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Freudian Melancholy and Bodily Mutilation in “Little Snow White” and “The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood”

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Abstract

What is left to say about fairy tales that has not already been said before? In this essay, I answer this question by approaching two famous fairy tales, The Grimm Brothers' "Little Snow White" (1812) and Charles Perrault's "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" (1897) with two theoretical frameworks in mind: Freudian psychoanalysis and disability studies. Both Freudian psychology and disability studies are mainstays in critical discourse of fairy tales, but neither Freud nor contemporary critics have combined the two in a way that addresses the pathological condition known as melancholia and its relationship to the perception of disabilities. My analysis of these two tales hinges on the behaviors and fates of the three elderly women in these tales—the queen in "Snow White," and the fairy and ogress in "Sleeping Beauty"—and specifically how their internal struggles with melancholia manifest themselves into disturbing and inappropriate behavior that cannot be dismissed simply as older women resenting their younger, and prettier, female counterparts.

My thesis traces how their violent behaviors stem from a loss of status that they experience—a loss that occurs on a subconscious level that then dictates their conscious actions. This loss is what triggers their melancholia, a type of mourning characterized by a significant loss in self-esteem. Based on my close reading of these three women's actions, I suggest that they cannot process the fact that their relevance in their respective communities has faded (the new loss), which becomes self-hate on a subconscious level, but a hatred of what Fred refers to as a substitutive object on a conscious level. The queen follows a destructive path toward trying to eat Snow White to the point where she wants to eat her bodily organs, while the fairy places an evil curse on Sleeping Beauty. Sleeping Beauty's mother-in-law, the ogress, then demands she be fed the murdered bodies of Sleeping Beauty and her two children.

What this essay argues is that their melancholia is a result of feeling as though they have a disability once their status has been taken from them. Whether it is their physical looks or their roles as queens and important fairies of the kingdom, without these titles that bring them self-worth, they feel diminished and outcasted on a level akin to those with physical and psychological disabilities that are seen in other tales. All three women feel belittled and blame that on everyone around them, particularly the two young women, Snow White and Sleeping Beauty. However, my argument clarifies that it is *not* this perceived disability that makes them pariahs of their community; their outrageously violent behavior is what causes pushback from other characters who feel as though they are left with no choice but to excommunicate or even kill the queen, fairy, and ogress to keep these threats in check. This essay reveals how the pairing of Freudian psychology with the field of disability studies can provide new insights on not just fictional literary texts, but perhaps the perception of disabilities in real life.

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By

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Freudian theories and fairy tales have maintained a well-established relationship in literary criticism for decades. My reading of Charles Perrault's 1697 "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" and The Grimm Brothers' 1812 "Snow White" prompted me to closely read the behavioral patterns of three essential female characters: the queen, the elderly fairy, and the ogress with Freud's theory of melancholia in mind. In Perrault's story, Sleeping Beauty grows into a beautiful young woman and quickly meets the terrifying wrath of the elderly fairy who feels snubbed after not receiving an invitation to her christening. The lovely princess later encounters the same animus from her mother-in-law, an ogress, who wishes to kill her much in the way the fairy wants to see Sleeping Beauty suffer. Fortunately for Sleeping Beauty, both the fairy and the ogress fail in this pursuit. In the Grimms' "Snow White," the young Snow White faces a similar conflict; once she grows up, her stepmother, the queen, pursues a relentless mission to have her murdered in order to regain the title of "fairest in all the land." The queen also falls short of exacting this unreasonable punishment as she eventually is forced to put on red-hot iron shoes and dance to her death. Regardless of three women's multiple failed attempts to get their way, the motifs of resentment and revenge are prominent in each text. All three elderly women—the fairy, the ogress, and the queen—exhibit traits of Freudian melancholia, something neither Freud nor other critics have paid any particular attention to, in relation to both tales and generally speaking, the entire fairy tale genre. My research traces the pathology behind their violent manifestation of melancholic symptoms, and how these symptoms connect to the tenets of disability studies—another familiar critical framework for the fairy tale genre.

For centuries, fairy tales have been used as tools to reinforce certain social mores and to teach children moral values and conditioned gendered behaviors. Even today, when children and adults alike hear the names of the famous fairy tales "Sleeping Beauty" and "Little Snow White,"

their minds likely conjure the images of princes saving the initially ill-fated princesses and their all-too-predictable happily ever-afters. Critics and fans alike have spent decades mulling over the portrayals of male and female characters throughout fairy tales—and how they affect the social development of women especially—from across the globe. For example, in *Women Hating*, Andrea Dworkin has this to say regarding literature's influence on human culture: "in the personae of the fairy tale—the wicked witch, the beautiful princess, the heroic prince—we find what the culture would have us know about who we are. The point is that we have not formed that ancient world—it has formed us" (32). Madonna Kolbenschlag's *Kiss Sleeping Beauty Goodbye* also explored women's sociological identity through the lens of fairy tales. Adrienne Rich's "Compulsory Sexuality and Lesbian Existence" argues at one point that fairy tales are a medium used to perpetuate gender roles and male sexual dominance. Lastly, Kate Bernheimer's *Mirror, Mirror on the Wall: Women Writers Explore Their Favorite Fairy Tales* assembles twenty-eight female authors to "begin a conversation among [them] about how fairy tales affected their thinking" (xxvii). Yet, many critics often overlook one of the arguably equally common sights in these texts: the scornful, often elderly mothers.

