing the mother with a stepmother, ogress or witch, and having these latter figures perform the obligatorily nefarious deeds (Bottigheimer 1987). In this way, during the course of the narration, the mother maintained her angelic reputation and the notoriety of the other grew in spades.

Walt Disney's versions of fairy tales are testaments to this form of manipulation. Coerced and seduced by the representation of Snow White's stepmother in primary and vivid colors, sinister music and flamboyant execution, it is easy for us to hate the nefarious manner with which she treats the princess (Stone 1975). Nonetheless, in Carmen García Surrallés' earlier version of the ATU 709 (Uther 383-385) tale "Cuento de los ladrones" (García 716-721), it is the biological mother herself who, beside herself with jealousy over the beauty of her daughter, first refuses to let her husband see his offspring, and later hires three men to take her to the woods and kill her. In the same vein, Antonio Rodríguez Almodóvar's "Mariquita y sus siete hermanitos" (Rodríguez 49-53), another ATU 709 tale, enraged by the attention her daughter receives from her husband, the mother first abuses the child at home, and then orders her servants to take her to the woods to kill her. Likewise, in one of the earliest versions of the ATU 327A (Uther 212-213) version of "Hansel and Gretel" (Tatar 45-59), it is none other than the biological mother who schemes to leave her children in the woods without food or hope of survival. Many variants use another ruse to dissimulate the culpability of the mother, such as in Julio y Chevalier Camarena's ATU 310 "Arbolicas de Arbolar" (Camarena 58-66), which skirts the issue entirely by referring to the matriarch directly as *bruja* ("witch").

In retaining the original sin of the parents in the Grimm's "Rapunze", the true nature of these iconic figures is unmasked. The father is not, in fact, a wise, benevolent king, but

rather an immature, emotionally compromised man, lacking the skills necessary to extricate himself from a desperate situation without implicating others. The queen is not a selfless, altruistic mother, but rather a narcissistic matriarch whose priorities are satiating her own desires regardless of the consequences. The prince is another who, once we separate his actual deeds from our expectations of him, also comes up lacking. He is, in fact, not the stereotypical humanitarian we are encouraged to believe him to be, liberating the princess from the clutches of the evil sorceress, but rather an egotistical youth who grievously skirts social customs to satiate his sexual appetite. His signature climb up the tower, for instance, is indeed not a romantic gesture, but rather a consummately thoughtless and selfish venture. Completely and blissfully ignorant of the princess' circumstances, the prince invites himself into her life and body, unmindful of how his presence might affect her. His transgressions are threefold: firstly, in the rigid societal codes of the day, his very presence in the chambers of a young maiden, with no other escort, puts the chastity and so the reputation of the girl in question; with this one act, he has essentially eradicated any possibility she may have of a future alliance with anyone of repute. Secondly, knowing nothing of the nature of her relationship with her guardian, he seems indifferent to the precarious position in which he might have placed the princess and the repercussions she might be the target of for his having trespassed on the witch's property and having insinuated himself into her charge's life without her permission. Thirdly, though we are led to believe that the prince's very manner of ascending to the damsel's chambers is the epitome of romance, his initial and probably many of his subsequent visits to the princess, had nothing to do with altruism, but rather his libido. If we pause for just a moment we would realize that the prejudices we hold about his gallant ascension to the princess' chambers obscure one critical oversight: he carries no tools with him which could aid him in helping the girl escape:

En un primer momento Rapónchigo se asustó muchísimo al ver que se le acercaba un hombre, pues hasta entonces sus ojos no habían visto ninguno, pero el hijo del rey empezó a hablar con ella muy amistosamente y le contó que había quedado tan turbado por su canto que había perdido la calma y por eso tenía necesidad de verla. Entonces Rapónchigo perdió el miedo y cuando él le pidió si quería ser su esposa y vio que era joven y apuesto pensó: -Él me va a querer más que la vieja señora Gothel-, y le dijo que sí y posó su mano en la mano del hijo del rey. Y dijo: -Me iría gustosa contio [...] Cuando vuelvas trae una cuerda de seda, con ella trazaré una escalera y cuando esté lista, bajaré y me llevarás en tu caballo. (Tatar 114-15)

Upon scaling the walls of the tower to meet the princess, it is evident that the prince has no preconceived plan or intention of carrying the girl off with him. Instead, he presents what is surely his tried and true seduction routine, attempting to conquer what is for him yet another available damsel in distress. However, his powers of persuasion fall on indifferent ears, until he changes tactics and proposes matrimony (Whether at this point he does so in earnest can only be guessed). Only then does the young girl look at him seriously and agree to bed him. And so begins a period of nocturnal pleasures which satisfies both, until the princess' condition makes it difficult to hide their relationship. But not even then does the prince act with honor and present himself to his lover's guardian. Instead, cowardly, he lets inertia take its course and leaves his lover to bear the brunt of the witch's eventual discovery of and reaction to their illicit affair.

Such inconsiderate and inappropriate acts unbecoming a prince, are repeated in many versions of the tale, some presented even more blatantly than that of the Grimm

brothers. In a version of the tale, “L’Adroite Princesse”, (Warner 1994, 65-97), for instance, written by Marie-Jeanne L’Héritier de Villandon, a member of *les précieuses*, an 18<sup>th</sup> century group of French writers, there is no attempt either at dissimulation or disguise of the lascivious intentions of the prince. In L’Héritier’s tale, the young man forces his way into the chambers of the princess and begins to rape her even before the door closes. Though shocking to those who have always maintained the romantic vision of the virtuous Prince Charming, when all is said and done, the difference between this and the other versions is really only a question of semantics. Though their methods vary slightly, the priority of the prince of this tale type is initially only in satisfying his own desires with no contemplation of the possible peril in which he places the princess.

His general *modus operandi* of irresponsibility and irreverence becomes most apparent when the young protagonist is finally confronted with the guardian of the tower. In the Grimm’s “Rapunzel”, unaware that his lover has been unceremoniously cleaved of all of her hair and exiled to a desert, the prince blithely scampers up the walls of the tower, (by the very person who cut it from the girl’s head), assuredly thinking only of the nighttime pleasure he expects to soon enjoy. Never imagining that his nighttime antics – and with that his boyhood - have already come to an end, he finds that on the other extreme of the sinuous ladder, the sorceress. Unable to confront his own culpability at this point, he retreats (falls off the tower and so figuratively and literally lowering himself to a base level), thus escaping the admonishment and accountability he would have faced from the older woman. The motif of blindness is a metaphor for the prince’s inability or disinterest in perceiving how his actions affect other people.

