

female ogres is the German *Menschenfresserin* (devourer of humans), a word far more expressive than the English *ogre* generally used to translate it.

How is it that these figures continue to occupy so prominent a position in a collection of tales for children? Surely these stories, of all the stories in the Grimms' collection, have the least factual basis, even in the realities of past ages or of savage practices, or so it would seem. Another text in the first edition of the *Nurses and Household Tales* (this one too failed to enter the pages of subsequent editions) suggests that cannibalism was not unknown in times of famine.⁵ The Grimms' "Starving Children" is neither fairy tale nor folk tale, but the summary of a seventeenth-century written account of a mother who threatened to kill and devour her daughters that she might survive a famine. In the end, the girls die of starvation and the mother simply disappears. It is unclear whether she planned to carry out her threat; the account may be embellished by the all-too-lively imagination of its reporter. It is telling, however, that the Grimms elected to include this kind of account in their collection. Clearly, for them there was no distinct dividing line between the fiction of fairy tales and the facts of everyday life, or at least the most sensational aspects of everyday life.

The many faces of maternal evil in fairy tales represent the obverse of all the positive qualities associated with mothers. Instead of functioning as nurturers and providers, cannibalistic female villains withhold food and threaten to turn children into their own source of nourishment, reincorporating them into the bodies that gave birth to them. Like the Jungian *magna mater*, they take ferocious possessiveness to an extreme. "Now the children are in my body," one mother-in-law triumphantly declares.⁶ These figures work hard to earn the trust of their victims with magnanimous maternal behavior, then reveal their true colors as cannibalistic monsters. The old witch in "Hansel and Gretel," for example, uses her tasty house to lure the children to her, then sets a feast of milk and pancakes, sugar, apples, and nuts before them. But she "only pretended to be friendly," we learn. "She was actually a wicked witch who . . . killed, cooked, and ate any child who fell into her hands."

Not all female villains in the Grimms' fairy tales indulge a taste for human flesh. Many are experts in the art of weaving spells: these are the witches and enchantresses for whom uttering curses rather than devouring children is the preferred mode of oral expression. Nearly all the stock characters of fairy tales—not just female villains—are blessed (or cursed) with the gift of casting spells. When one fairy-tale father, for example, denounces his sons in a moment of irritation for their frivolous ways and utters the fateful wish that they turn into ravens, he finds himself suddenly endowed with magical powers. No sooner has the wish escaped his lips than he hears the beating of wings and silently watches seven ravens fly into the distance. Variants of the tale of the seven ravens suggest that such rash imprecations, whether uttered by fathers or by mothers, are instantly translated into reality. In "Twelve Brothers," it is the sister of the twelve boys who bears the blame for their transformation into ravens, though some versions implicate the children's stepmother in the guilty act. In yet another tale of enchanted male siblings ("Six Swans"), a woman turns her stepsons into winged creatures when she flings six magical shirts over them. While the spells cast in all three tales are equally effective, only one of the three transformations arises from a willful act of premeditated evil. It is the stepmother alone who deliberately takes advantage of magical powers to harm her six stepchildren. Nearly the entire cast of characters in fairy tales may possess supernatural powers, yet it will be obvious to the habitual reader of these tales that stepmothers are the principal agents of enchantment.

Stepmothers stand as an abiding source of evil in countless fairy tales, and it is no accident that they rank among the most memorable villains in those tales. Folklorists would be hard pressed to name a single good stepmother, for in fairy tales the very title "stepmother" pins the badge of iniquity on a figure.⁷ One can safely argue that the phrase *wicked stepmother*, which has a nearly formulaic ring to it, is pleonastic.

The vast majority of the Grimms' stepmothers actively persecute not their stepsons, but their stepdaughters, who consequently take on the role of innocent martyrs and patient sufferers. If the step-

mothers are not literal witches, they possess qualities that place them firmly in the class of ogres and fiends. As alien intruders, they disturb the harmony among blood relations. They may not always have the power to perform a metamorphosis from woman to beast, but they can turn even the most aristocratic and beguiling girl into the humblest of scullery maids. By contrast to the sorceresses who work behind the scenes in tales of enchanted young boys, they remain visible, palpable presences in fairy tales that chart the shifting fortunes of heroines who have lost their biological mothers and await rescue by dashing young princes or kings.

