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## HEROINES VICTIMIZED BY FEMALE VIOLENCE IN FAIRY TALES: JORINDA, RAPUNZEL, SLEEPING BEAUTY, CINDERELLA AND SNOW WHITE\*

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### Abstract

Despite the term 'violence' associates the force which strong and powerful people use against the weak in order to have their ways, there lies a deeper truth beneath the surface. According to Erich Fromm, it is possible to say that violence actually stems from impotency or different kinds of weakness and feeling of deficiency. Hence, the origin of violence is psychological. From this point of view, it can be clearly noticed that violence has begun to lose its male character and gains a new and female attribution when examined under the light of some recent researches regarding myths, fairy tales and some religious narratives as the indicators of behavioural patterns in time immemorial. In these narratives, women can also apply violence, even to women. Especially in some famous fairy tales like *Jorinda and Joringel*, *Rapunzel*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Cinderella* and *Snow White*, the female violence against female figures becomes strikingly obvious. So, in this study we have turned our perspective to the feminine world in these fairy tales and have tried to analyse the female violence victimizing the heroines by using some theories of analytical psychology and psychoanalysis.

**Key words:** Violence, Fairy Tales, Heroine, Jorinda, Rapunzel, Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella, Snow White, Erich Fromm, Carl Gustav Jung.

*To create life is to transcend one's status as a creature that is thrown into life as dice are thrown out of a cup. But to destroy life also means to transcend it and to escape the unbearable suffering of complete passivity. To create life requires certain qualities that the impotent person lacks. To destroy life requires only one quality – the use of force. The impotent man, if he has a pistol, a knife or a strong arm, can transcend life by destroying it in others or in himself. He thus takes revenge on life for negating itself to him. Compensatory violence is precisely that violence which has its roots in and which compensates for impotence. The man who cannot create wants to destroy.*

– Erich Fromm, *The Heart of Man*, (1964)

### I. Introduction

Having both realistic and fantastic elements, fairy tales are one of the oldest and most preferred literary kinds because of their archetypal roots and highly influential narrative style. In his famous *Liber Novus*, known as *Red Book*, Carl Gustav Jung, the founder of Analytical Psychology, draws attention to the

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connection between fairy tales and literature: "The fairy tale is the great mother of the novel, and has even more universal validity than the most-avidly read novel of your time" (2009, 224). They belong to oral tradition and mostly to children's world; but, as a matter of fact, they can be of interest to a wide audience expanding from adults to children with their colourful and wish-fulfilling world, bearing the magical traces of ancient times. Marie-Louise von Franz, a famous pupil of Jung, claims that some certain "unaltered" themes of fairy tales can be traced back to approximately twenty seven thousand years ago, adding that till the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, adults, as well as children, were told fairy tales (1996, 4). Stith Thompson, an American scholar of folklore, makes the definition of fairy tale (he prefers "Marchen" in German) as "a tale of some length involving a succession of motifs or episodes. It moves in an unreal world without definite locality or definite creatures and is filled with the marvellous. In this never-never land humble heroes kill adversaries, succeed to kingdoms and marry princesses" (1946, 8). It seems that the constitution and function of fairy tales are a little bit more complex than they are seen. Pointing out their relationship with collective unconscious at the very beginning of her work, von Franz states that: "Fairy tales are the purest and simplest expression of collective unconscious psychic processes. Therefore their value for the scientific investigation of the unconscious exceeds that of all other material. They represent the archetypes in their simplest, barest, and most concise form" (1996, 1). Different from myths or legends, or any other mythological narrative, in which the basic patterns of the psyche covered by the cultural material, fairy tales have "much less specific cultural-conscious material", hence they reflect the basic patterns of the human psyche more clearly.

Mostly collected from female tellers, fairy tales had been compiled for a very long time by famous figures from different countries like Aesop, Brothers Grimm (Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm), Charles Perrault, Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy, Hans Christian Andersen, Joseph Jacobs, Andrew Lang and so on. Most known collectors, no doubt, are Brothers Grimm who collected totally more than two hundreds fairy tales, among them are those famous ones like Rapunzel, Hansel and Grethel, Sleeping Beauty, Little Red Cap, Cinderella, Snow White and Jorinda and Joringel some of which will be examined in this study. Jack Zipes states that they have Indo-European origin and there is a stress on patriarchal authority and taming of women in them (2002, 159). Apart from this stress, the original forms of these tales were sometimes full of cruelty and violence, some scenes of which were censored and omitted by Grimms while preparing for publication. Alongside the male figures or animals in the perpetrator role in violent scenes, we can also witness the tragic events experienced by innocent heroines who are victimized by female agents of violence in the person of stepmother, stepsister, wicked witch, and even sometimes fairy godmother. At this point, we face with a serious dilemma complicating our decision process. On one hand, we know that these tales were collected and changed by male collectors of patriarchal system, hence lost their original form; on the other hand, we do not exactly know which parts are omitted or changed and in what ways they are changed, so we will never make sure of that to what extent the male collectors Grimms bent the truth. The statement of Ellen Cronan Rose helps the improvement of the feminist side of this dilemma: "What a woman reads in her mirror is the tales men tell about woman - Madonna and whores, saints and witches, good little girls and wicked queens" (1983, 211).