While some scholars have devoted thoughtful discourse to the plight of both young princesses and the spurned female figures of fairy tales, their work is often focused on popular Freudian and feminist critical approaches regarding female identity politics and gendered psychological behaviors. Simone de Beauvoir posits a common sentiment in her 1949 book *The Second Sex*: "many of the faults for which women are reproached—mediocrity, laziness, frivolity—simply express the fact that their horizon is closed…after being enclosed within the limits of her ego or her household, she is reproached for her narcissism, her egotism, with all their train: vanity, touchiness, malice," and so on (106-108). This passage illuminates de

Beauvoir's argument that over history, men have controlled and treated women as the "other" both physically and psychologically, leaving women confined to prescribed roles (as exemplified in fairy tales). De Beauvoir dedicates time to fairy tales and specifically mentions the two young women in the Grimms' and Perrault's tales. In *The Second Sex,* she also explains how there are the "so-called passive heroines" Sleeping Beauty and Snow White, who "learn that in order to be happy [they] must be loved; in order to be loved, [they have] to wait for love. Woman is Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella, Snow White, the one who receives and endures" (qtd. in Kawan 35). She also explains how "most often the only virtue [young female characters] are required to possess is beauty. Therefore, it is comprehensible that care for her physical appearance may become for the young girl a real obsession" (qtd. in Kawan 35). De Beauvoir's assessment of young female characters rings true for Sleeping Beauty and Snow White in that their beauty is their most valuable trait, but my research is not intended to merely reinforce all of this longstanding commentary on gender roles. Instead, an alternative reading of these tales reveals how the older women—the fairy, ogress, and queen—in "Sleeping Beauty" and "Snow White" are not really criticized for their mediocrity, vanity, and the like. In fact, the only criticism (or rejection) they face comes when the psychological troubles brewing in their minds manifest into such outrageous actions that other characters feel the need to intervene. The presence of their melancholic symptoms indicates that the sequence of events in both tales are much more significant than and therefore worth much closer scrutiny than the examples cited above. In other words, any cultural or gendered bounds to which the women might be tethered are not really to blame—their unfettered melancholia is.

Though de Beauvoir's words, and the works of many others, certainly have their merits when it comes to the assessment of young female characters and the expectations that are placed

upon them, they fall a bit short with respect to the depiction of women in fairy tales, as they are not solely hinged upon only patriarchal, misogynistic ideologies. To their credit, numerous analyses of these tales, including de Beauvoir's, do, in fact, draw comparisons between the young, sprightly princesses and the old mothers and women cast as shrews or embittered widows—and not just the prince/princess relationship. However, one overlooked interpretation goes far beyond the standard dissatisfaction that elderly women in fairy tales experience once what de Beauvoir refers to as their "short-lived beauty and erotic attractiveness" fades. In Perrault's "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood," the prince's mother, the ogress, starts acting out on her beastly urge to eat humans after the death of her husband and the marriage of her son, and the elderly fairy curses the body of the young Sleeping Beauty. In the Grimm Brothers' "Little Snow White," the queen becomes obsessively fixated with wanting to consume the bodily organs of Snow White. There is a dearth of critical work on the application of disability studies and Freudian melancholia toward the three women's unmitigated quest for violence along with the repeated references to the body. In her essay delineating the various disabilities in children's fairy tales, Vivian Yenika-Agbaw provides an analysis of *The Little Mermaid*, *Thumbelina*, and *The Ugly Duckling* regarding their various disabilities, in which she states, "the fact that the characters have disabilities defines their place in the social order within their imagined worlds" (92). Though this is somewhat similar to my own research—especially Yenika-Agbaw's focus on the duckling's ugliness, which mirrors my analysis of the three women's ugliness framed as a disability—the three characters discussed in her work are all youthful and do not engage in violent behaviors as a result of their disabilities, which leaves the aforementioned missing piece concerning Freudian theories and fairy tales.

To reiterate the argument presented earlier, the queen, the fairy, and the ogress do *not* perform such appalling behaviors merely as reactions to the societal restrictions of which men are prominently the arbiters; the second half of that argument is missing. Their reactions stem from their feelings of being displaced from the roles they hold in their respective communities. The displaced Queen, the elderly fairy, and the ogress act this way because of their perceived limited choices—they appear to feel as though they do not have much of an alternative apart from being attractive queens or fairies, or overall motherly figures (for all the wrong reasons)—and as a result, feel as though they are physically deformed and disfigured following their inability to mourn their respective losses. This refers to the condition known as melancholia. However, given the nature of melancholia, it is in, in fact, their psyche that has been disfigured without them realizing it. Freud describes melancholia as a form of grief that differs from mourning in that it is a "morbid pathological disposition" with the potential to create harmful and even dangerous consequences for the melancholiac (Freud 153). While the fates of the three women in these tales may be a consequence of living as the "other," second sex, their actions go to extremes to say the least, and assuredly represent how the feelings behind being "disabled," according to long-established and prescribed norms of the able-bodied majority, have substantial social and psychological impacts beyond simply making the other feel excluded from everyday life.