In true Oedipal style he must lose his sight in order to see. He is forced to change his predilections for egocentrism and superficiality that have, up until this point, steered his life, and look within himself and reflect on his imprudence and inconsideration. His eventual discovery of the exiled princess and the physical recovery of his vision represent his symbolic acceptance of his past failings. He is now able to discern and direct himself toward the path of integrity and responsibility. Accepting the cure from the princess indicates his ability to see his connectedness in the cycle of life - that he is not an entity unto himself, but rather a part of a whole and must act accordingly.

And so, just as our judgment of the true characters of the king and queen were clouded by preconceptions, it becomes clear that, contrary to the prince’s profile, this boy is not the embodiment of bravery, resourcefulness and honor. Instead, until his encounter with the witch, he is a spoiled youth who enjoyed a life of too much privilege, too little supervision, and little or no schooling.

It will not appear precipitous, then, to propose that the princess does not conform to the stereotypical role which has defined her over the centuries either - that of a weak and submissive girl, dependent on those around her for direction and salvation. Who can deny that upon hearing the name “Rapunzel” the image of a sad and lonely girl comes to mind, one longing for the day when she is freed from her lofty chambers - a maiden brushing her thick, luxuriously long hair, her only company her jailer, the very woman who obligates her to participate in her own abuse by daily demanding her to proffer up her own tresses as the means with which this older woman can climb to her isolated abode. Nevertheless, the famous pose of the princess in the window of the tower, assumedly pining for another life, has been misinterpreted and misunderstood by sexist analyses and a general apathy to challenge accepted beliefs (Tatar 2002). Let us confront this ennui and look at her situation from a fresh angle. Let us consider that she is not pondering the injustices of her situation, but rather gazing upon a world she has

no interest in yet joining. It is possible that this iconic representative of single women everywhere is not dreaming of the day when a wealthy and charismatic youth on a horse comes to carry her off, but is rather basking in her present freedom as a woman with no external commitments, and with no concerns for her own well-being – be they either emotional or physical.

Indeed, it is the setting of the story itself which insinuates the princess' abode in the tower to be a safe haven and not a prison. Firstly, the motif of a young girl's isolation in a wood is, in fact, a remnant of an ancient ritual. According to Vladimir Propp, the Russian anthropologist and folklorist, this tradition evolved from the community's attempt to guard women from the unpredictabilities of their environment. At key points in a their lives – during menstruation, after marriage, and during pregnancy, for instance - women were segregated from the rest of the tribe in order to protect them from elements that could compromise their safety: “[...] el aire está lleno de peligros, de fuerzas que en cualquier momento pueden desencadenarse contra el hombre. [...] Para los [ancianos] los bosques, el aire y la oscuridad están llenos de seres misteriosos.” (Propp 56-57). This is the first indication that our preconceptions regarding the princess' circumstances may be erroneous. Secondly, though it might be tempting to assume that the princess is permitted no other office than to care for her long tresses, we can see from the manner in which she deals with unexpected events, and her abilities to not only survive, but to extricate herself gracefully from perilous situations, that this is not the case. On the contrary, all the signs indicate that she has been educated actively. For example, in a French version of the tale, “Persinette”, the narration pointedly states that the princess is blessed not just with lavish meals to keep her alive, but with books, paint, and music (Mayer 5). In other words, not only does she have regular instruction, but she has the benefit of a renaissance education which most girls in her age did not, given that such pursuits were seen as appropriate only for men. Her emotional stability and social skills are clearly evident as well during her first, unexpected encounter with the prince – the first man she's ever seen - in the intimate and restricted surroundings of her own quarters. For a person with less confidence, this situation would produce panic and most likely a cry for assistance. Rapunzel, however, shows no evidence of needing aid, rather she maintains her calm, bargains with the uninvited guest, and, once her terms are met (she receives a commitment from him), she readily participates in a consensual physical relationship. Later, in an unguarded moment during a conversation with her guardian, after having enjoyed relations with the prince for several weeks, the princess “slips” and reveals her theretofore unsanctioned nocturnal activities. Why, we must ask ourselves, does she choose that particular time to declare her secret to the witch and not before? Simply because it is clear at this point in her life that she is prepared to leave her childhood behind; she is satisfied with the partner she has chosen, she is now with child, and she wishes to be treated as an adult by the woman who has raised her since infancy. Explains Maureen Murdock in *The Heroine's Journey*:

The heroine crosses the threshold, abandons the security of her home, and leaves in search of herself. In every heroic journey there is a call: when a woman has superseded the limits of her own interior reality, something surges to the surface that provokes her to go further than the security of what is known. It is a journey towards a growth that can come with great suffering. (Murdock 49)

The princess, therefore, does not inadvertently betray herself, but has, instead, consciously planned the moment to confront the situation, secure in her ability to withstand whatever reaction her guardian's disapproval assuredly will inspire.

The form in which she takes leave of the tower is another indication of her maturity. In the Grimm's "Rapunzel" we see the fortitude of the princess in confronting the witch; however, although we later see her resourcefulness and ingenuity in her exile, we do not have the benefit of observing her handling of the escape she planned, as it is her guardian who facilitates her departure from the wood. In other versions, however, we see her presence of mind and composure throughout the story. In "Las tres salivitas", (García 77-81) for instance, it is also the princess who designs the departure from her childhood home (and not the prince); it is she who tricks her father, a powerful magician, and it is she who corrects the errors made by the prince when he ignores her explicit instructions regarding their mode of escape. In Baptista's "Pertrosinella", again, it is the princess who keeps a level head amidst the chaos of her escape, and it is solely by her design that she and her lover skillfully elude their pursuers. In "Arbolicas de Arbolar", we see the princess' presence of mind even further when, as a result of a spell cast over the prince, she is left at the gates of a foreign city, alone and virtually abandoned. Instead of succumbing to agitation and alarm which would frankly be understandable, this girl calmly creates a situation which requires her lover's presence; once by her side once more, the prince falls for her again thereby breaking the spell and permitting them their 'happily ever after' ending. In the case of Rapunzel, we see her fortitude and inner resources when, thrown into an unknown and primitive situation in the desert, she not only survives, but also births her twin daughters and cares for them by herself. So strong do her inner powers become that they externalize in the form of curative tears - antidotes - for the prince's blindness.