Luma Ibrahim Al-Barazeni postulates that the second wave feminism regards fairy tales as indicators of women's victimization:

It may be obvious that the second wave feminism considers fairy tales as evidences of women's victimization. To its activists, these tales are objects for the real suffering of this generation because women are subjects of submissiveness, silence, patriarchal authority, or physical and psychological violence. In Cinderella, the heroin is subjugated to the physical beating and the spiritual humiliation. She is forced to repress her feelings and to do all home duties under the oppression of her stepmother. She represents the real and symbolic of victimization of a girl who lost her mother and lives the injustice of her stepmother and stepsisters. (2015, 49)

Yet, the example of Cinderella is not sufficient to solve our dilemma, because she is tortured by other female figures of the tale, stepmother and step sisters. Women's victimization is actualized by women again. From this point forth, violence, generally associated with world of men and patriarchal system, has lost its male character and gains a new and female attribution when examined under the light of some recent researches regarding myths, fairy tales and certain religious narratives as the indicators of behavioural patterns in time immemorial. In these narratives, women can also apply violence, even to women. By denotation, the term 'violence' can be defined as the force which strong and powerful people use against the weak in order to have their ways. Taking this definition a step further, American psychoanalyst Erich Fromm claims that it is possible to say that violence actually stems from impotency or different kinds of



weakness and feeling of deficiency. In other words, it comes from “*the drive for complete and absolute control over a living being*” (Fromm, 1964, 28). Therefore, the origin of violence is psychological.

Moreover, Fromm may have the possible answer for the dilemma of Cinderella mentioned above with the help of his famous wolf-sheep metaphor:

Should we assume that you and I and most average men are wolves in sheep’s clothing, and that our “true nature” will become apparent once we rid ourselves of those inhibitions which until now have prevented us from acting like beasts? This assumption is hard to disprove, yet it is not entirely convincing. There are numerous opportunities for cruelty and sadism in everyday life in which people could indulge without fear of retaliation; yet many do not do so; in fact many react with a certain sense of revulsion when they meet cruelty and sadism. (1964, 14)

Hence, he interrogates the fact that violence originates in our brutal side which is inherent in the nature of human being, but cannot be discovered easily because of the social rules and sanctions. Ranging violence from its simple form that can be considered most harmless to the most harmful one, Fromm categorizes violence in six main groups one of which has two subclasses: playful, reactive (because of being threatened and of frustration), the one engendered by envy and jealousy, revengeful, compensatory and, as the most harmful type, the archaic blood thirst (1964, 21-30).

If we take into consideration Fromm’s violence theory together with the statement of Franz Riklin, one of Jung’s colleagues, it can be understood more clearly why fairy tales include female violence as well as male one. Riklin claims that “the fairy tales are inventions of the directly utilized, immediately conceived experiences of the primitive human soul and the general human tendency to wish fulfilment which we find again in modern fiction only somewhat more complicated and garbed in different forms” (1913, 95). Here, the wish fulfilment in fairy tales can satisfy the wish for power in order to apply violence and to feel superior as well as the wish for any harmless thing that we cannot acquire in our daily lives. On the other hand, Bruno Bettelheim illuminates the issue by linking it with collective conscious mind and unconscious content:

The fairy tale, on the other hand, is very much the result of common conscious and unconscious content having been shaped by the conscious mind, not of one particular person, but the consensus of many in regard to what they view as universal human problems, and what they accept as desirable solutions. (2010, 36)

Hence, supported by Riklin’s idea and Bettelheim’s illumination, Fromm’s theory is clear enough to explain the tendency to violence in fairy tales and its deep psychological roots.

