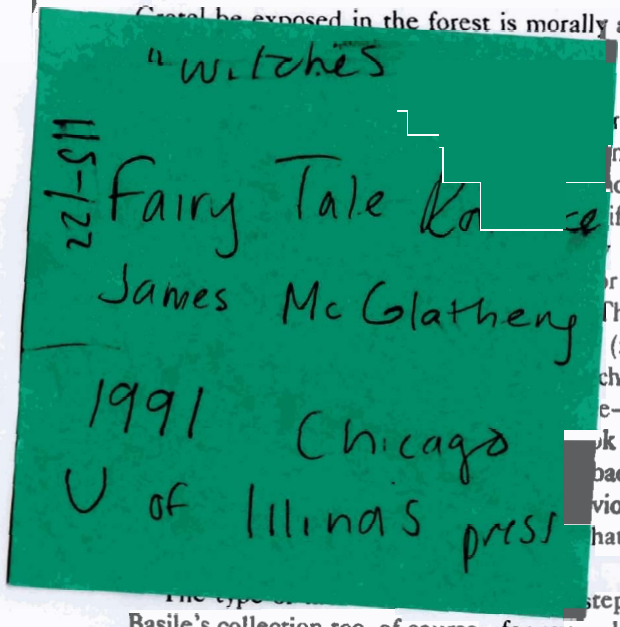
McGlathery, James. Fairy Tale Romance. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991.



Gretel be exposed in the forest is morally as ugly as the witch whom the repulsive. The lady cook who not have to be described as a r. While the selfish stepmother no distinction between the two dy cook is intent on doing away ify with his little sister, however and devotion. In these stories r inspiring devotion that renders Thus, in "The Two Royal Children" (not a stepmother's) unseemly ch back their daughter after she e—an episode that matches the k is reduced to going out herself back. And in "The White Bride vious stepmother contrives to do hat her ugly daughter may usurp

stepmother is a familiar figure in Basile's collection too, of course—for example the second wife in "Ninnillo and Nennella" (V, 8), who dislikes having to care for another woman's children and demands that her husband get rid of them. There are also interesting variations on this type, however, such as the fisherman's wife in "Penta the Handless" (III, 2), who so resents having to care for the beautiful maiden without hands whom her husband has found in a box floating in the sea that she has the girl put back in the box and cast into the water. And in Basile's story of the Sleeping Beauty type, "Sun, Moon, and Talia" (V, 5), the queen, having grown suspicious at hearing her husband mumble "Talia, Sun, Moon" in his sleep, discovers the whereabouts of her husband's beautiful young paramour and their twin children and attempts to have them killed.

Of equal importance, and indeed greater interest, are the older women who identify rather more positively with beautiful young maidens. As we have seen (Chap. 2), the grandmother's doting affection in "Little Red Cap" (*KHM* 26) is described in terms almost befitting a lover. Far more striking, however, is the sudden, seemingly magical appearance of the hag in "The Twelve Brothers" (*KHM* 9), whom the beautiful sister finds standing behind her just after she has fatefully plucked the twelve lilies. While it is likely that the old woman is a witch, and quite possible that she is responsible for the girl's twelve brothers having been changed into ravens, no mention of this is made. On the contrary, the hag's role is rather to advise the sister as to what she must do in order that the brothers may

eventually be restored to her. In this sense, the hag serves here in the conventional function of an older woman as adviser to a maiden about affairs of the heart, thus enjoying vicarious participation in the young love now lost to her. At the same time, her reproach of the girl for having plucked the lilies may echo the sister's inner voice of guilt over her continued cohabitation with the brothers in the forest now that she has reached marriageable age.

A rather similar instance of an older woman in the role of aide and counselor to a nubile maiden in a moment of crisis occurs in "The Robber Bridegroom" (*KHM* 40). As in "The Twelve Brothers," an element of the fantastic is associated with the hag's appearance here. As we remember (Chap. 2), the whole of the bride's lonely visit to her fiancé's house in the forest has the character of a nightmare. The hag's function in this fantastic adventure is to warn the girl of the danger that awaits her in the bridegroom's house and, moreover, to enable her to see with her very eyes what an ogre he is. Thus, if the hag in "The Twelve Brothers" is a projection of the sister's unconscious guilt over incipient incestuous urges, the old housekeeper's exposure of the bridegroom here reflects the girl's anxiety about what might await her on the wedding night. In both cases, the depiction is enhanced by the contrast between the innocent virgin and the older woman who is privy to dark and mysterious secrets.