Having established that the traditional profiles of four of the most iconic folkloric characters hold no true validity, it is now the moment to examine the most defamed and misunderstood of them all: the witch.<sup>3</sup> As in the others, the prejudices attached to this figure are precipitous and erroneous. In this case, what is most important is to take careful note of her interactions with the others, and the effects thereof, for only in this way will her motives be understood. It is not difficult to understand the tenacity of the preconceptions surrounding the witch. The ubiquitous portrayals of her as a sinister and unapproachable figure influence and cloud our vision. The proliferation of grotesque and menacing images of the witch abound, encouraging her to be seen as the personification of sin and corruption (Cashdan 1999). Even worse, her character has been relegated to bi-dimensionality by storytellers throughout history, so curbing any inclination viewers or readers might have in considering her more profoundly.

Where did this characterization begin? Did the historic witch - she who has been persecuted throughout the ages by insecure depots and covetous religious leaders - cast the shadow on the literary character, or did the folkloric antagonist color the judgment and reason of those of flesh and blood with the will and power to annihilate believers of other faiths (above all women), who were perceived as a threat to their power? Before we dismiss the matter as simple misogyny (though this would be far from unreasonable), it must be clarified that this study recognizes that not all witches, either in history or in literature, are women. Warlocks, magicians, alchemists, all have had prominent roles both as literary foils as well as the victims of witch trials throughout the

---

<sup>3</sup> As they perform the same role, we treat the witch and all other antagonists (stepmother, stepsister, ogress, sorcerer, etc.) equally, mentioning only the former by name for simplicity.

centuries (Lara 2010). However, for the purposes of simplifying references, and maintaining clarity in the argument at hand, we will refer to the feminine of the classification, fully acknowledging that a cross-section of men are insinuated as well. Further, a clarification must be made regarding the term “witch”. Those scholars who have devoted their studies to the differentiation between healers, sorcerers, alchemists and witches, are frequently forced to overlook the irrespective use of the label by others, but at the same time, they find this lack of precision irresponsible and confusing. For them there are essential differences between the mediums and philosophies used by these practitioners that should not be ignored (Barandiaran 1983). However, as most fairy tales are edited without this recognition - the use of the term “witch” being used freely for all female characters of an advanced age - a certain permissiveness must be allowed and we take the liberty of calling all villains of these stories “witch” with the understanding that she should not necessarily be considered a Devil worshiper.

Put simply, a “witch” is a person (or a literary figure) who is believed to be a consort of the Devil (Baroja 1966). She is different from a natural healer and sorceress in that, while all practice rituals which involve manipulating nature, the witch has gone farther having made a pact with the Devil to work as his servant and enjoy his favors. In Eva Lara Alberola’s exhaustive study on the subject, the author explains:

En el caso del mago, es explícito el origen del término, que aludía, en un principio, a los sabios de Oriente o también a un individuo de la clase sacerdotal de la religión zoroástrica. Esto nos da las pistas para determinar que maga no es lo mismo que hechicera, pero, puesto que la definición también incluye a “aquella persona que por arte de magia, ayudada del demonio, hace cosas extraordinarias”, podemos utilizar, en determinados contextos, el vocablo maga para señalar a la hechicera. Del mismo modo, cabe la posibilidad de denominar hechicera a la bruja, puesto que la bruja es también hechicera, pero no viceversa. Los términos van, por tanto, de mayor prestigio a menor y de lo general a lo particular (Lara 28).

According to José Manuel Pedrosa, we name a character a witch “si la individual en cuestión (repetimos que suele hablar en femenino) posee unas cualidades o facultades innatas, gracias a las cuales podría realizar sus agresiones mágicas. La hechicera, en cambio no poseería tales capacidades, sino que llevaría a cabo un aprendizaje del sistema mágico, y se ayudaría de fórmulas, libros u otros objetos [...]” (Montaner y Lara 35-36). Though the implications of the labels are important in the literary discussions, it was critical during the witch trials of the Middle Ages. The absurdity of the accusations aside, the labels attached to each victim could have meant the difference between a pardon and an execution. A legal distinction used in the 1600s is recorded by one of the Spanish inquisitors, Dr. Isidro (de) San Vicente, who differentiates between the different types of victims in the following manner:

Los escalona [a los magos], comenzando por brujos-brujas[,] como los que participan en juntas (aquelarres), real o imaginariamente, y practican daños como ejecutores de las órdenes del demonio. A continuación se extiende a los hechiceros, adivinos, invocadores de demonios y supersticiosos. (Montaner y Lara 30)

Such hierarchy did not necessarily save an accused, for once a victim was accused, such distinctions did little to save them in general but they seemed to assuage the courts, to a certain extent, of their doggedness.

In any case, the populous in general believed in the culpability of those accused of witchcraft, or, at the very least, for lack of any other entertainment, convinced themselves to believe. The attention and fame earned by those who participated in the prosecution, served to cyclically fuel more denouncements. Celebrity “witnesses” grew out of this fever, and they became experts at theatrical accusations and histrionic allegations. They took great delight, for instance, in describing and amplifying the horrors of the “sabbaths” – the supposed witches’ reunions – that they attended, voluntarily or by force, just as the descriptions of their supposed transformations became legendary. That they borrowed descriptions of witches and their activities from stories they had been told or read about is entirely possible. The colorful details which embellished the stories which described the involvement in witchcraft of those brought to trial, had uncanny similarities from one case to another. The results were that these melodramatic chronicles incrementally increased the fear of and fascination with those profiled as “witches”, at the same time as justifying the courts’ devotion to their elimination (Henningsen 1981).