For both tales, the male characters are treated more as ancillary, rather than primary, figures, which makes room for my argument that fairy tales are more than just simply misogynistic texts that focus on men's experiences. Right from the start of "Snow White," for example, the king's presence is swept aside as his new wife, the Queen, is introduced in the opening of the tale to take center stage. There are no descriptors to indicate either his looks or his

personality, whereas the queen is described as “a beautiful woman” but also “proud and arrogant, and she could not stand it if anyone might surpass her in beauty” (Grimm 1). Similarly, in “Sleeping Beauty,” the old fairy is quickly introduced as bitter and vengeful. Upon hearing she initially received no invitation to the princess’ christening and that “only seven [golden caskets] had been made for the [younger] fairies, the old creature believed that she was intentionally slighted and muttered threats between her breath” (Perrault 1). Likewise, the prince’s ogress of a mother is introduced as untrustworthy and dangerous (apart from the implicit fact that her ogrish appearance is likely unattractive): “his mother was not so easily hoodwinked;” “but he did not dare to trust her with his secret;” “he was afraid of his mother, for she came from a race of ogres;” “it was whispered at the court that she had ogrish instincts . . . when little children were near her” (Perrault 4).

The male characters in “Snow White” and “Sleeping Beauty” are somewhat unmemorable, unlike the women who are given distinct traits. The king’s lack of presence in “Snow White” is similar to the treatment of Sleeping Beauty’s father, the king, who is simply described as a grieving man because he and his wife cannot bear children. Later, the only information readers get about the ogress’ husband is that he married her for her money, an unusual reversal of the gold-digger trope assigned to superficial and flat female characters elsewhere. All of this affirms my previous point regarding fairy tales and their commonplace and harsh treatment of women. The neutral snippets of information that readers get about these three male characters echo what Jeana Jorgenson notes in her essay “Masculinity and Men’s Bodies in Fairy Tales: Youth, Violence, and Transformation.” She writes that in many fairy tales, “fewer words to evaluate physical attractiveness or morality are used with men than with women” (351). In her study, Joregenson observes traits used for male characters in selected fairy tales, noting

that words like “handsome,” “rich,” “human,” “strong,” and “gray” are used for men, but that “there is only one subjective adjective in this bunch, ‘handsome.’” She notes that the rest can be fairly objectively used to describe a person’s state of being, in contrast to “the high number of physical evaluative words that were used exclusively or predominantly with women,” such as “wicked, wise, or evil” (347). Despite these examples from both tales maintaining stereotypical depictions of women as vain and envious figures—not coincidentally at the hands of male authors—all three women push these qualities above and beyond any stereotypical female persona and attempt to commit horrendous deeds as a result of their melancholic tendencies. Indeed, male characters do seem to receive a little more grace and a little less judgement than female characters; however, the queen, ogress, and elderly fairy’s actions reveal far more than just the detrimental effects of codified gender norms, but rather, the intricacies of a warped mind.

Freud had a strong interest in fairy tales, which he makes clear in “The Occurrence in Dreams of Material from Fairy Tales,” when he states that the interpretation of their narratives “confirms our recognition of the important place which folk fairy tales have acquired in the mental life of our children,” with attention also given to the “relations between the fairy tales and the history of the dreamer’s childhood and his neurosis” (1). Freud’s emphasis on fairy tales bolsters his extensive work on dreams and the exploration of subconscious human desires, but the mention of “neurosis” should lead us to focus specifically on the pathology behind the Freudian condition of melancholia—something Freud did not apply toward any specific fairy tales. Additionally, as stated earlier, scholars have combined Freudian psychanalysis and fairy tales in a narrow scope, with many skimming past his work on loss and grief (work that Freud applied toward fairy tales, but not with melancholia in mind). For example, Helga Benediktsdóttir explains the oft-discussed cornerstones in the psychoanalysis of fairy tales: an

oedipal diagnosis of the Queen in “Snow White” and attachment theory in “Hansel and Gretel” and “The Little Match Girl.” Similarly, Ben Rubenstein offers a popular interpretation of “Cinderella” focused on penis envy and castration. As for the aforementioned loss and grief, Freud argues that there are two ways that people experience a loss of some kind. In “Mourning and Melancholia,” Freud says mourning is “regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as the fatherland, liberty, an ideal, and so on” (153). The queen, the fairy, and the ogress all try to grieve the aforementioned abstract ideals that they hold in their minds both consciously and subconsciously but fail to fully do so, leaving them with feelings of utter despondency and animosity. With a normal mourning experience, individuals may feel sad and detached from others for some time, but they eventually return to a sound state of mind and can function without social or professional intervention. Melancholia, however, is an entirely different reaction to loss, the “morbid, pathological disposition” I introduced earlier that is characterized by “profoundly painful dejection, abrogation of interest in the outside world” and a significant blow to self-esteem and self-worth, which is “absent in grief” (Freud 153).

The queen in “Snow White” demonstrates these melancholic symptoms early in the story. The loss of her supreme beauty absolutely consumes her on a profoundly disturbing level, and she can think of nothing else but to destroy Snow White, an innocent young girl, once her magic mirror tells her, “Snow White is a thousand times fairer than [her]” (Grimm 1). She becomes hell-bent on regaining her lost title as fairest in all the land, with her self-esteem depending on it: “from that hour on whenever she looked at Snow White her heart turned over inside her body, so great was her hatred for the girl. The envy and pride grew ever greater, like a weed in her heart, until she had no peace day and night” (Grimm 1). Simply having Snow White killed or even

banished is not enough; the queen orders a huntsman to "kill her, and as proof that she is dead bring her lungs and her liver back," an unusually specific and heinous demand, which will be more closely examined later in this essay (Grimm 2). Rather than embrace her stepdaughter with open arms, she aims to eliminate her existence. Though relations with stepfamily members can sometimes be tenuous for both parties, to call this an abnormal reaction would be an understatement.