In "The Goosegirl at the Spring" (*KHM* 179), we find a clear case of an old woman's identification with a young maiden as the potential object of desire. After a handsome young count has helped a humorous old woman carry home her burden, she teases him by implying that he might fall in love with her rather old-looking and extremely ugly goose maiden, whom she addresses as her daughter and who calls her "mother." The hag says to the girl, "Get yourself into the house, my little daughter. It's not proper for you to be alone with a young gentleman. One must not pour oil onto the fire. He could fall in love with you." The hag is speaking only partly in jest; for as the count later discovers when he comes upon the girl bathing her face in a spring (hence the title), she is in reality young and beautiful, and a princess to boot. Thus, the hag's role in bringing about the romantic happy ending is motivated by vicarious participation in dreams of young love. This is further suggested by the circumstance that when the girl's parents and the count arrive in search of the maiden, the hag restores her to her princessly beauty, transforms the house into a castle, and disappears.

II. WITCHES

As the hag's transformation of her house and her disappearance at the end of "The Goosegirl at the Spring" remind us, older women in folktale,

especially when the subject is love, often possess magical powers or knowledge of occult sciences. The fact that these figures are "wise" women, in that sense, does not mean that their roles in these stories and the motivations for their actions are basically different, of course. Their magical powers chiefly serve to enhance the portrayal of their passions as being especially intense, as for example in the familiar type of the resentful or abusive stepmother. Thus in "Little Brother and Little Sister" (*KHM* 11) the stepmother attempts to continue her evil oppression of the brother and sister, after they have run away from home, by casting a spell on all the springs in the forest. Similarly, in "The Six Swans" (*KHM* 49), when the new bride discovers that the husband has hid the children by his deceased wife in the forest, she is not content that she will not have to trouble herself with them. She deceitfully sews a magical charm into the little white silk shirts she makes for them, so that they will be transformed into swans and fly away. And the stepmother in "The Little Lamb and the Little Fish" (*KHM* 141), we remember (Chap. 1), so resented the little brother's and sister's happiness with their playmates on the meadow that she changed the girl into a lamb and the brother into a fish. Not satisfied, she subsequently ordered that the lamb be slaughtered to feed the guests she had invited to dinner. In such depictions, the chief irony is that the stepmothers' magically aided evil acts set in motion events that lead to a happy ending. Indeed, in at least a couple of stories the heroine even manages to appropriate the stepmother's magic for use in fulfilling her dream of bliss with her beloved. The stepdaughter in "Beloved Roland" (*KHM* 56) steals the wicked stepmother's magic wand and thereby foils her evil attempt to catch and destroy the young lovers. And in "The True Bride" (*KHM* 186) the daughter inherits her evil stepmother's magical castle and thus is enabled to attract the attention of numerous suitors, with one of whom she falls in love.

Most often, of course, the hag endowed with magical powers is not related to the hero or the heroine but is a mysterious stranger whom one of the central figures encounters on some fateful occasion. In "The Frog King" (*KHM* 1), for example, we learn only that the prince "had been cast under a spell by an evil witch, and no one could have rescued him from the spring" save the princess alone, as he explains to her after they have married. Since no motive for the witch's spell is given, we may suspect that her purpose was even the benevolent one of ensuring that the prince might marry the girl of his dreams, especially in view of the outcome. Or perhaps the witch's motivation was that given in another story of the animal suitor type, Basile's "The Serpent" (II, 5), where the prince was transformed for seven years into a snake by an ogress whose unbridled desires he had refused to fulfill. Something like this latter motivation may have been involved, too, in "The Old Woman in the Woods" (*KHM* 123) when the witch changed the prince into a tree, allowing him to fly around as a dove for only a few hours each day—particularly when one considers that the condition for his release from the spell is the theft, by the heroine, of a simple ring (like those used in weddings?) from among many jeweled ones on a table in the hag's house.