Such was the momentum and enthusiasm for hunting down new victims - both for the judges and for those eager for the opportunity to accuse and thus exterminate undesirable neighbors - that one of the only factors which slowed the process was the eventual lack of candidates with any notable funds. As in most politically backed ventures, economics fueled decision-making, which in this case meant that these judges, these champions of justice whose task it was to scourge the villages of evil, were allowed to retain all the goods of the accused, whether these latter were later found to be innocent or not. Needless to say, the wealth they accrued was impressive, but as in all cases of supply and demand, once the resources ran out, the courts could do none else but to move on (Henningsen 1981). Meanwhile, maximizing the defamation and perversion of the image and reputation of the witch only served to benefit these in the position of making a profit from her downfall. Aside from independent criteria used, such as Dr. (de) San Vicente’s above, textbooks sprang up, standardizing the profile of these alleged practitioners of the dark arts, with specific guidelines for judges on how to counter arguments that might be presented during their defense. Henrich Kramer’s *Malleus Maleficarum* (*Hammer of witches*) was possibly the most influential and so the most damaging. In it, he offered proof of the existence of witches given the weak nature of women - as is evidence in the portrayal of the gender in the Bible - and their proclivity to be swayed and so seduced, in this case by Satan. He explained in detail the pacts and rituals practiced by witches, including incantations, spells and curses (Mériada 2006). Added to these fantastical literary descriptions were the proliferations of visual images that depicted and defined the figure. Usually with grotesquely exaggerated features, and almost inevitably with macabre and menacing postures, the witch’s legacy has been detrimentally affected by the vivid imagination of artists and illustrators. Though Goya’s famous depictions of these historic figures in his paintings were ironically meant to be protests against the very superstition and fear which incited such frenzy, in the end, they might have fueled more fear than they quelled. His vivid depictions are echoed in films and in animated features to this day.

In the end, however, whether the literary figure has influenced the vision people have of those accused of witchcraft or vice versa, these horrific and ubiquitous characterizations have served to shroud the witch’s true character and deflect any deeper consideration of her role in popular tales; we are trained to look no deeper than the façade. We are taught that a woman who lives in isolation in a wood and exhibits

strength of will and independence, is one who we must regard with suspicion and fear. Her direct manner (skewed as instead vexing and provoking), is incriminatory, and her motives are solely self-serving and iniquitous. It cannot be denied that the scenario depicted in the “The Maiden in the Tower” of an older woman gaining sovereignty over a young girl and imprisoning her for a lengthy period of time, seems irrefutably damning. Is there any other way to interpret her actions? Indeed, though it is simpler to withdraw to the time-honored and accepted image of the villainous and diabolical sorceress, we must rally and look to her intentions, for only in this way can we possibly justify the results. For indeed, the beneficial effects the environment has on the princess has already been established, and as such, the motives behind the older woman’s conduct deserves consideration.

Let us discard then for the moment, the traditional characterization of this antagonist as a conniving and manipulating shrew, one who has plotted to gain custody of the cherished offspring of the local royalty for purely gratuitous motives. Instead, could she not be a concerned citizen who, having observed the comings and goings of her neighbors over time, has decided to liberate their soon-to-be-born child from them? They have shown themselves to be, after all, two self-involved, self-absorbed parents, who seem incapable of imparting anything to their imminent charge but the most superficial of values. Working under this assumption, we then reject the witch in the form of jailer and consider her a care-giver, proposing that once she has gained custody of the babe, she takes her responsibility seriously and does what is necessary to create an environment rich in education and replete in values.

Why then does she move the girl to such an isolated place? In the opening of “Rapunzel”, the witch’s property borders that of the king and queen. Why do we suddenly find her exiled in the middle of the wood? If her aim is to safeguard the princess, sequestering her to an uninhabited knoll in the woods only increases the dangers. Yet, seen from another angle, the move is propitious. The witch places the girl in the tower at a time in her life which, as is atypically indicated in many versions as around 12 years old, is a critical time in her life: puberty. For any girl, such an age is critical both internally and externally, and she who has assumed the task of raising her has many responsibilities, among them to keep the girl chaste now that she is of a birthing age. Choosing a dwelling far from all others enables the witch to have more control over the influences in the princess’ life; in this way she will have the freedom to get to know herself before she is told who she is by others. Raised near her parents, the girl would have been exposed to every manner of tradesman and courtesan desiring to ingratiate themselves to her, filling her mind with pretty but empty words, and acting with questionable motives. By separating the girl from the others, the sorceress creates a space in which her young charge can concentrate on her inner skills and strengths and not be swayed by the vision of those around her. The guardian has built a portal through which the princess can seek her own place in the world and not be limited by the societal prejudices.

But why then a tower? Why would the sorceress create an atmosphere which seems, from the outside, to be so oppressive and despotic? For one, symbolically, we can say that the witch places the girl high above the ground to manifest the lofty expectations she has for her. By surrounding her and placing her closer to the heavens, she indicates the direction of focus she wants for the princess – on her inner abilities, on her mind, and on her spirit. Further, the witch chooses this form of dwelling for simple logistical concern. The two live in the middle of the woods alone, accessible to any unwelcome

visit from potentially unprincipled travelers passing by. Installing the girl in the tower, out of reach of such intruders, is one of the most indicated and prudent choices the older woman can make. The tower is, in fact, not a prison but rather a place of refuge for a young girl in a vulnerable time in her life. It reflects not malice on the part of her guardian, but rather the best of intentions for her ward.

The witch has also designed the home of the princess to give her the benefit of a full education, for, though it gives the princess safety, it does not rob her of knowledge of the world around her. On the contrary, in all versions of the story, there is always a window and it is this window that is the key to understanding the underlying intentions of the witch. In its most literal form, the aperture at the top of the tower serves as the conduit between the princess and the rest of the world. She could have been locked behind the stones of a circular prison fitted with no more than slits at the top to let in air and light, such as that which the king of Argos imprisoned his daughter Danae. This he did with the express desire to cut off all ties she had to the world and sever any outside connections (Hamilton). The witch's intentions, on the other hand, are to give the girl a place of safety and seclusion but with an active outlet from which she can explore the many facets of her personality and gender. As for an active tutor, compare the difference in judgment and abilities between the princess raised by the witch and one who was put in similar dwellings without the benefit of such educational training. In Emilia Pardo Bazán's Catalanian version "El balcón de la princesa", (Pardo 233-235) the princess' guardian is the king, her father, who, with the intention of protecting his daughter from the ugliness of the world and maintaining her innocence, ensconces her in a tower high above his castle where she is surrounded by all the luxuries of the world but is forbidden to interact with it. Further, he denies her all knowledge of what she observes; in so doing, he has truly imprisoned her for this withholding is her destruction. As the years go by, what most holds her fascinated is the work of a laborer who has a shop just below the walls of the castle. Ignorant of class differences in general and of professional labor specifically, the blacksmith's work delights and amazes the princess as she considers the sparks that fly from his hammer flickers of gold. One day, tired of her isolation, she escapes from the tower, finds herself in the much sought after smithy, and as she has never been taught about worldly issues, about men, and how to defend herself, she ends up raped, imprisoned, and enslaved by the man she had admired so much from so far away. On the other extreme, her father, thinking her kidnapped, and not realizing his own responsibility in her disappearance and fate, declares war on his neighboring kingdoms. We compare these reprisals with versions in which the witch has been an active educator and has given the princess the emotional tools necessary to function in the world at large. These princesses turn out to be a functional member of society once they leave both their tower and their guardian.