Biological mothers, as noted earlier, seldom command a central role in the fairy tales compiled by the Grimms, in part because Wilhelm Grimm could rarely resist the temptation to act as censor by turning the monstrously unnatural cannibals and enchantresses of these tales into stepmothers, cooks, witches, or mothers-in-law.⁸ As the audience for the tales changed, the need to shift the burden of evil from a mother to a stepmother became ever more urgent. Yet the tactic had a way of backfiring. In the 1856 preface to his *New Book of German Fairy Tales* (*Neues Deutsches Märchenbuch*), Ludwig Bechstein made a point of deviating from the practice established by Wilhelm Grimm and others.

There is nothing that children would rather read than fairy tales. Among the thousands of children who every year get their hands on books of fairy tales, there must be many so-called *stepchildren*. When such a child—after reading many a fairy tale in which stepmothers appear (the stepmothers are all uniformly evil)—feels that it has been somehow injured or insulted . . . by its own stepmother, then that young person makes comparisons and develops a strong aversion to his guardian. This aversion can become so intense that it disturbs the peace and happiness of an entire family.⁹

Whether a figure is designated as a stepmother or a witch, she takes on a single well-defined function in fairy tales—one that is limited to the sphere known as villainy and that magnifies and distorts all the perceived evils associated with mothers. Wicked stepmothers and cooks find their way into the homes of fairy-tale heroes; witches masquerading as magnanimous mothers are nearly ubiquitous in

the woods; and evil mothers-in-law make their presence felt in the castles that serve as a second home for fairy-tale heroines. That these figures share not only a common function but also a single identity becomes clear on closer inspection of the tales in which they imperil innocent young children.

Let us begin by taking a more careful look at stepmothers and cooks. Snow White's stepmother is perhaps the most infamous stepmother of them all. But is she really a stepmother? In the first edition of the *Nursery and Household Tales*, Snow White's mother never dies; her vanity and pride turn her into an ogre who orders her daughter murdered; she then devours what she believes to be the girl's lungs and liver. Only in the second edition of the Grimms' collection does the real mother die and is replaced by a wicked stepmother. "Mother Holle" underwent a similar transformation. The first version of the tale featured a widow with two biological daughters, and the second version traced the fortunes of a widow with one favored, biological daughter and one ill-treated stepdaughter. What easier way is there to depict maternal abuse of children and at the same time preserve the sanctity of mothers than by turning the evil mother into an alien interloper whose goal is to disturb the harmony of family life? As for the evil cooks in the *Nursery and Household Tales*, more often than not they turn out to be stand-ins for stepmothers. In "Fledgling," one such figure plans to throw the adopted foundling of the household into a vat of boiling water—presumably he will constitute the main course for that night's dinner. Almost all other versions of that tale type place an evil stepmother in the role of the old cook. Think of "The Juniper Tree," in which a stepmother murders her stepson by decapitating him. (In passing, it should be noted that nearly every variant of the famous refrain of that tale ["My wicked mother slew me, / My dear father ate me."] attributes the murder to a mother rather than to a stepmother, even though the actual perpetrator in the story is usually a stepmother.)¹⁰ Here the folkloric imagination—not just the Grimms—is responsible for the replacement of a mother by a stepmother. To some extent, Wilhelm Grimm, with his editorial practices, may simply have been falling in line with a general tendency to sanitize the tales for consump-

tion by children. In surveying the Grimms' collection of tales, it becomes clear that both stepmothers and cooks are almost always thinly disguised substitutes for biological mothers.

Witches and mothers-in-law display the evil impulses and instincts of cooks and stepmothers, and they clearly perform the same function in fairy tales. Heroines who emerge from the forest to live happily ever after with the kings who discover them there often find their domestic bliss disturbed by a rival. In "Twelve Brothers," that particular figure is characterized first as the heroine's mother-in-law, then as her stepmother.¹¹ In fairy tales, these two figures are clearly interchangeable. "Little Brother and Little Sister" gives us a witch who masquerades as a stepmother so that she can insinuate herself into a household. At home she subjects the children to daily abuse; in the forest she continues to tyrannize them by enchanting their sources of drinking water. In "Hansel and Gretel," it is probably not coincidental that the two siblings return home to find that their cruel stepmother has vanished once they have conquered the evil witch in the woods.¹² It quickly becomes clear that stepmother, evil cook, witch, and mother-in-law are different names for one villain whose aim is to banish the heroine from hearth and home and to subvert her elevation from humble origins to noble status. What at first blush appears to be a conspiracy of hags and witches is in the final analysis the work of a single female villain.