The fairy in "Sleeping Beauty" is no different, as she chooses "in token of spite" to curse the princess with a fate of "prick[ing] her hand with a spindle and [dying]" as revenge for not receiving an invitation to the party in which the princess had no say, given that she was an infant at the time (Perrault 1). Meanwhile, earlier in the text, the narrator presumes that she did not receive an invite because "for more than fifty years, she had never quitted the tower in which she lived, and people had supposed her to be dead or bewitched" (1). After word spreads that the elderly fairy is, in fact, alive and well, "by the king's orders a place was laid for her," but that is still not enough for her because the younger fairies got their gold trinkets, while it was impossible for hers to be crafted in time for the party (1). In this case, she is not a victim of being "too ugly" to be able to attend an important event. The people in the kingdom simply had not seen her for half a century and imagined that she is either dead (an honest and understandable assumption to make after that much time has elapsed) or had been cast under a spell by some outside force—which would be out of their control anyway. But as proven through her pathological behavior, the old fairy makes this oversight personal, convinced that the young, pretty fairies (and more outrageously, perhaps even the infant Sleeping Beauty herself) are conspiring with the rest of the kingdom against her because she is supposedly too old and ugly to be relevant.

The ogress in “Sleeping Beauty” also goes to great lengths to inflict harm on others, as she deliberately sends her daughter-in-law, the now-grown Sleeping Beauty, and her two children into a country mansion deep in the forest in order to “more easily gratify her horrible longings” by eating them (Perrault 5). Sleeping Beauty and her children are members of the ogress’ family, but this clearly does not matter, with her even requesting that the chief steward of the mansion serve her soon-to-be butchered granddaughter, Dawn, “with piquant sauce”—later insisting that Sleeping Beauty be served with “the same sauce as [the steward prepared] with her children” (5). She enjoys these musings and schemes to the point where she insists that her own flesh and blood (and wife of her only son) be turned into gourmet meals for her indulgence. Though her actions are not cannibalistic since she is not a human herself, her behavior bears a strong similarity to the queen’s actions in “Snow White” explained earlier. The ogress’ urge to eat her family members does not arise from the basic need of food, as she refuses the acceptable means of nourishment for a creature such as herself. If she simply wanted to dine on human flesh, while simultaneously perpetuating the expectation that she must give in to her “horrible longings” as the grotesque creature that she is, she could have quickly found non-familial victims; instead, she pursues even more disturbing avenues to do so, all while being unprovoked by Sleeping Beauty and her children.

After looking closely at all these moments, readers might feel inclined to point a finger at toxic societal and cultural standards, which imply that women earn and maintain their value primarily from their physical appearance, but I want to emphasize that there is much more going on here. For the queen in “Snow White,” had this been a smooth progression from sadness to placation as healthy mourning dictates, she would have gradually lamented, but then accepted, her fleeting looks, realizing this is an inevitable course of life and aging; perhaps then she could

devote time to more productive pursuits, such as how to better serve her constituents, or even herself and her own husband in their marriage. The same can be said for the aged fairy, who could try to serve as a mentor for the younger fairies rather than resent them and thus curse the baby Sleeping Beauty. Lastly, the ogress could have opted to defy the notion that labels ogres as ghastly monsters by turning into a loving grandmother at the very least, since they are her son's own children. Freudian scholars might look to the useful links between melancholia and depression, but there is something more sinister in these two stories. None of these three women respond appropriately because their melancholic condition makes it impossible once they feel that they are disfigured or "disabled" in some way, which will be explained in correspondence with Freud's theories.

The perverse behavior of the queen, the ogress, and the elderly fairy is more than skin-deep. For one reason or another, they feel a void in their existence, while "perpetually taking offense and behaving as if they have been treated with great injustice" (Freud 159). In the case of the queen, her great injustice stems from Snow White usurping her place as fairest woman in the land; the old fairy feels utter contempt toward both the younger fairies and ultimately Sleeping Beauty because without them, there would be no forgotten invitation or table placeholder to subtly remind her of what she thinks is her diminished role in the kingdom. The ogress takes great offense at Sleeping Beauty "stealing" her son's attention, which comes as a blow right after the death of her husband: "at the end of two years, the king died, and the prince found himself on the throne. He then made public announcement of his marriage," which he kept secret from her (Perrault 4). In other words, these three women feel reduced to the status of almost nothing following these events.

Whatever this nothing means, they cannot seem to fully make out, as Freud explains: the melancholic individual is aware "a loss of [some] kind has occurred, but one cannot clearly see what it is that has been lost" and "cannot consciously perceive what [she] has lost either." He then emphasizes that "melancholia is in some way related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness, in contradistinction to mourning, in which there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious" (160). What the queen, fairy, and ogress *do* know is that something must be wrong and something must be done to rectify their circumstances. In other words, unlike an example of mourning the death of someone they hold dear, "the object has not perhaps actually died, but has been lost as an object of love" (161). Their abstract objects of "love" are their feelings of self-worth and beauty, with the self-worth of the ogress becoming compromised once her role as mother becomes null and void after the marriage of her son and Sleeping Beauty. Though her husband does die, she does not seem to be that upset about it, as proven by the lack of textual evidence to indicate this—especially considering that readers learn how "the king had only married her for her wealth," establishing the point that there was not much love between them to begin with (Perrault 4). The ogress likely does not mourn his actual death as a person she loved, but instead struggles to mourn her lost status in the wake of his death, in combination with her son's marriage. Some of this information may seem obvious to readers, but for all three women, what is really occurring is "an impoverishment of the ego on a grand scale" in ways they cannot fully comprehend, causing them to engage in violent and outrageous behaviors (Freud 155). Since these intangible "love objects" are now gone, they are left no choice but to enact their pathological feelings on what Freud calls a substitutive object, whom I have determined are Snow White and Sleeping Beauty and her children: characters whose existences rattle the very cores of the three women's egos.