## II. Discussion

“The ordinary man with extraordinary power is the chief danger for mankind” says Fromm, “not the fiend or the sadist” (1964, 18). Despite its male discourse, the quotation actually has no gender. We can find the core of Fromm’s theory in its most remarkable form in the tale of Cinderella, an orphan girl whose father takes another wife and in this way brings a stepmother and two stepsisters into home after her mother’s death. The father is unconcerned with the tortures Cinderella undergoes and so, he is noneffective throughout the novel. The stepmother, an ordinary woman with her ordinary daughters acquires the domestic power by right of marriage and the indifference of father; it becomes extraordinary when it is exercised over Cinderella, because it provides a sense of relief and self-satisfaction through the maximum authority and control over the weaker one. These ordinary women apply both physical and psychological violence in the tale: taking clothes of Cinderella away, giving her old and dirty clothes and wooden shoes, making her do all the housework, getting her to sleep in the ashes, making fun of her poor and dirty appearance and all kinds of humiliation. They are intuitively aware of her outstanding beauty accompanied by purity and innocence, providing her a kind of superiority that should be nipped in the bud. According to Fromm, the people who cannot have the things they desire are full of hatred for and turn against those who have the desired things. This hatred coming from envy and jealousy paves the way for the outbreak of violence and destruction (1964, 24). Stepmother is merciless and violent also towards her own daughters while giving them the order of cutting their toes off for fitting their foot in that famous golden shoe in the hands of the prince which actually belongs to Cinderella: “Cut a bit off thy heel; when thou art Queen thou wilt have no more need to go on foot” (Grimm Brothers, 1884, 99). At the end of the tale, their fear comes true and Cinderella is taken on the horse of the handsome prince as his future wife leaving the stepsisters with their castrated toes (1884, 99). This tale can be regarded as one of the most remarkable examples reflecting the violence engendered by envy and jealousy. Ironically, at the end of the tale, violence comes



upon two stepsisters through the agency of two white doves, which actually should have olive branch in their beaks but, instead, peck out the eyes of these wicked sisters.

A tale of another orphan girl, Little Snow-White has the similar details like wicked stepmother and noneffective father and it includes same kind of violence as in Cinderella, though most of its characters are the noble ones like the king as father, queen as stepmother, Snow-White as princess, the saviour as handsome prince and violence scenes are more cruel and serious because of the Queen stepmother's attempts for killing the heroine. It is a futile occupation for the stepmother to torture the little girl physically or psychologically, so the wicked Queen attempts to kill the princess in order to annihilate the unique beauty of her for four times. At first she wants the huntsman to kill the little princess in the forest and to bring her heart in order to eat. Secondly, she laces her so tightly that the girl cannot breathe; at the third attempt, she combs her hair with a poisonous comb and finally comes that notorious half-poisoned apple, at every attempt she disguises as an old woman. However, Snow-White can manage to survive her conspirator by the end of the tale through some miraculous rescues (Grimm Brothers, 1884, 207-215). There is a dangerous and fatal combination of violence exemplified here: violence engendered by envy and jealousy is mixed with the most harmful type, the archaic blood thirst indicated by the act of eating the heart of victim, though it is actually a heart of boar, as well as by her attempts to destroy the princess.

Like Snow-White, Sleeping Beauty is also a princess, but she is not an orphan and cursed by an old wicked fairy who is not invited to the feast given in honour of the birth of little princess. She is not invited to the feast because she is thought to be dead or enchanted due to her long absence. To crown it all, she is not given a massive gold case on the table, such as the other seven fairies have, hence she thinks that she is treated with contempt and curses the little baby that she should pierce her hand with a spindle and die of the wound (Perrault, 1921, 1-20). This curse, indeed, the violence itself, because it leads everybody and everything in the court to sleep for a hundred years, except for the parents who have to separate from their beloved daughter. It also turns the beautiful and domestic scenery of the court into a wild one. We notice the mixed form of violence in the curse of wicked fairy: the one engendered by jealousy melts into the revengeful violence. Fromm describes the revengeful violence as "already a step further in the direction of pathology" adding that "it has the irrational function of undoing magically what has been done realistically" (1964, 24). This time, there is no wicked stepmother or indifferent father, but the violence in this tale is double layered. While curse of the wicked fairy creates psychological and indirect physical violence towards all the people in the court of Sleeping Beauty's parents at the first layer, the Ogress Queen's passionate desire to devour Sleeping Beauty with her children and, motivated by frustration and revenge, her attempt to throw them into a large copper filled with "toads, vipers, adders, and serpents" show the inhuman/monstrous side of violence at the second layer. After the first layer of violence, comes the second one which is also constituted by tripart combination applied by the Ogress Queen who is also Sleeping Beauty's mother-in-law and can be thought as a kind of stepmother: the archaic blood thirst for the passion to devour her daughter-in-law and grandchildren, reactive violence because of frustration and revengeful one when she realizes that she has been deceived with the meats of animals instead of the ones she desires.