To some extent, the female villains of fairy tales have a dual identity. As stepmothers, evil servants, and hostile mothers-in-law, they remain firmly anchored in the world of family life and figure among the facts of everyday life. Conflicts and tensions between them and the tales' protagonists reflect nothing more than the observable realities of human life. These female villains—whether wearing the hat of cook, stepmother, witch, or mother-in-law—have repeatedly been labeled folkloristic projections of the "bad mother." Bruno Bettelheim, Marthe Robert, and other psychoanalytically oriented critics have admired the deft way in which these stories split mother images into two components: the good (and usually absent) mother and the evil stepmother. As Bettelheim points out, "the fantasy of the wicked stepmother not only preserves the good mother intact, it

also prevents having to feel guilty about one's angry wishes about her."¹³ But what is especially remarkable about fairy tales is the extent to which they inflate maternal evil. The alien meddlers who make their way into households and attempt to divide a heroine from her father or husband are painted in the worst imaginable colors. As terrifying ogres and evil enchantresses, they take on almost mythical dimensions.

The female villains of fairy tales operate in three distinct arenas of action that emerge in chronological sequence. The main contours of the opening situation in tales featuring these villains are reasonably predictable. The child or children whose biological mother has died become the victims of a brutal, scheming stepmother. One fairy-tale brother confides to his sister: "Ever since mother died, we haven't had a single happy hour. Our stepmother beats us every day, and when we go to see her, she kicks us and sends us away. We get nothing but hard breadcrusts to eat. Even the little dog under the table is better off than we are." Small wonder that these abused youngsters resolve to escape the oppressive atmosphere at home even at the cost of facing the perils of "the vast world." Those who fail to move into voluntary exile are, like Hansel and Gretel, banished from home owing to a stepmother's relentless bullying of her husband. But even those who patiently endure villainy at home find themselves expelled from the family circle, living like servants at the hearth rather than like children at home. At home or in the woods, the once unrivaled princes and princesses of the household find themselves dethroned, living a lowly existence in exile. Whether literally of royal parentage or regal simply by virtue of their status as children, the adolescent protagonists of fairy tales find that their legitimate rights have been abrogated and that their positions have been usurped by those perennial pretenders to the throne known in fairy tales as older brothers and as stepsisters.¹⁴

If home represents the first station in the hero's sufferings, the enchanted world of the forest stands as the locus of his second series of struggles. But in the woods the hero is no longer pitted against a powerful human adversary; instead he finds himself locked in combat with a superhuman opponent armed with supernatural powers.

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The villainous stepmother reemerges in the woods as a monster equipped with powers far more formidable than those she exercised at home. If she proved successful in deposing her stepchildren and banishing them from the household by constantly badgering and hectoring either children or spouse, in the woods she appears above all to be a master in the art of transforming humans into animals. Her power to turn children into beasts is generally exerted on stepsons; the task of disenchantment falls to stepdaughters. Little Brother rather than Little Sister is turned into a deer when he drinks from waters enchanted by his stepmother; Hansel, not Gretel, is encaged like an animal and fattened up for a feast of flesh; the six swans in the tale of that title are all male; and of the thirteen children in "Twelve Brothers," only the boys take wing after being turned into ravens. In this context, it is worth noting that there are relatively few female counterparts to the many enchanted males in the cycle of tales known as animal-groom stories. To be sure, female heroines are not immune to spells cast by witches and fairies, but, like Snow White and Sleeping Beauty, they remain eternally human and beautiful even in their dormant, enchanted states. That brothers and prospective bridegrooms are turned into animals by older women may be read as a telling commentary on women's attitudes toward male sexuality, just as the choice of a catatonic Snow White and Sleeping Beauty as the fairest and most desirable of them all may offer a sobering statement on folkloristic visions of the ideal bride.¹⁵

While the curses uttered by stepmothers take effect almost instantaneously, the process of disenchantment is long and arduous. In tales of metamorphosed males, the sisters or prospective brides of the degraded heroes are burdened with the task of disenchantment. Yet as one mentor after another warns these heroines, the conditions of that task are so difficult as to be virtually impossible to fulfill. Only Gretel, who keeps her wits about her, succeeds in liberating her brother within a reasonable period of time. The sister of the six swans requires a more typical time span, spending year after year perched on a tree branch sewing shirts. She releases her brothers from the stepmother's curse only after six years have passed. Given

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the duration of the brothers' bewitchment, it is not altogether surprising to find that the heroine of the fairy tale matures, marries, and establishes a family of her own by the time the prescribed length of her trial has elapsed.