This internal conflict with the new object is what Freud calls *object-cathexis*; as previously mentioned, with melancholia, the separation regarding this loss they experience is improper or incomplete, and their desires to be beautiful, valued, and important now revert inward to the ego, rather than attach themselves to a new [healthy] object or ideal (Freud 159). In short, their egos undergo a schism, in which the one side, its reality-based reasoning, cannot reconcile with the other side—a new, internalized attachment to this "object." As a result, their egos cannot suppress these feelings of inadequacy, leading them to seek unwarranted revenge on innocent characters. With the failed attempt of internalizing their beauty, then, comes an internalization of self-hate. For example, each time the queen looks in the mirror while Snow White is still a living threat, she quite literally sees her bruised, damaged—and most importantly, unattractive—ego right before her own eyes. After the mirror tells the queen yet again that Snow White "is still a thousand times fairer than" her, she knows "her envy would give her no rest" as looking in the mirror causes too much despair (Grimm 4). The fairy in "Sleeping Beauty" associates the infant princess with the false premise that she is too old to be valued, thus deciding that the only possible solution is to curse her, a much younger female character, with an imminent death to remove her from her unconscious feelings of self-loathing.

The ogress also "loves" her original status as a wealthy queen, considering how it softens the fact that she is a monster in the eyes of everyone else. She also tries especially hard to show love toward her son, perhaps on a mission to prove to humans she is capable of love to some degree, but then sees the presence of Sleeping Beauty and her children as stark reminders that she is now only an ugly, widowed ex-queen whose own son cannot fully trust her. All of their thoughts are marred by nonexistent threats, which "culminate in a delusional expectation of punishment" as they try to regain what is lost in shocking and gruesome ways (Freud 155). Their

desire for revenge is worsened once their loss of beauty manifests itself, as Freud explains that their libidos cannot attach themselves to someone they "ought to love" because of a "real injury or disappointment concerned with the loved person," which delivers a devastating blow to the ego (158, 159). In this case, the ones they ought to love, Snow White, and Sleeping Beauty and her children, have created an "injury" to the respective egos of the queen, fairy, and ogress. The queen and the fairy both "love" the idea of beauty (and the weight it holds in their respective kingdoms) but also resent it for its fleeing nature once it is gone, which then underscores the depth of their melancholic state.

Freud later argues that for melancholiacs, "hate comes into the operation on this substitutive object, abusing it, debasing it, making it suffer and deriving sadistic satisfaction from this suffering" (Freud 161-162). The fairy in Perrault's tale acts in accordance with Freud's description, set on ruining the life of an innocent princess who subconsciously represents everything she no longer has. Rather than just setting up an "easy" situation where she can be murdered in a short timeframe, the fairy dooms her to a life of paranoia and fear by condemning her to die by something as trivial and commonplace as a spindle. This kind of calculated malice garners great satisfaction from such prolonged suffering. Exerting this kind of control over the life (and death/subsequent elimination) of Sleeping Beauty allows the fairy to attempt to control and regain her sense of identity. Meanwhile, if the elderly fairy had continued living in her tower undisturbed, or simply accepted that a beautiful princess will one day rule the land (a role she would never get to have in the first place), she would have never developed these feelings at all. However, her sense of disfigurement is what spurs this ruthless, pathological path of cruelty and spite. The fairy's internal melancholic struggle ensures that her sadistic patterns of behavior will

not stop until Sleeping Beauty is removed from the equation, as her need to gain pleasure from Sleeping Beauty's suffering would then be complete.

The desire to make the substitutive object suffer is also explicitly apparent in the Grimms' tale, as proven by the numerous, methodical attempts the queen makes in trying to kill Snow White. Her emotions are not rooted in some hate or rivalry that is easily quelled; it is indeed sadistic and rooted in Snow White's suffering. She first hires a huntsman to take Snow White into the woods and mercilessly kill her. Once this plan is foiled as a result of the huntsman's sympathy and guilty conscience, she takes matters into her own hands and visits the home of the Seven Dwarfs, in which Snow White later resides. Both attempts of dressing as an unsuspecting old woman peddling various goods fail—the dwarves cut off the lace scarf she used to choke Snow White, and one of the prince's servants dislodge the famous poisoned apple from her throat. Again, critics might highlight these moments as a reinforcement of typical gender roles, as her safety is secured thanks to male characters, but the only reason she needs saving at all is because of the queen's sadistic inability to let go of what is no longer hers. Her inability to do so is a result of feeling like she is now disabled, in her own way—something that can affect men as well, albeit in somewhat different circumstances.

The queen's mission is also obsessive; her obsession is where Freud's theory that "the most remarkable characteristic of melancholia . . . is its tendency to change round into mania" comes into play (163). She becomes deranged and wants to literally eat Snow White's body, with the huntsman eventually bringing back the lungs and liver of a boar, and the queen "supposing that she had eaten Snow White's lungs and liver" (Grimm 2). Since she no longer possesses these physical qualities, or an identity that was once hers, she wants to physically have the bodily pieces of the person who took them from her. In her unconscious mind, the ownership of the

beautiful Snow White's body could provide her with a reinstated, repaired, and positive ego, as she reclaims what she thinks is rightfully hers, thus no longer harboring melancholic characteristics. She deliberately performs, and enjoys, all of this horrific violence and what she *thinks* is an act of cannibalism as she literally consumes the lungs and liver of the boar that the huntsman killed, thereby hoping to internally recapture what, in her mind, was lost. Her insistence on eating Snow White's body parts is yet another example of her melancholia, as one of the somatic symptoms of this condition is a "refusal of nourishment" (Freud 156). Yes, the queen is seen wanting to eat something, but turning into a cannibal is almost universally considered an abnormal (not to mention illegal and immoral) means of consumption. My point is proven in that the queen is not genuinely hungry or starved of sustenance; her choice to have what she thinks is Snow White's organs for dinner is a psychologically driven act of sadism, not a biological need to satisfy her hunger.