Like Sleeping Beauty, Rapunzel is also the tale of an extraordinarily beautiful girl, but she is not a princess and taken from her parents at her birth by a dreadful enchantress. She is taken in exchange for the rampions stolen from the beautiful garden of enchantress, which her mother longs while she is pregnant. Violence in this tale is also multi-layered: at the first layer, the old enchantress applies violence towards both Rapunzel's mother by taking her baby for some herbs, a trivial pretext and the heroine by depriving her of the real parents. This is the simple form of the revengeful violence, because Rapunzel's father steals some rampions from her garden for his beloved pregnant wife and they should pay the price for this transgression. At the second layer, comes again a mixed type of violence: envy and jealousy in old enchantress causes that when Rapunzel is twelve years old, she shuts this beautiful girl into a tower, which lies in a forest, and has neither stairs nor door, but quite at the top is a little window. Isolating her from the outside world and from society is a kind of psychological violence, because she is totally alone when the old woman does not visit. But the worse one is the revengeful violence the enchantress applies when she learns that there is one more person seeing and visiting Rapunzel at the tower climbing up by her magnificent long hair. The old wicked woman cuts off her golden tresses and takes her into a desert where she has "to live in great grief and misery" (Grimm Brothers, 1884, 50-54). Hence, once more she isolates Rapunzel -this time in a desert- trying to damage her beauty and to attack on her personal integrity by cutting off her hair, whereby she applies the revengeful violence, of course in its most primitive form, towards the weaker one.

In the tale of Jorinda, we cannot understand the causes of violence at first sight, because they are expressed implicitly. Jorinda is turned into a nightingale while her fiancé Joringel is paralysed temporarily



by an old witch who dwells all alone in an old castle and who always turns innocent maidens into birds shutting them up in the cages in her castle and makes the men stand still until she wants to free them. Their unique guilt is coming within one hundred paces of the castle. In the day-time she changes herself into a cat or a screech-owl, but in the evening she takes the human being form. She has about seven thousand cages of birds in the castle. Jorinda is her last victim and saved by her lover using a blood-red flower in the middle of which there is a large dew-drop like a fine pearl. The old witch represents the old age because of its ability to turn into owl while nightingale into which Jorinda is turned stands for the youth. Moreover, the witch is described in the tale as “a crooked old woman, yellow and lean, with large red eyes and a hooked nose, the point of which reached to her chin”, that is an old and ugly creature (Grimm Brothers, 1884, 288-290). From this point forth, it can be analysed that her violent acts stem from envy and jealousy because of her wicked, aged and grotesque appearance contrasting to the innocent, young and beautiful girls; so they should not be visible in the outside world and making these maidens invisible by turning them into birds is the only solution for soothing her pain that stems from her frustration. This is also a kind of taking revenge from the merciless time which renders her an aged woman and from the cruel destiny which does not bestow a beautiful appearance on her. Hence, there is again a mixed type violence consisting of the one due to frustration and the revengeful one in the tale of beautiful Jorinda.

### III. Conclusion

At the end of the study, one of the significant results we have obtained is the fact that fairy tales are among the most suitable literary kinds indicating that violence is an ancient phenomenon coeval with the history of human being, because, as von Franz states, we know that fairy tales can date back thousands of years. It is not an irritating fact that their contents are sometimes full of violence, because they can manage to display the most violent scenes in the most ordinary way. Another significant point we have arrived is that the violence in the fairy tales is mostly applied by wicked female figures like stepmother, wicked Queen, enchantress and Ogress Queen towards innocent females as well as the male ones. Taking Fromm's theories of violence into consideration, it can be easily observed that violence has no gender; hence, a woman can also apply violence towards another woman as well as a man having power and superiority in any way. It can be postulated that the violence in fairy tales emphasizes the fact that women, who are generally associated with mercy, kindness and compassion, have lost this association and tended to violence as a result of having power and being tired of being the weak one, of course with the support of getting used to patriarchal implementations and impositions in the course of time. The fairy tales we examined here are the vivid and striking evidences proving the fact that violence can be examined in the third dimension with a different point of view like Fromm's theories, and it is actually the starting point of this study.

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