While the brothers of fairy-tale heroes patiently wait in the woods for liberation from their enchanted state, the heroines have moved on to a third arena of action. Rescued or, more often than not, kidnapped by the hunting party of a king, they are spirited off to a castle and in due course married to the sovereign of the land. Yet many of these heroines, who are bound by vows of silence or solemnity, cannot yet live happily ever after, at least not so long as their brothers remain enchanted. Furthermore, even at the castle that has become their second home, they become once again the victims of plotting females, be they treacherous mothers-in-law or ever vigilant stepmothers who have heard of their stepdaughters' accession to a throne. Since the young queens frequently become mothers themselves, the murderous schemes of their stepmothers take on an added dimension of peril. The children of the new royal couple seem destined to share the lot of their mothers, to relive the fairy tale whose plot will come to an end with the death of their biological mother. Once a stepmother succeeds in murdering her stepdaughter (as in "Little Brother and Little Sister") or in conspiring to have her put to death (as in "Twelve Brothers" and "Six Swans"), she paves the way for the marriage of her own, biological daughter to the newly widowed king and thereby precisely re-creates the kind of family situation that prevailed at the tale's beginning. That new royal family, like the nuclear family described in the opening paragraphs of fairy tales, would consist of a father, a stepmother, and one or more children from the father's first marriage. It can only be a matter of time until the sole missing elements, the children of the second union, appear on the scene to assist in reenacting the drama played out in the first part of the fairy tale.¹⁶

Before anyone can live happily ever after, this vicious cycle of events must be arrested. To avoid the danger of endless repetition of one plot, the stepmother must perish along with her mischievous progeny. Not until she has been conquered and done away with is it

possible to break the magic spell that bedevils the stepchildren of fairy tales and that threatens to doom one generation after another of their progeny. Once a fairy-tale heroine succeeds in reversing the effects of her stepmother's villainy, either by completing the tasks assigned to her or by returning from the dead to broadcast the harm done to her, the process of disenchantment is complete. To emphasize the definitive end to the stepmother's reign of terror, the fairy tale describes her demise in graphic and morbid detail. Drowned, burned to ashes, torn to pieces by wild animals, or placed in a casket filled with boiling oil and poisonous snakes, she dies in both body and spirit, no longer representing a threat to the recently established royal family. And once the biological mother of that family reigns supreme, the king and even his children are destined to live happily ever after.

In tales ending with the wedding of a royal couple, stepmothers are repeatedly implicated in the evil that befalls their stepchildren, just as they eternally attempt to obstruct their elevation to a higher social rank. These heartless creatures stand in sharp contrast to their relatively artless spouses, whose only serious defect appears to be lack of discrimination in choosing a marriage partner. Even that defect is eliminated in some tales featuring evil stepmothers: occasionally it is the heroine who is deceived by the friendly face put on by a woman and who naively persuades her father to remarry. The fathers of fairy-tale heroines may appear passive to a fault, but it is surely to their credit that they rarely take the lead in abandoning their children or in treating them like servants. It is the stepmother of Hansel and Gretel who hatches the plot to desert the children in the forest; only after being subjected to a good measure of browbeating does their father acquiesce in her plans. Cinderella's father never conspires to debase his daughter, for his wife and stepdaughters are experts in the art of humiliation. And the father of Snow White (mentioned by the Grimms only in the context of his remarriage and even then solely to motivate the presence of the stepmother) never once interferes with the elaborate web of evil that his wife spins in order to remain "the fairest of them all." Although the fathers of these fairy-tale figures are supremely passive or positively

negligent when it comes to their children's welfare, they remain benevolent personages largely because benign neglect contrasts favorably with the monstrous deeds of their wives.¹⁷