This exact same trope of vengeance via murder and the consumption of human flesh, and the subsequent psychological reaction, in "Snow White" are present in "Sleeping Beauty in the Wood." The ogress becomes obsessed with the consumption of her grandchildren and daughter-in-law to regain some abstract loss of which she is only partially cognizant. Although her attempts get thwarted by a benign male presence, she finds great joy in what she thinks is successful deviance, as she feels "well satisfied with her cruel deeds" and intends to tell her son, the king, a lie about the fate of his family (Perrault 6). For both the ogress and the queen, this melancholic condition begins a cycle of self-hate and torment, which I noticed "signifies a satisfaction of trends of sadism and hate [that] relate to an object, and which have been turned round on the subject's own self" (Freud 160). Their subconscious self-loathing, coupled with the elderly fairy's apparent self-loathing based on a vast misinterpretation of a party invitation, speak

to how the three women act in these heinous ways because they feel parts of their bodies—but in reality, their psyches—have been mutilated. This perceived mutilation is where my application of the theories surrounding disability studies can establish the link between melancholia and the loss of able-bodiedness.

Disabilities and disability studies are no stranger to both fairy tales and literature in general, as there are plenty of characters with deformities and disabilities to look to when performing this type of critical analysis. For example, Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, Sparks' *The Elephant Man*, Shakespeare's *Richard III*, Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," to name a few, are all texts with characters who have disabilities that lead to them being stigmatized, mocked, and/or oppressed due to living in a world where able-bodiedness dictates social and political spheres in everyday life. While the three women in the two fairy tales do not possess the conventional physical traits of disabilities, their psychological troubles are what cause them to feel as though they are disabled in contrast to the rest of the population. They are depicted as "different," as the queen and the fairy become ugly after Snow White and Sleeping Beauty appear, respectively, and the ogress, already ugly given her monstrous appearance, seems to become even uglier to everyone else after the aforementioned circumstances of her family. Furthermore, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines a person with disabilities as someone "who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment" (U.S. Department of Justice). There are two critical components of this definition that serve to explain the predicament of the three elderly women in these two tales: Their impairment limits one or more major life activities, and they are perceived by others as having such an impairment. I

would also like to add the caveat that the three women perceive *themselves* as having the physical impairment, which only aggravates the resentment they feel regarding what they see as their disabled bodies.

In "Little Snow White," the queen's "daily life activities" are certainly limited once the all-knowing mirror tells her she is no longer the fairest in all the land, with the mirror serving as the mouthpiece of the kingdom—which is where the ADA's inclusion of "a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment" comes into play. However, the queen decides to interpret the mirror's words in such a way: Being a (still) beautiful queen who happens to be slightly less beautiful than the young Snow White does *not* mean she is now actually impaired in any way. The same goes for the elderly fairy and the ogress, both of whom also can no longer fulfill everyday tasks once they think they have been cast off as physically insignificant members of their communities. Because of their impaired psychological states, all three women presumptuously assign that label to themselves, which makes clear that their melancholia is the disability, albeit a psychological one—not the physical one to which they convince themselves they have succumbed.

Since the ADA does include mental impairments in its definition, it would be remiss to not include the actual definition of what a mental impairment is, which is defined by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) as "any condition characterized by cognitive and emotional disturbances, abnormal behaviors, impaired functioning, or any combination of these." The melancholia that afflicts the queen, fairy, and ogress fits this definition as proven by the abnormal and violent behaviors all three women exhibit as the two tales unfold. Their broken psychological state upon feeling that their status and therefore their self-worth is taken from them is what makes them feel as though they are the victims of ableism. However, this

discrimination against those with disabilities, which Thomas Hehir defines as a "form of discrimination based on the perception that being able-bodied is the normal human condition and is superior to being disabled," is not rooted in their physical looks (qtd. In Oswal). The queen not being the most beautiful woman around does not affect her capacity to uphold the duties of a queen. Likewise, the fairy is able to attend Sleeping Beauty's christening just fine, and the ogress' family loves her all the same despite her less-than-captivating looks. As stated earlier in this essay, the fairy was not originally invited to the christening because no one had seen her for 50 years, a factor that is not swayed by her appearance whatsoever. Similarly, the ogress does not have to be seen as equal to her human counterparts in order to be a loving mother-in-law and grandmother. Their internalization of this ableism causes the melancholic "profoundly painful dejection" mentioned earlier, which makes them then want to "disable" the bodies that their flawed and hate-filled subconscious compels them to target. It is at *this* point when their disability—the psychological disability of melancholia, not any physical differences they think they suddenly have—causes them to become ostracized by everyone else.