Yet there is more, for the window in Rapunzel's tower is also an outlet for her sexual energy which the stone walls of her chambers cannot (and should not) contain. Though it may seem shocking to more prudent readers, the motifs which frequent this tale type have highly sexual connotations. The princess is housed in a tower which is a phallic symbol in itself, she interacts with the world through her song, a method of communication that is legendary for its powers of seduction, and she spends hours combing her long tresses, hair being an ancient symbol of sexual control (Warner 1994). The girl's guardian is aware of the needs of her ward, including the necessity to explore and express her sexuality. Indeed, the older woman encourages and helps her. Why, for instance, has the witch's mode of ascending the tower never been questioned? Given her

abilities, why has she not simply appeared in the girl's rooms by sorcery and magic? Permitting that the princess to take an active part in their daily visits is yet one more opportunity the witch gives to learn - in this case about choice and discernment. It is the sorceress who calls for the princess to lower her hair, but it is the girl who decides whether to comply or not. And the act of throwing down her hair is, as mentioned above, an indication of the younger woman's sexual exploration.

The study of the motif of hair in literature is vast and extensive. Marina Warner, for instance in her comprehensive study on fairy tales, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, devotes an entire chapter to the different ways a character's hair is feted and charged with primal importance. "Hair constantly reminds us", Warner insists, "of the closeness of the dumb animal in us, and we reveal our changing sympathies and values in the way we treat the relations..." (Warner 1994, 360). These seemingly innocuous pigmented filaments indeed represent our savage, innate sexuality, and simply by manipulating them we can attract or detract sexual partners. We are all controlled by a combination of primitive and "civilized" sensibilities, and the witch understands the importance of honoring both sides. Rapunzel's braid – an element in this tale so prominent as to be considered almost a character in itself – is none other than her sexual token and the witch calling for it is her method of encouraging the girl to explore that side of herself. But - with the witch, we ask ourselves? In the case of the older woman it is solely a metaphoric exploration, surely. Perhaps not. Ann Sexton, in her collection of poetry centering on key arguments of fairy tales, proposes that the insinuation of carnal relations between the princess and the witch is far from symbolic:

A woman  
 who loves a woman  
 is forever young.  
 The mentor  
 and the student  
 feed off each other.  
 many a girl  
 had an old aunt,  
 who locked her in the study,  
 to keep the boys away.  
 They would play rummy  
 or lie on the couch  
 and touch and touch.  
 Old breast against young breast. (Sexton 35)

Whether the two share a physical relationship or not, this interpretation of the maiden in the tower's sexual proclivity is far from unique. In a poetic retelling of the story, originating from a Sephardic song, the princess has achieved flagrant mastery over her powers to seduce:

En la mar hay una torre,  
 en la torre hay una ventana,  
 en la ventana hay una hija  
 que a los marineros ama.  
 [...]  
 Esta serena era loca,  
 quere que la quera yo;

que la quera su marido,  
que tiene la obligación. (Pedrosa 1995, 175)

This hybrid between a princess in the tower with such apparent sexual prowess and the erotically hypnotizing fame of the sirens of Faiakes, is titillating.

Added to these suggestively sexual motifs is Rapunzel's song, which is the method with which she ventures out from her tower. The mythic power of song is frequently the literary means with which to charm, mesmerize, and beguile, and sure enough, not only does she seduce the prince, who, upon hearing her voice, is immediately enamored, but once she perceives him at the foot of the tower, immediately offers her braid to him (we remember this as a sexual token), in an open invitation to explore a more intimate relationship. Is he the first to have ever heard her voice and climb to her chambers? Is he the first to have ever tasted her favors? Of this we cannot be certain, but what is obvious is the level of maturity and presence the princess shows both in her reaction to unexpected events, and in her self-confidence in facing both the witch and the prince. Both can be attributed to her upbringing by her guardian, the only person present in her life

There still remains, however, an explanation for the violence with which the witch acts upon discovering the clandestine relationship between the princess and the prince. Though ostensibly the sorceress discovers the tryst between the two lovers by a slip made by the princess, it can easily be argued that the older woman has been aware since the beginning of the arrival of the prince and of the relationship he has had with the girl. With all the care she's taken in the upbringing of the princess, being ignorant of her nightly activities would be unlikely. Instead, she accepts the rite of passage of the princess, permitting her to reveal the relationship at her will, but still decides on two more ministrations that are necessary to enact, and without which she could not conscientiously let her go. While the form she takes in carrying out these acts may seem unconscionably cruel to outside observers, the witch has weighed their worth and knows that they are necessary to complete the girl's education.

In the case of her ward, cutting the girl's hair may seem cruel, but the act hurts nothing more than her pride. In doing so, the witch reminds the princess to focus on her inner attributes as exterior beauty is transitory. In the same light, obligating her to give birth and care for her children alone in an unknown land only seems vicious and merciless; in reality, it is another way of reinforcing the education she has given the girl since she came under her care. She wants the princess to remember her strengths and to trust in her own skills. Her behavior with the prince is also, on the surface, abominable. She leaves him lying at the bottom of the tower wounded and blinded and does nothing to aid him either then or when he rises to begin his wanderings through the forest, sightless and helpless. Yet, instead of damming her as heartless and callous, let us dare to see her acts as those of a woman who, though respectful of her ward's choice of mates, has seen the defects of the prince (his egocentricity and thoughtlessness) and will not be satisfied until she takes measures to correct them. By leaving him on his own, she has given him the gift of time - for meditation and self-exploration - to learn humility and reconsider the consequences of his actions.

In many versions of the tale, the guardian goes so far as to actively and aggressively pursue the pair during their escape. In "Las tres salivitas", for instance, upon discovery of his daughter's flight from her tower, the magician mounts a horse and pursues the two lovers. Because of the prince's previous heedlessness to the princess' instructions,

the sorcerer is left with a horse “which is faster than thought” while the lovers are mounted on a horse which is only “as fast as the wind” (García 79). This detail of the speed of the horse in this version is critical, for we know that the sorcerer is able to overtake his daughter at any moment yet he does not. Instead he draws near enough only to incite the girl into using her magical (inner) powers, so as to remind her of her strength and her ability, and not to depend on the prince or anyone else for her own salvation. In effect, later, when the girl is left stranded by the prince in a foreign city and has the opportunity to return to her home, safe under the protection of her father, she shows the fortitude instilled in her through her father’s training by deciding not to abandon her journey, but rather the means with which to resolve the elements blocking her happiness.