In the Grimms' collection there is one conspicuous example of a father whose perversity rivals the malice harbored by his female counterparts in fairy tales. Stepmothers may sin by withholding love and affection from their stepchildren, but this father errs in the excessive love and devotion he feels for his biological daughter. The father of young Thousandfurs (*Allerleirauh*), in the tale that bears her name, promises his wife on her deathbed that he will remarry only if he finds a woman whose beauty equals that of his quickly fading spouse. When the king's envoys return from a worldwide search for a second wife to announce that they have failed in their mission, the king's eye lights on his daughter, and he is overcome by passion (*eine heftige Liebe*) for her. The king's counselors may be stunned by their sovereign's proposal to marry his own daughter, but they are not nearly so shocked and dismayed as Thousandfurs herself, who, after a variety of delaying tactics, ultimately flees the castle to escape her father's erotic advances.

On the surface of things, it would appear that plots concerned with wicked stepmothers belong to a tale type separate from plots featuring fathers driven by incestuous desires. In practice, these two plots do indeed run on different tracks: a stepmother's insufficient love and a father's excessive love for a child appear to be incompatible. Yet what the folk have worked hard to keep apart, folklorists have sought to bring together. Antti Aarne's authoritative register of tale types, for example, assigns a single number to two such representative plots (*Cinderella* is 510A; *The Dress of Gold, of Silver, and of Stars*, of which "*Allerleirauh*" is a variant, is 510B). Clearly, Aarne must have intuitively recognized a kinship between these two types of tales, though he never explained just how the two could coexist as a single drama. Another folklorist determined that two distinct motifs are associated with the tragic loss of the heroine's appendages in "The Girl without Hands." One involves the sexual jealousy of any one of the following: a biological mother, a stepmother, a mother-in-law, or a sister-in-law; the other is concerned with a fa-

ther's love for a daughter or (as is the case with the version in the *Nursery and Household Tales*) a father's forging of a pact with the devil.¹⁸

In German tales depicting social persecution of a girl by her stepmother, the central focus comes to rest on the unbearable family situation produced by a father's remarriage. But while the father's responsibility for creating turmoil by choosing a monstrous marriage partner recedes into the background or is entirely suppressed as a motif even as the father himself is virtually eliminated as a character, the foul deeds of his wife come to occupy center stage. Her repulsive attributes and sadistic acts are described in painful detail. We learn how she throws her stepdaughter into a river, instructs a hunter to kill her and to recover her liver and lungs for dinner, inadvertently decapitates her own daughter, or, as "The True Bride" tells us, makes life "wretched in every way."

In tales depicting erotic persecution of a daughter by her father, on the other hand, mothers and stepdaughters tend to vanish from the central arena of action. Yet the father's desire for his daughter in the second tale type furnishes a powerful motive for a stepmother's jealous rages and unnatural deeds in the first tale type. The two plots thereby conveniently dovetail to produce an intrigue that corresponds almost perfectly to the Oedipal fantasies of female children. In this way fairy tales are able to stage the Oedipal drama even as they disguise it by eliminating one of its two essential components.

If we survey extant versions of the two tale types, it becomes evident that intimations of a father's passion for his daughter are generally discreetly kept to a minimum, while the evil deeds of a stepmother are invariably writ large. A comparison of Perrault's "Donkey-Skin" (the French counterpart of "Thousandfurs") with Perrault's "Cinderella" offers a typical contrast. In "Donkey-Skin," the king's unrestrained passion for his daughter is explained as nothing more than a temporary aberration caused by excessive grief over the loss of his wife. The king becomes confused, imagines himself a young man, and labors under the delusion that his daughter is "the maiden he had once wooed to be his wife."¹⁹ Perrault is

clearly at pains to frame excuses for the advances the king makes to his daughter. In "Cinderella," by contrast, he strains his verbal resources to summon up negative terms ("haughty," "proud," "mean," and so on) to describe Cinderella's stepmother. Even when they violate basic codes of morality and decency, fathers remain noble figures who rarely commit premeditated acts of evil. Stepmothers, however, are unreconstructed villains, malicious by nature and disposition.