In "Sleeping Beauty," no one rejects the old fairy's presence once she arrives to Sleeping Beauty's baptism, as mentioned previously with the king still ensuring she even has her own place to sit near the younger fairies. Once her fiery temper and spite burst out of her and she tries to condemn the princess to death by spindle, the king, "in an attempt to avert the unhappy doom pronounced by the old fairy, at once published an edict forbidding all persons, under pain of death, to use a spinning wheel or keep a spindle in the house" (Perrault 1). Her villainous words unsurprisingly sour the occasion, thus distancing herself from the other guests and by extension members of the entire kingdom, and the king's subsequent decree is an implicit denunciation of the elderly fairy's impulsive and reckless stunt. Had she not taken the initial lack of invitation

personally, no such scene or edict would have presented itself, and the fairy could have used the opportunity to show everyone she is, in fact, not dead or bewitched as they had assumed and thereafter enjoyed an active social presence in her community in perhaps new and meaningful ways. Instead, her melancholic obsession with what she thinks is an ageist (and therefore ableist) affront to her existence pushes her further toward the periphery of her community.

The ogress does face a little more resistance given that she is a monster in the eyes of her human counterparts, but they still do not disrupt her position as queen—both when her human husband is alive and even after he dies. People "whisper in the court" about her, and her son, the prince, is "afraid of his mother, for she came of a race of ogres," but he still "entrusted his wife and children to her care" and gives her the title of regent once he becomes king and has to leave for war (Perrault 4). If her being an ogress was truly problematic, both the prince and the other members of the kingdom could have devised a plan to officially invalidate her existence, and yet her life remains unchanged when her husband, her link to the human world, is gone. However, this is not good enough for her, as she chooses to let her insecurities get the best of her and demands that she be fed the bodies of her daughter-in-law and grandchildren in a subconscious plot to avenge the personal degradation she perceives from human beings—her melancholia making it so that her targets are the humans who have done nothing to harm or insult her. Only once her son returns from war and sees the carnage she has caused in her bid to murder his entire family is there any indication that she will be punished or expelled from her community. After her suicide, her disconnect from the human world is complete when the narrator remarks that her son "could not but be sorry, for after all she was his mother; but it was not long before he found ample consolation in his beautiful wife and children" (Perrault 6). While he is sad, he finds comfort in the family he has created with Sleeping Beauty: one with no ogres. His reaction

maintains my point that he still loved the ogress up until her melancholic self-sabotage drove her to madness once she determined she had no place in the kingdom. If she had taken the time to foster a close connection to her son, there could have been the potential for meaningful relationships to build, but all the unspoken words of their mother-son dynamic allow her subconscious anxieties and animosity to fester until they bubble to the surface and come to a head with her sudden death.

The queen in "Snow White" endures a similar issue in her melancholic state. Even though the mirror declares that she is no longer the fairest woman in the kingdom, no one mocks or isolates her, including Snow White, who has no idea about the existence of said mirror to begin with. Much like the elderly fairy, the queen assumes she is now useless in the eyes of her constituents and acts on her unjustifiable rage accordingly. She is also like the ogress in that she does not once consider the possibility of developing a close relationship with her stepdaughter, and instead thinks Snow White is part of a conspiratorial cabal who wants to dethrone her from her designation as "fairest of all." Her melancholic delusion catches up to her once the wedding guests become privy to her murderous ways and they excommunicate her from the community literally and figuratively; they realize someone so violently disturbed must be killed in order to remove what is a legitimate threat to everyone else's well-being. There would be no need for these extreme measures if her melancholia never got to the point where it wracked her fragile psyche beyond repair. With all this evidence in mind, I would like to again stress that the fate of these three elderly women comes *not* because they are ugly, incompetent, or seen as unworthy in the public sphere; they are only shunned (and in two of the three cases, die) once their pathological disposition leaves the other characters with no other choice than to cast them out of their respective societies.

In the preface of their book, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*, David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder make clear that, for a long time, disability studies hinged upon conventional "markers" of disability like "the cane, brace, limp, stutter, lisp, bulge, tremor, aberration, or weakness" (xi). Mitchell and Snyder go on to say that "physical or cognitive inferiority has historically categorized the means by which bodies have been constructed as 'deviant:' the Victorian equation between femininity and hysteria; the biological racism that justified; psychiatry's categorization of homosexuality as a pathological disorder, and so on" (2). These historical bases and conventional markers of disabilities have presented themselves throughout countless works of literature, and while great strides have been made in disability studies since the publication of Mitchell and Snyder's book, Amy Schmiesing points out in her 2014 *book Disability, Deformity, and Disease in the Grimms' Fairy Tales*, that "narratives not only often use physical beauty or ability to accentuate a character's moral virtues or other positive traits but also employ physical impairment as a mark that signifies evildoers," a statement that still holds some truth in relation to "Snow White" and "Sleeping Beauty" (1).

Schmiesing's argument is crucial in terms of understanding the actions of the queen, fairy, and ogress. The fact that they think they are disabled is not the reason or justification for their inappropriate actions, as plenty of fairy tale characters—and people in real life—do not turn to extreme violence (like cannibalism) *because of* their disabilities. Rather, these three women face their inner turmoil in spite of the implicit societal rejection of those who are different. Both "Snow White" and "Sleeping Beauty" are examples of tales that demonstrate how these evil deeds occur when ableism is given a privileged position while disabilities are denigrated.

The queen, fairy, and ogress eventually become the villainous "evildoers" once they internalize what they believe is a form of disability or disfigurement given that they are left to feel useless

by the regular members of society. The queen *should* be the most beautiful woman, and thus feels damaged when she no longer has that title; the old fairy feels neglected after not being worthy of receiving an invite to huge, celebratory parties—fairies in just about any tale are depicted as important only when they are youthful—and maybe that is why she isolates herself in her tower initially; the ogress fails to fit in with the humans of her kingdom to begin with and only feels worse once her shields (her husband and son) are gone. In other words, they feel as though they may as well be labeled as equal to those with the canes, limps, or tremors that Mitchell and Snyder discuss because now, they no longer feel able-bodied; they are limited and restrained in their new, and ultimately unwelcomed, positions.