The most famous curse in all of romantic folktale is surely that placed on the newborn princess in the Sleeping Beauty story. In the Grimms' version, "Little Briar-Rose" (*KHM* 50), the thirteenth wise woman in the father's kingdom avenges herself for not having been invited to the feast celebrating the daughter's birth by declaring that "The princess, on her fifteenth birthday, shall prick herself on a spindle and fall down dead." The curse is then modified by the twelfth wise woman, who had not yet announced her magical gift to the newborn child when her angry peer burst in to disrupt the festivities. Since the twelfth wise woman cannot remove the curse, only mitigate it, she declares that "It shall not be death, into which the princess falls, but only a deep, hundred-year-long sleep." The angry wise woman's specification that the girl is to perish upon reaching her fifteenth birthday indicates that she is thinking ahead to the time when the princess will have reached marriageable age, and that to her mind having to die without experiencing the joys of courting and marrying is the worst fate that could befall a woman. By the same token, the twelfth wise woman's stipulation that death in this case shall mean a prolonged sleep, extending far beyond the normal life expectancy, suggests that she may be imagining how lovely it would be to remain a blossoming maiden forever, as it were, endlessly indulging in youthful dreams of love and romance. That this magical sleep will begin in connection with spinning points in the same direction, insofar as sitting at the spinning wheel is associated with building castles in the air and a woman's pricking herself with a spindle, needle, or the like usually occurs, in folktales, in association with dreams about becoming pregnant.

Though no hint is given as to the age of the wise women, they are surely beyond maidenhood, and are therefore representative of the type of the older woman whose use of her knowledge of occult arts involves an identification with young maidens as objects of desire. Thus it comes as no surprise that the woman at a spinning wheel whom the princess fatefully discovers on her fifteenth birthday should be a true representative of the familiar type of the hag as stranger. Though the hag is not identified with either the twelfth or the thirteenth wise woman, she must be part of the situation they envisioned the princess as confronting. Under other circumstances, one might have expected the hag, who appears kindly and friendly enough, to initiate the girl into the secrets of love and marriage, instead

of enlightening her about the—in the princess's case forbidden—art of spinning.[2] The result is nevertheless essentially the same. When the princess awakens from her long sleep, it is no longer a spinning wheel and spindle she sees before her but the far more appropriate object of curiosity and desire for a girl her age: a handsome young prince whose passion has moved him to accept the challenge of making his way through the seemingly impenetrable thorns (hence the Grimms' title "Dornröschen") so that he might court the beautiful blossoming rose that lies slumbering within. What more appealing dream, or "castle in the air," could the hag at her spinning wheel have conjured up in the imagination of the adolescent princess?

In Perrault's "The Beauty Sleeping in the Forest," from which the name of the Sleeping Beauty type is taken, the curse is uttered by an old, reclusive fairy who had not been invited to the feast because she had not come out of her tower for fifty years and thus was presumed to be dead or to have fallen under a spell. In this telling, the angry fairy, before making her declaration, hears the list of magical qualities with which the other fairies, in the order of their youth, have endowed the baby princess. The youngest fairy wished that the princess might be "the most beautiful person in the world," and the wishes of the others then served further to endow her with all the spiritual and social graces appropriate to enhance that beauty. If the old fairy already was angry, this list of magical endowments could only give rise to additional feelings of envy and bitterness, especially since she appears to possess no such charms and graces herself.

Unlike the wise women in the Grimms' version, Perrault's angry fairy does not specify the age at which the princess is to die, only that it is to be by piercing her hand with a spindle. Meanwhile, one of the younger fairies, anticipating that in her rage the old fairy will make some evil pronouncement, has hidden herself behind the tapestry. It is left to this young fairy to envision the fateful event happening, as it then does, when the princess has reached marriageable age (fifteen or sixteen). She specifies, namely, that the girl, having fallen into a deep, hundred-year sleep instead of dying, will be awakened by a young prince. And if there remained any doubt, in Perrault's version, that the fairies—the younger ones, at least—identify with the princess as the eventual object of ardent passion, the narrator makes the implication clear by remarking that, though his source is silent on the matter, it appears that the good fairy has afforded the princess, during her long sleep, "The pleasure of pleasant dreams." That those dreams were about a handsome prince arriving to court her is made clear by the princess's greeting to him on awakening: "Is it you, my prince? You've certainly kept me waiting a long time."[3]