It may be true, as Bettelheim has asserted, that fairy tales enacting Oedipal conflicts split the mother figure in two: one mother who stands by her child and another (step)mother who stands in the way of the female child's attempts to secure the love of her father. Most fairy tales depicting the fortunes of heroines persecuted by stepmothers portray benevolent female figures in the form of wise women, or, failing that, enact a deceased mother's undying love for her child by bringing Mother Nature to the heroine's rescue. Cinderella, the Goose Girl, Thousandfurs, and a host of other oppressed female protagonists benefit either from nature's munificence in the form of animal helpers or from the natural sanctuaries found in the hollows of trees and in the forest.²⁰ Yet while the good mother generally appears incognito as a dove, a cow, or as a tree (and then only ever so briefly), the evil stepmother becomes an overpowering presence in the tale. She stands as the flesh-and-blood embodiment of maternity, and it is this figure of manifest evil that is most openly associated with women as mothers.

If the Grimms' fairy tales tend to permit all manner of explicit social persecution by jealous stepmothers (whose true identity is only thinly concealed by the prefix *step-*), they also tend to avoid direct depiction of erotic persecution by fathers and to shun amorous entanglements with them. Some heroines make a point of returning home to their fathers and sharing their new-found wealth with him and with him alone. And in one version of "Snow White" recorded by the Grimms, it is the father and not a prince who discovers his daughter's coffin on his way through the woods and who mobilizes medical help to reanimate her. But on the whole, fathers in the Grimms' tales either absent themselves from home or are so passive

as to be superfluous. We have already seen the lengths to which Wilhelm Grimm was prepared to go in order to mask incestuous desire in "The Girl without Hands." Only in "Thousandfurs" was a father permitted to stand as the active source of evil at home, with the consequence that the theme of incest was broached and pushed to its limits. Even the most restrained commentators on "Thousandfurs" speculate on the possibility that the heroine ends up marrying the very king who sent her into exile. The Grimms may have attempted to describe the marriage in ambiguous terms ("so as to avoid being offensive," one critic insists), but one possible aspect of that marriage cannot be entirely suppressed. This critic neglects to note what is perhaps most remarkable about "Thousandfurs." In its original version, it confronts the problem of incestuous desire in a wholly matter-of-fact fashion and at the same time points to a resolution of that problem.²¹

At times it appears as if the tellers of these tales, or those who set down the tales in their written versions, were bent on excising all explicit references to the source of rivalry that divides mothers from daughters in childhood fantasies. As folklorists remind us, censorship of material in oral literary forms is generally exercised by the audience, which determines the vitality of certain plots by voicing approval of them or simply selecting them for retelling.²² The same seems to hold true for written tales, though perhaps less consistently. In our own culture, we find in the process of selection a bias working manifestly in favor of the rags-to-riches tale that contains a powerful, wicked older woman. "Cinderella," "Snow White," and "Sleeping Beauty" are the tales from Perrault and from the Grimms that continue to thrive even on non-native soil, while stories such as "Thousandfurs" and "Donkey-Skin" are virtually unknown.²³ Of the two components that shape female Oedipal plots—the fantasy of an amorous father and the fantasy of rivalry with the mother—only the latter has become a prominent, virtually undisguised theme in popular tales depicting the marriage of female protagonists. While (step)mothers are habitually demonized as nags at home and witches in the woods, fathers qua fathers tend to fade into the background or to be absent from the tale.

It is important to bear in mind that the passive or absent father was not always the rule in fairy tales. As Marian Cox's nineteenth-century study of 345 variants of "Cinderella" makes clear, at least two widespread and pervasive versions of that tale attributed the heroine's degradation either to what Cox describes in characteristic Victorian language as an "unnatural father" or to a father who attempts to extract from his daughter a confession of love. Of the 226 tales belonging unambiguously to one of three categories labeled by Cox as (1) ill-treated heroine (with mothers, stepmothers, and their progeny as victimizers), (2) unnatural father, and (3) King Lear judgment, 130 belong to the first class, 77 to the second class, and 19 to the third. Thus in the tales examined by Cox, the versions that cast (step)mothers in the role of villain only slightly outnumber those that ascribe Cinderella's misfortunes to an importunate father. Cinderella and her folkloristic sisters are therefore almost as likely to flee the household because of their father's perverse erotic attachment to them or because of his insistence on a verbal declaration of love as they are to be banished to the hearth and degraded to domestic servitude by an ill-tempered stepmother.²⁴

Although folklorists have correctly pointed out that it is impossible to reconstruct the *Urmärchen*, or authentic parent tale (if ever there was one), that gave rise to the countless versions of "Cinderella" existing the world over from China to North America, it is important to recognize that one basic tale type has attached to it two components that are now perceived to be competing and mutually exclusive. The jealous mother and amorous father, as Cox's neat divisions make clear, rarely coexist in one tale. In "Aschenputtel," the Grimms' version of "Cinderella," the father makes only the briefest cameo appearance to give his daughter a branch which, once planted, turns into a tree that showers Cinderella with royal apparel for the ball. From an accomplice in Cinderella's degradation, he has turned into an unwitting, yet benevolent, helper in the tests that await her. In "Thousandfurs," by contrast, the only mother figure in the tale expires in the introductory paragraph.