Without their desired, ideal traits, they seem to almost feel no longer like themselves, since, "one might think of disability as the master trope of human disqualification" (Mitchell and Snyder 3). With this in mind, it is worth noting that in "Sleeping Beauty," the ogress' absence of a proper human identity in the first place only exacerbates this condition. For all three women, this could explain their more than unusual reactions to taking on their new bodies, and especially why they choose to focus on violently disfiguring the bodies of those who supposedly cause these feelings; they no longer feel human, and more importantly, want to reclaim, or damage in an act of revenge, the bodies of those considered normal (that is, beautiful). The fairy wants to destroy the body of Sleeping Beauty as it represents everything she no longer physically has, the queen wants to eat the organs of Snow White, and the ogress want to eat the bodies of Sleeping Beauty and her children in hopes of somehow reclaiming their original, healthy bodies (or even repairing their now-disfigured bodies). However, the hope of taking back what they think is rightfully theirs comes at the expense of their own lives, with the melancholic woes pushing them to their demise.

As a result of the three women's subconscious attack on and rejection of their own egos (as proven through their attack on the bodies of their intended victims) Freud argues in "Mourning and Melancholia" that the likelihood of suicide increases because the melancholic individual cannot cope any longer. This characteristic is also what separates it from healthy mourning: "in grief the world becomes poor empty. In melancholia it is the ego itself," which inevitably leads to extreme and possibly lethal outcomes for the melancholiac (Freud 155). Though the queen in "Snow White" does not directly choose to commit suicide, her pathological and perverse behavior does catch up to her, with the guests at Snow White's wedding party forcing her to wear red-hot iron shoes until she drops dead. By that point in the narrative, the queen is likely aware that the kingdom learned of her evildoings and can anticipate a rejection of her arrival but decides to accept the invitation to Snow White's wedding, which is probably a formality in the first place. The guests' rejection is made apparent as they almost immediately punish her with death.

The queen is also initially convinced that her plan to kill Snow White will work but is still aware that her mission of killing Snow White can have grave consequences, as she acknowledges that she may die in the process: she once shouts, "Snow White shall die if it costs me my life!" (Grimm 5). Her decision to attend the wedding seems to be a subconscious acceptance of "suicide," and her earlier explicit acceptance of death as a possibility lends itself to a conscious recognition of suicide, as she willingly chooses to forge the path toward trying to kill Snow White. Her fate of turning into a disfigured version of her former self is unfathomable, and the possibility of death is a better outcome than living as what she thinks is a marginalized, disabled woman. The elderly fairy is much like the queen in that she does not actively commit suicide, nor does she actually die by the end of the tale, but her very public proclamation of

Sleeping Beauty's curse is all-but-guaranteed to get her excommunicated from the kingdom—a condemnation that is akin to suicide in that she will likely never see or speak to anyone from the kingdom ever again and will, for all intents and purposes, be dead to them. For her, this seems to be a more palatable scenario, as she will no longer have to show her face, or her old, valueless body, anywhere thereafter, as it only causes her pain and anguish to do so.

Unlike the fairy, the ogress does exemplify Freud's theories to their extreme with her eventual suicide at the end of the story. Once she discovers that she did not actually consume the bodies of her three family members, she decides to set up a "huge vat to be brought into the middle of the courtyard . . . filled with vipers and toads, with snakes and serpents of every kind" in order to toss Sleeping Beauty and her children inside (Perrault 5). However, her plan is foiled once her son, the king, appears and demands "to know what this horrible spectacle mean[s]" (5). Seeing that she has been cornered into a humiliating predicament and "enraged at what confronted her, [she throws] herself head foremost into the vat, and [is] devoured on the instant by the hideous creatures she had placed in it" (5). Faced with the reality that her son now confirmed his past suspicions and sees her as the monster she is, and knowing that she will be punished, she kills herself as a better alternative. The life of an ugly, widowed ogress whose son disowns her is a life she is convinced is worse than death by violent suicide. Her hollowed and bruised ego cannot tolerate the fallout, and the rejection culminates in a final act of self-destruction.

In each tale, the queen, the fairy, and the ogress all believe that some external force comes to deliberately inflict pain and suffering on them. Their obsession with this alleged suffering throws their lives into disrepair, causing them to feel as though they are disabled and kept from participating in the activities of which they were previously capable. Their experiences

seem physical to them, but the more significant damage is psychological, as their minds can only focus on getting a form of misguided revenge, thus leaving them unfit to think of (and incapable of) anything else. The melancholic misfortunes that plague the three women are a reminder of how fairy tales produce the idea that differences are negative traits to possess. Furthermore, the analysis of their melancholia, in conjunction with the theories behind disability studies. illuminates how fairy tales not only produce, but also reinforce, negative stereotypes about the nature of disabilities. By close-reading literary works with more multidisciplinary critical methods—as explored in this essay—readers may be able to view highly (and recently) discursive topics like disabilities in a new light, and make room for new insights on texts that have been around for too long to receive that attention. Perhaps such readings and research could further redefine what it means to have a disability or be able-bodied beyond just the literary scope and impact how we see ourselves and those who cross our day-to-day paths.

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