These last ministrations on the part of the witch bear fruit. In “Rapunzel”, for instance, when the lovers are reunited, the prince has indeed been transformed. Unable to see the princess’ beauty, he still desires to connect to her on what can only be an emotional level, something that would have been unlikely before his fall from the tower. Accepting her cure for his blindness, symbolizes a new humility in him which replaces his previous arrogance.

And yet, the clearest way of measuring the witch’s intentions, is to consider, in contrast, those girls (and boys) who have not had the same role modeling and guidance. In Bruno Bettelheim’s psychological exploration of fairy tales, he states that:

There is no greater threat in life than that we will be deserted, left all alone. Psychoanalysis has named this – man’s greatest fear – separation anxiety; and the younger we are, the more excruciating is our anxiety when we feel deserted, for the young child actually perishes when not adequately protected and taken care of (Bettelheim 1976, 145).

The princess of this tale type is not weak and indecisive, but rather, strong, intelligent, and resourceful. Further, from a psychological standpoint, a girl who has lost her mother at an early age will exhibit signs of abandonment. Psychologists stress that the mother is the person who has the most influence over a child and whose teaching is the most impressionable in their lives. Without this, a child will, in all cases, demonstrate a lack of vitality often manifested in low self-esteem (Franz). Nevertheless, all of the princesses that we have discussed so far have grown up without the influence of their mothers yet have all shown common sense in the face of difficult and new circumstances, self-control in the face of chaos, and resourcefulness when a solution is most needed. In her extensive study of the witch, Beatriz Domínguez García proposes an explanation for this phenomenon:

Este personaje [la bruja] es el único que consigue y utiliza su conocimiento de una manera autónoma [...]. Conoce los secretos del alma humana [...]. Mientras que la joven aprende desde su perspectiva los dones que la hacen atractiva al hombre: belleza, pasividad, silencio, virtud, etcétera, la madrastra le muestra los que le darán el poder cuando su posición vuelve a ser precaria, cuando llegue otra joven que querrá poseer al príncipe. (Domínguez 72)

Given that these princesses were influenced by none but their custodian, we must conclude that their emotional needs were met by her.

Yet, even if we accept the good intentions of the witch, can we excuse her methods? Is she not guilty of extremism with regard to how she achieves her aims? Perhaps. But

even so, children who have been abused find some way of expressing their pain and bitterness such as being self-destructive or demonstrating resentment towards authority figures. Yet the ATU 310 tale presents a mentally stable young woman. In the case of Rapunzel, despite having been taken from her biological parents as an infant, being locked in a tower, physically disfigured, and exiled unceremoniously, there is never a moment in which the girl speaks ill about the older woman, a similar posture found in most versions. Furthermore, had the witch withheld the necessary affection from the girl, we would see evidence in the younger woman's inability to function outside the tower. Yet we don't. On the contrary, another indication of a dysfunctional home environment is that, ironically, children in such a situation find it difficult to leave; they do not have the will to separate themselves from their abuser or the confidence to confront the world outside their homes. Marion Woodman, Canadian author and poet explains that "to arrive at the place we belong, we have to cut the umbilical cord that ties us to old dependencies. If we have never had a loving mother, this cut will most likely be more difficult because we keep wishing for what we never had. In these cases, we keep looking for the mother figure in everyone we meet". (Woodman 128)

However, an analysis done with Vladimir Propp's morphology of a fairy tale (Propp 1988), demonstrates that though one of the commonalities of the ATU 310 tale is that there is a Departure (↑), (Propp 2001, 53-54) there are no Returns (↓) (Propp 2001, 73). What this means is that the princess in "The Maiden in the Tower" tales has all the skills needed to venture out into the world on her own and venture out she does. And she does not come back. She has no need to. A less-formed child would find leaving home difficult if close to impossible, and would return repeatedly. The key is the education the girl has had at home. Clarissa Pinkola Estés, in her iconic book *Women who Run with the Wolves*, declares:

Hay que aceptar que la solícita madre psíquica, perennemente vigilante y protectora, no es adecuada como guía central de la propia vida instintiva futura (muere la madre demasiado buena) [...]. En su exagerado afán de protegernos, empieza a impedirnos responder a los nuevos retos, obstaculizando con ello un desarrollo más profundo [...]. Si permanecemos demasiado tiempo con la madre protectora en nuestra psique, no podremos enfrentarnos a los retos que se nos planteen y bloquearemos nuestro ulterior desarrollo [...]. Por consiguiente, es justo que, para que podamos proseguir nuestro desarrollo, cambiemos a la solícita madre interior que nos era beneficiosa en nuestra infancia por otra clase de madre, una madre que habita en los rincones de nuestra mente y es no solo una escolta sino también una maestra, una madre afectuosa, pero también severa y exigente. (Pinkola 115-117)

In effect, the witch separating the princess from her mother in the "Maiden in the Tower" tales actually acts as the younger woman's salvation. Some children need strong role models to pull them out of their complacency largely caused by a suffocatingly devoted (or narcissistic) mother (Pinkola). Others need help extricating themselves from an abusive situation. The witches in these tales do both; they have not only assumed the role - and so the responsibilities - of a mother, but have modeled the strength of character that their wards needed. So can we now reconsider our image of this witch? Despite her methods which we find reprehensible, can we applaud her intentions? Do we damn her as the Devil or is she, in fact, the true heroine of the story?

Just as we have been programmed to admire the folkloric king and queen, dismiss the princess as innocuous, praise the prince, and condemn the witch - all of which we have

seen are misplaced sentiments –we need to reexamine the profile of a hero. Is it the character whose actions are the most dramatic, or the one who challenges societal norms? Is the hero he who destroys the dragon for the townspeople or she who builds up their confidence so that they can fight for themselves? Isn't it logical to confer the title of hero on that figure who models responsibility and commitment to helping others develop their inner strength?