In three of Basile's stories one finds similar curses or prophecies regarding a daughter, though in only one of these is there any hint of a witch's or fairy's identification with the girl. In "The Little Slave Girl" (II, 8), Cilla, having conceived a child by swallowing a rose petal, brings the daughter to the fairies so that they might raise her. One of the fairies stumps her toe in her haste to see for herself just how beautiful the child is, and angrily declares that when the girl reaches her seventh year her mother will forget to remove from the daughter's hair the comb with which she has been grooming her, and that this will cause the child to die. While the fairy's stumping of her toe excuses her ill temper, one suspects that she acts out of envy over the girl's beauty—like the mother in the Snow White story, who herself uses a poisoned comb to groom the daughter.

In Basile's "Sun, Moon, and Talia" (V, 5), the story in his collection that most resembles the Sleeping Beauty tales of Perrault and the Grimms, the prophecy is made not by a fairy or a wise woman but by the wise men and prophets of the kingdom. Here the prophecy is not a curse, nor a declaration motivated by ill will, but on the contrary something like an expression of doting concern that the beautiful little princess might in one way or another be adversely affected by becoming involved with the distaff chore of spinning. Thus, the soothsayers do not specify in their prophecy that the girl shall die or fall into a deathlike sleep (as indeed happens), but vaguely foretell that great danger threatens her from a fiber of flax. Finally, in Basile's third story involving such a prophecy, "The Face" (III, 3), the danger is similarly foretold by male soothsayers. In this case, the peril envisioned quite obviously has erotic overtones, for they warn that the girl (here she is no longer an infant) "runs the risk of having the main sluice of life uncorked by a master bone" (*un osso maestro* 'a thigh bone of an animal'). In the various versions of this part of the Sleeping Beauty story, therefore, the curse or prophecy is made under circumstances which suggest that the soothsayers' underlying or secret concern is with the girl's potential for becoming the object of passionate desire.[4]

In other stories in the collections by the Grimms and by Basile, older women with magical powers place various obstacles in the paths of maidens destined to fulfill young dreams of love. In "Jorinda and Joringel" (*KHM* 69), an old witch transforms all the young virgins who venture too close to her castle into birds, imprisons them in baskets, and places the baskets in a room in the castle. As the storyteller roguishly reports, "She had surely seven thousand such baskets with such rare birds in her castle." To make matters worse for the imprisoned maidens, anyone else who gets within one hundred paces of the castle is frozen in his tracks.[5] In "The Herb Donkey" (*KHM* 122), a hag uses her daughter's appeal to gain possession of a youth's magical gifts, and the girl is forced to do her mother's bidding even though she is in love with the young man. Similarly, in Basile's "Rosella" (III, 9) the girl's mother uses occult powers in her attempt to

prevent the daughter's elopement; then, failing that, she uses them to make the girl's beloved forget all about her. And in "The Dove" (II, 7) the mother likewise tries to destroy the daughter's dream of love. First, she assigns seemingly impossible tasks for the lover to fulfill before he can marry the girl. Then, when that does not succeed because the daughter makes use of magical arts learned from the mother to aid the prince in completing the tasks, she issues a magical curse that with the first kiss the prince receives (as it turns out, it is from his mother) he will lose all memory of the daughter.

The most famous of these stories about a magical older woman's efforts to prevent the fulfillment of young desire is certainly "Rapunzel" (*KHM* 12). The hag's demand that the father forfeit the child his pregnant wife is carrying in exchange for the rampions from the hag's garden the wife craves seems motivated by desire for a child. We can imagine that even as a girl the hag was so ugly that no man desired her, or that like the sorceress in "Jorinda and Joringel" perhaps or like the type of the haughty princess, she found the thought of the loss of virginity repugnant. In any case, she obviously perceives the foster daughter's subsequent arrival at puberty as a threat to the continuance of their relationship; for when Rapunzel reaches the age of twelve, the hag closes her up in a tower in the forest.