In tales that emphasize a stepmother's cruelty, the role of the biological father tends to be peripheral. Indeed, the father does not

appear at all in a number of stories that conform to the rags-to-riches pattern found in "Cinderella." "Snow White" stands as an especially prominent example of such a tale, although even this most chaste and guileless of fairy-tale heroines is subjected to paternal advances in some versions of the story, even as her father's manifest delight in her beauty stands as the source of marital discord in other versions.²⁵ In the Grimms' version of the tale, which refers to the father only once and then merely to proclaim his marriage, astute observers have nonetheless identified vestiges of the father's original function: "His surely is the voice of the looking glass, the patriarchal voice of judgment that rules the Queen's—and every woman's—self-evaluation."²⁶ Once the disembodied voice in the mirror is recognized as that of the wicked queen's husband, it becomes clear that the struggle between Snow White and her mother could well be motivated in psychological terms by rivalry for the love and admiration of an absent husband and father.

The voice in the mirror is not the sole means by which the father makes his presence felt in the tale. In his study of fifty-seven variants of "Snow White," Ernst Böklen notes (with evident consternation) that some versions of the tale openly depict the father as a co-conspirator in his wife's intrigues.²⁷ It is the father who, in an attempt to pacify his disagreeable spouse, leads Snow White into the woods and abandons her there. Böklen's study of such variants gives added weight to the view voiced by Bettelheim that, in the Grimms' tale, the hunter who spares Snow White's life yet abandons her in the woods may represent a disguised father figure. Torn between his loyalty to a wife and affection for a daughter, he "tries to placate the mother, by seemingly executing the order, and the girl, by merely not killing her."²⁸ In short, despite the complete suppression in this tale of explicit references to the figure for whose affection mother and daughter vie, the logic of the Oedipal subplot dictates the presence of male figures who find themselves divided in their allegiances to a mother and her daughter.

Here a word of caution is in order. In "Snow White," we have seen just how easy it is to discover a father figure lurking behind every male voice and body. For some critics, the father has slipped into the

mirror, for others he has been taken into the service of the queen, and for still others he has transformed himself into a handsome young prince. In "Little Red Riding Hood," the father has been identified as both wolf and hunter in disguise. In view of the fairy tale's often single-minded focus on family life, this perceived duplication, even multiplication, of fathers in each tale is not wholly off the mark. Still, it is wise to keep in mind that a handsome young prince generally functions as an alternative to the father rather than as his double.

In reviewing the Grimms' tales of oppressed female protagonists, it becomes evident that these stories dramatize female Oedipal conflicts in unique fashion. With the exception of "Thousandfurs," they suppress the theme of paternal erotic pursuit even as they indulge freely in elaborate variations on the theme of maternal domestic tyranny. For the one story in the *Nursery and Household Tales* that openly depicts a father's persecution of his daughter, there are twelve that recount a girl's misery at the hands of her stepmother. Enshrining the stepmother as villain brings with it the added advantage of exonerating both biological parents from blame for the miserable conditions at home. One might reasonably argue that cruel stepmothers, absent fathers, and child abandonment counted far more significantly than father-daughter incest among the social realities of the age in which the Grimms recorded German fairy tales.²⁹ Yet fairy tales have never been treasured as mirrors of reality; only in their opening paragraphs and in their decorative details do they offer a world that bears some resemblance to the realities of family life.³⁰ Once the protagonists of these tales leave home, they pass through the looking glass and arrive in a world of inner realities. Although those childhood fantasies are remarkably stable in contrast to social realities, they are nonetheless reshaped and modified by the cultural setting in which they are told and retold. In our own age, it is easy to see why fairy tales, which evolved only late in their development into stories for children, favor the theme of maternal malice over the forbidden and forbidding theme of incest.