The definitions of a “hero” are many and varied. One, for instance, is presented by the mythic scholar Baron Fitzroy Richard Somerset, based on four characters from diverse traditions: Oedipus, Theseus, Moses, and King Arthur, all of whom are men of action and whose accomplishments are flagrant (Dundes 143). There is the definition presented by folklorist Alan Dundes in his study of legendary figures from both classical and non-classical literature such as Odysseus, Theseus, Romulus, Siegfried and the mythical African king Nyikang – again men who have focused on changing their external world (Dundes 145). Philologist and folklorist José Manuel Pedrosa's definition centers as well on the physicality being the criteria of a hero, saying: “Por lo general, es el héroe quien *se mueve*, quien viaja hasta el territorio del oponente (y no al revés). Y, cuando le toca escapar, sus movimientos son más rápidos y ágiles que los del perseguidor, cuyas potencias pierden efectividad fuera de los límites de su territorio.” (Pedrosa 220). Culture also plays a large factor in the measure of a heroic character. In China, for instance, it is a character from the lower class who becomes a knight and is sworn to correct injustices, fight for honor, and eliminate tyrants. For some Native American tribes, intelligence and the capacity to deceive his enemies is what is celebrated (Hayes 1942). Tzvetan Todorov. Todorov, on the other hand, in his study on human reactions under extraordinary stress, *Facing the Extreme*, proposes that the label of “hero” applies to a person who has demonstrated moral determination in extreme situations even at the risk of death:

He neither submits to the laws of his society nor has the same reactions as other people. His extraordinary qualities, in particular his spiritual strength, make him a solitary figure who cares little about the effect of his actions on those close to him...[H]e rejects compromise; consequently, he is always ready to die for his faith... (Todorov 49)

We are so conditioned to believe that a hero is defined by his or her actions, like those of Somerset, Dundes and Pedrosa, that this last definition, based on the inner beliefs of the character, may be at first difficult to swallow. Yet, this study proposes a hybrid of all the above, putting stress, in the end, on principles and morals and not on physical action. We contend that the hero (heroine) of fairy tales is that character who embodies the spiritual strength necessary to reject the most travelled path. She is that person who walks with confidence down the road which will lead her – and those she influences – to emotional maturity. She lives isolated, follows her own beliefs and counsel, and does not worry about the opinions of those around her. She is the figure who exhibits courage, energy, integrity and moral strength and who risks all for her own convictions. She is the witch.

And yet, even as we dare crown her heroine, there is more, for the witch is not simply nor solely the familiar figure we know so well and despise with such abandon; she is also, in the most general sense, a concept, a seed, which can push us to change our paradigms if we open our minds and permit it to take root. She represents those obstacles in our lives that confront us and challenge us to change, grow and develop in

ways we might not have without their presence. If we permit her, she can teach us to accept our inner power and be led by our own will.

For, the witch is not, nor is any metamorphosis of her, “evil”. In the best of cases, that term is subjective and ambiguous. She is, instead, a challenge in the form of an impediment, a factor which turns us from a path we have loathed to part from or an occurrence which forces us to question our beliefs we have about the people who surround us. In anthropomorphic form, she can be an abusive mother, an oppressive supervisor, but as a concept, she can be an illness or an economic crisis. Just as with the characters in fairy tales, considered from another angle, this impossible boss can either teach us to yield to his or her supposed power over us, or propel us to become proactive defenders of own cause. The abusive mother can leave us defeated, downtrodden, empty, and self-destructive, or she can turn out to be the reason we are more sympathetic to others, that we have chosen different avenues in life than we might have if she had coddled us. Her disdain of us means that instead of seeking external approval (hers, for instance), we have learned to find within ourselves the motivation necessary to succeed in life. In the same light, we can view a diagnosis of an illness as a punishment from the heavens, or we can take it as the opportunity of finding the inner strength to fight it. As for economic difficulties, we can luxuriate in self-pity, or we can reevaluate our priorities and focus on the absolute essentials we need to create a life of quality. It is all in the perspective.

The witch is the character responsible for educating the princess - at times perhaps with questionable force, but always with laudable motives. As a single mother, she removes her ward from the path of danger both physically and emotionally, making sure that the girl will never be inclined to use her outward beauty as her *modus operandi*. In its stead, she encourages the girl to develop her inner talents and learn to trust in her own abilities and inner power. She can do the same for all of us.

Without considering the actions of the sorceress with prudence, her approach to the princess’ education is incriminating and implicative; she is relentless and seems to take delight in choosing provocative and ruthless methods. However, examined with care, we see that she is the one character who dares to risk everything in her determination to push those people under her tutelage to flourish. To the folkloric characters, whether they recognize her ministries on their behalf or not, she is the heroine; in our own lives, both the witches of flesh and bone, and the witches of spirit, can be our saviors.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Brindo los más sinceros agradecimientos a Eva Lara Alberola por su gran ayuda y por creer en este tema.

## Works Cited

- Adams, W.H. Davenport. *Witch, Warlock and Magician: Historical Sketches of Magic and Witchcraft in England and Scotland*. Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1889.
- Atwood, Margaret. *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 2004.
- Bal, Mieke. *Teoría de la narrativa*. Madrid: Cátedra, 1985.
- Barandiaran, José Miguel. *Brujería y brujas*. Guipúzcoa: Txertoa, 1983.
- Baroja, Julio Caro, *Las brujas y su mundo*, Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1966.
- Baschwitz, Kurt, *Brujas y procesos de brujerías*, Barcelona: Luis de Caralt, 1968.
- Basile, Giambattista, *El cuento de los cuentos*, Madrid: Siruela, 1994-1995. 2 vols.
- Beltrán, Rafael, ed., *Rondalles populars valencianes. Antologia, catàleg i estudi dins la tradició del folklore universal*. Valencia: PUV, 2007.
- Bettelheim, Bruno. *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*. London: Penguin, 1976.
- . *Psicoanálisis de los cuentos de hadas*. Barcelona: Ares y Mares, 2007.
- Bolt, Barbara Lee. *Powerful or Powerless?: Women in Njal's Saga, Gottfried Von Strassberg's Tristan, and The Niobelungenlied*. Master of Arts Thesis. Houston, Texas. 2003.
- Bottigheimer, Ruth B. *Grimms' Bad Girls & Bold Boys: The Moral & Social Vision of the Tales*. New Haven-Londres: Yale University Press, 1987.
- Camarena Laucirica, Julio & Maxime Chevalier. *Catálogo Tipológico del Cuento Folklórico Español. Cuentos maravillosos*. 'Biblioteca Románica Hispánica', IV, Textos 24. Madrid: Gredos, 1995.
- Cano Herrera, Mercedes. *Entre anjanas y duendes: mitología tradicional ibérica*. Valladolid: Castilla Ediciones, 2007.
- Cardini, Franco. *Magia, brujería y superstición en el occidente medieval*. Barcelona: Península, 1982.
- Caro, Baroja, *Las Brujas y su mundo*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1966.
- Cashdan, Sheldon. *The Witch Must Die: The Hidden Meaning of Fairy Tales*. New York: Basic Books, 1999.
- Cawthorne, Niel. *Witch Hunt: History of a Persecution*. London: Arcturus Publishing Limited, 2011.
- Domínguez García, Beatriz. *Hadas y brujas*. Huelva: Universidad de Huelva, 1999.
- Douglas, John, *The Cases That Haunt Us*. New York: A Lisa Drew Book, Scribner, 2000.
- Dueso, José. *Brujería en el País Vasco*. San Sebastián: Roger, 2001.
- Dundes, Alan. *The Study of Folklore*. Nueva Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965, 3 vols.
- Fields, Donna, "El protagonismo de la bruja tutelar en el cuento folklórico maravilloso: análisis de personajes, argumentos, funciones y motivos en un corpus hispánico y universal", Tesis Doctoral Inédita. Valencia: Universidad de Valencia, 2012.
- Franz, Marie-Louise von. *The Interpretation of Fairy Tales*. Boston: Shambhala, 1996.
- García Surrallés, Carmen. *Eraposivé... Cuentos tradicionales gaditanos*. Cádiz: Jimenez-Mena, 1992.
- Gaskill, Malcom. *Witchcraft: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Gould, Joan. *Spinning Straw Into Gold*. New York: Random House, 2005.