Though the hag is described as a sorceress, she actually works no magic. The only wondrous element in the story is that, as the tower has neither door nor stairway, the hag is able to use Rapunzel's incredibly long tresses to pull herself up to the small window that is the sole entrance. The young prince who discovers the girl's presence in the tower is similarly able to avail himself of this means of entry. This property of Rapunzel's hair is a magical endowment, if it can be called that, which was given to her at birth or with the arrival at puberty, as an added token of her beauty and desirability.

Even if the sorceress is responsible for this remarkable "gift," once it has been given she no longer controls the use to which it may be put. Indeed, we may suspect that the hag has allowed the girl's hair to grow because issuing the command "Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair for me"—much as a bridegroom might say to a bride on the wedding night—provides her a form of sexual gratification, as recompense for the erotic fulfillment she likely has never known. Precisely this need on the hag's part leads to the defeat of her dream, because it serves to teach Rapunzel an art familiar to girls not so jealously hidden away as she, namely, how to help hoist a lover into one's bedroom (in those days, usually by means of a rope and a basket, hence perhaps the German expression *jemandem einen Korb geben* 'to reject an offer of marriage'—literally 'to give someone a basket', as when the girl dropped the rope, leaving the would-be lover

with the basket). That the hag's feelings toward Rapunzel are essentially those of a jealous lover is suggested, too, by the wording of her curse of the prince once his liaison with Rapunzel has been discovered: " 'Aha,' she sneeringly cried, 'you want to fetch the dearest lady, but the beautiful bird is no longer sitting in the nest and sings no more; the cat [referring to herself?] has fetched it and will scratch out your eyes for good measure. Rapunzel is lost to you; you will never behold her again.' "[6]

This type of the envious older woman who holds a beautiful young maiden captive is encountered in other stories as well. In Basile's version of the Rapunzel story, "Petrosinella" (II, 1), the element of possessiveness, as opposed to jealous love, is emphasized. When the hag learns from a neighboring gossip about the prince's nocturnal visits to the girl, she is not seized by passionate rage but calmly contents herself with the belief that a magical spell she has cast on the girl will prevent her escape.[7] In two of the Grimms' stories the older woman seeks to prevent the girl's marriage by assigning seemingly impossible tasks to her suitors ("The Drummer" [*KHM* 193] and "The Six Servants" [*KHM* 134]; in the latter story, the older woman is not a witch but the girl's mother, a queen who has ordered that all of the young men who fail to fulfill the tasks be decapitated). Yet in Basile's "The Three Crowns" (IV, 6), by contrast, the devotion of a witch, to whose house the girl has been transported, is indicated by her providing the maiden with magical means for venturing safely into the world, where she finds and wins a lover.

The most passionate reaction of a sorceress to a girl's budding charms is found in the famous tale of Snow White ("Little Snow White" [*KHM* 53]). This is a story not of possessive love or mere envy but of jealous vanity. The stepmother (in some versions it is the girl's own mother) cannot abide the thought that the daughter's beauty surpasses her own.[8] Her reaction to this perception is the naked urge to kill. Once the queen has discovered that her order to her huntsman to slay the girl has failed to produce the desired result, she is reduced to having to make the attempt herself.

The means the queen chooses for killing Snow White reflects her intense preoccupation with the matter of female sexual appeal and casts her in the unflattering, comic role of the ugly hag who compensates herself for her lack of captivating charms by vicariously identifying with a blossoming maiden. Thus in her guise as an old peddler woman she offers to enhance the girl's appearance with a new bodice lace, then to groom her with a comb, and finally to render her, in effect, a full daughter of Eve or Aphrodite by handing her an apple. The stepmother thereby betrays her own sense of what it means to be a woman, or what means most to a woman.[9] And the fact that these tempting gifts are offered out of an intent to kill testifies

further to the queen's recognition that the girl's youthful charms are superior to her own fading allure. Insofar as her jealous vanity was premature or anticipatory, arising when the girl was still only seven, it is rendered that much more amusing. And if the jealous queen and the mother who wished for a beautiful baby daughter are, as in some versions, one and the same, the mother's subsequent rage once she perceives the daughter as a potential rival is sublimely incongruous—quite in accord with mankind's paradoxical nature. The queen's mirror, of course, is magical only in the sense that it answers her from the depths of her own jealous vanity.[10] Moreover, if one thinks of the queen as the girl's own mother instead of a stepmother, the mirror speaks with the voice of a narcissism that cannot conceive of any serious threat in the matter of beauty except that which might issue from one's own flesh and blood.[11]