- Haase, Donald. *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales: Volume 1: A-F*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2008.
- Hamilton, Edith. *Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes*. Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1942.
- Hayes, Joe & Lucy Jelinek *Coyote & Native American Folktales*. Santa Fe, Nuevo Méjico: Mariposa Printing & Publishing, 1942.
- Henningsen, Gustav. *El abogado de las brujas*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1981.
- Lang, Andrew. *The Grey Fairy Book*. New York: Dover Children's Classics, 1967.
- Lara Alberola, Eva. *Hechiceras y brujas en la Literatura Española de los Siglos de Oro*, Valencia: PUV, 2010.
- Malinowski, Bronsilaw. *Magic, Science and Religion*. New York: Waveland Publishing, 1954. Available at [www.adolphus.nl/xcrpts/xcmalinow.html](http://www.adolphus.nl/xcrpts/xcmalinow.html).
- Mayer, Charles-Joseph, ed. *Le cabinet des fées, ou Collection choisie des contes de fées et autre contes merveilleux*, vol 6. Paris: Chez Cuchet, 1785.
- Mérida Jiménez, Rafael M. *El gran libro de las brujas*. Barcelona, RBA, 2006.
- Michelet, Jules. *The Sorceress*. California: Evinty Publishing, 2009.
- Montaner, Alberto & Eva Lara. "Magia, hechicería, brujería: Deslinde de conceptos". En Eva Lara & Alberto Montaner coords. *Señales, portentos y demonios: la magia en la literatura española del renacimiento*, Salamanca, Sociedad de Estudios Medievales y Renacentistas, 2013. En prensa.
- Murdock, Maureen. *El viaje heroico de la mujer*. Madrid: Gaia, 1998.
- Pardo Bazán, Emilia. Juan Paredes Núñez ed. *Cuentos completos*. La Coruña: Fundación Pedro Barrié de la Maza, 1990.
- Pedrosa, José Manuel. *Las dos sirenas y otros estudios de literatura tradicional. De la Edad Media al siglo XX*, Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1995.
- . "La lógica del cuento: el silencio, la voz, el poder, el doble, la muerte". En R. Beltrán & M. Haro eds. *El cuento folklórico en la literatura y en la tradición oral*, 'Col·lecció Oberta', 126, Valencia: PUV, 2006, 247-270.
- Pilinovsky, Helen. "Donkeyskin, Deerskin, Allerleirauh: The Reality of the Fairy Tale." *Realms of Fantasy Magazine* 21 (2001): 45-53.
- Pinkola Estés, Clarissa. *Mujeres que corren con los lobos*. Barcelona: Zeta, 1995 (Madrid: Punto de Lectura, 2001)
- Propp, Vladimir. *Las raíces históricas del cuento*. Madrid, Fundamentos, 1974.
- . *Morfología del cuento*. Madrid: Akal, 1988.
- Rappaport, Philippa. "If it Dries Out, It's No Good: Women, Hair and Rusalki". *SEEFA Journal* 4.1 (1999): 55-64.
- Rodríguez Almodóvar, Antonio. *Cuentos al amor de la lumbre*. Madrid: Anaya, 1983-1984. 2 vols.
- . *Cuentos populares españoles*. Madrid: Anaya 2002.
- Sexton, Anne. *Transformations*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1971.
- Steinem, Gloria. *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1983.
- Stone, Kay. "Things Walt Disney Never Told Us". *Women and Folklore* 88 (1975): 42-50.
- Swahn, Jan-Öjvind. *The Tale of Cupid and Psyche*. Lund: Gleerup, 1955.
- Talley, Joyce Ann. *The Dragon's Progress: The significance of the Dragon in "Beowulf", The "Volsunga Saga", "Das Nibelungenlied", and "Der Ring Des Nibelungen"*. Doctoral Dissertation. Colorado: University of Denver, 1983.

- Tatar, María. *Los cuentos de hadas clásicos*. Barcelona: Ares y Mares, 2002.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. *Facing the Extreme: Moral Life in the Concentration Camps*. Londres: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999.
- Uther, Hans-Jörg. *The Types of International Folktales. A classification and Bibliography. Based on the System of Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson*. 'FF Communications', 284. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia – Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 2004, 3 vols.
- Warner, Marina. *From the Beast to the Blonde; On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers*. New York: The Noonday Press, 1994.
- . *Wonder Tales*. Nueva York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995.
- Wood, Naomi. "Domesticating Dreams in Walt Disney's *Cinderella*". *The Lion and the Unicorn* 20.1 (1996): 25-49.
- Woodman, Marion. *Leaving My Father's House*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1993.
- Zipes, Jack. *Don't Bet on the Prince*. New York: Routledge, 1987.
- . *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk & Fairy Tales*. Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002.