III. FAIRIES

As critics long since have remarked, fairies as such do not play a role in the Grimms' collection. One does find, however, the type of the older woman as magical helper of a maiden in distress. Though these figures tend to be described, like their counterparts in Basile, as wise women, sorceresses, or even witches, they have the same function as the good fairies in Perrault, in Madame D'Aulnoy, and in stories by other authors in that French tradition which is responsible for our term "fairy tale." Like the fairies in Perrault's Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty tales, their entry into the stories tends to occur as rather a magical wish fulfillment in response to the emotional situation of the young heroine. The role of such kindly, magical older women thus has something of the character of a dream experience; and these figures tend to be not so much persons in their own right as reflexes of the psychic state of the maidens who receive their aid.

In some tales involving this type of character, the magical older woman serves as a substitute mother. In "The Holy Virgin's Child" (*KHM* 3) this foster parent is none other than St. Mary, the veritable heavenly mother.[12] Here the girl is adopted, as it were, by the Holy Mother when she is three years old, because her parents are too poor to be able to feed her. The story focuses, though, on the girl's passage from childhood to maidenhood. When the daughter has turned fourteen, the Virgin goes off on a journey and entrusts to her the keys to the thirteen rooms of the heavenly kingdom—suggesting a possible association of paradise with the girl's thirteen years of childhood. She tells the daughter not to open the thirteenth door, saying that that room is forbidden to her (aside from the number's association with bad luck or evil, it may allude here to the girl's arrival at nubility and the concomitant awakening desire or curiosity and beginning

loss of sexual innocence). Although what the girl discovers behind forbidden door is the Holy Trinity sitting "in fire and splendor," no corpses of Bluebeard's wives or some other scene destructive of child innocence in any usual sense, the effect on the girl is similar to Eve's e of the apple: she has acquired the knowledge of good and evil in the pr of committing a forbidden act and then of lying about it; and the res that, as the Virgin tells her, she is "no longer worthy to be in hea The telltale gold that rubbed off on the girl's finger when she succu to the urge to touch the Trinity is a symbol of her coming of age, rec God's words to Adam and Eve that once they have eaten from the t knowledge they must leave the garden, for if they were now allow eat from its tree of life they would be his equals (*rührte an dem Glan* the metaphorical meaning "to tarnish the image," in the sense of (ishing, or appropriating, something of God's glory).

The Holy Virgin's putting the girl to the test, and punishing h having failed it, would appear antithetical to the role of the good except that as a result of her expulsion from heaven the girl is subseq discovered by a king who is out hunting and who takes her home wi and marries her. Thus, the girl's "punishment" leads to the fulfilln the maidenly dream of marrying and becoming a queen; and the n foster mother's testing of the girl has indeed made possible—or, p logically speaking, simply marked—this passage from childhood to anhood. From the pious viewpoint of this tale, however, the girl is a bride insofar as she has not accepted the obligation of confessi repenting the trespass that led to the fulfillment of her maidenly The Virgin punishes her stubborn refusal to confess and repent by away her newborn children. As a result, the young queen is suspe having eaten her children and is condemned as an ogress. Once the h faced with death, meets the pious obligation to confess and repe children are restored to her; and with heaven's blessing she is pe to enjoy the full measure of earthly bliss as a wife and mother.

This connection between a magical older woman's testing of a girl's virtue and a maiden's dream of beauty, wealth, or marriage uncommon. In "Frau Holle" (*KHM* 24), the girl's sojourn with a sul mother in a magical subterranean realm does not result in marriag in the compensatory fulfillment of a desire to be praised, loved, warded for goodness and virtue; for this is not a tale about the pas womanhood but one about the yearnings of an abused and pers stepdaughter whose despair is so intense as to engender an urge to s The girl's dreaming while spinning at the well may be about a Charming, but it is more likely about a mother's love; and her obe to the stepmother's demand that she fetch the spool she has absentmi