

Rumpelstiltskin: Superimposing Current Societal/Cultural Needs onto the Fairy Tale Genre

by

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Abstract

Since their introduction in 1815, Grimm's *Children's Stories and Household Tales* have been retold and refashioned many times in American popular culture. Closely studying these retellings helps readers understand the differences in culture, society, and context when compared to the texts that influenced them. This thesis uses the tenets of narrative and critical theory, specifically Cultural, Feminist, and Marxist theories, to compare the tale "Rumpelstiltskin" by the Brothers Grimm with the Rumpelstiltskin character in the ABC network show *Once Upon A Time* (2011). This is done in order to analyze the ideological changes and similarities present between the original and adaptation. This study concludes that adaptations, although retaining certain elements from the original text, are actually more reflective and promote current mores, ideological beliefs, and customs.

Resumen

Desde su introducción al público en 1815, el libro *Grimm's Children's Stories and Household Tales* ha sido promulgado y readaptado en la cultura popular Americana. El estudio minucioso de estas adaptaciones permite a los lectores entender las diferencias en cultura, sociedad y época cuando estas se comparan con los textos que los influyeron. Esta tesis utiliza los principios de teoría crítica y narrativa, y teoría cultural, feminista y marxista en específico, para comparar el cuento "Rumpelstiltskin" de los hermanos Grimm con el personaje de Rumpelstiltskin en el programa de ABC titulado *Once Upon A Time* (2011). Esta comparación se lleva a cabo para analizar los cambios y las similitudes ideológicas entre ambos. El estudio concluye que las adaptaciones de cuentos, aún reteniendo ciertos elementos del texto original, reflejan y promueven mas aún las costumbres, creencias ideológicas y tradiciones actuales.

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Chapter I: Introduction

From the late 18th century and early to mid-19th century, Germany had found itself in a state of revival, of its history and culture. It was the Romantic era and there was a strong drive to re-discover and preserve German culture, history and national heritage. Within this context, Joseph and Wilhelm Grimm began to collect and record histories, stories, and folk narratives of the people of Germany. Andrew Teverson, in *Fairy Tale (The New Critical Idiom)*, asserts “the brothers sought to shore up an idea of German nationhood by rooting it in a long past and by giving it a coherent linguistic and cultural identity in the present” (62). When the brothers Grimm recorded their national folk history, their work led them to the publication of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen (Children’s Stories and Household Tales)*, first published in two volumes in 1812 and 1815 respectively. For them, these collected tales represented part of a history, a past, which was worth remembering; today, these tales are among the most beloved and retold stories in American popular culture.

The Grimm’s fairy tales are quite popular, appealing to both children and the adults who grew up with them; consequently, they are constantly readapted in American popular culture, primarily by the Disney Company, in the form of television shows and movies. This thesis will compare the “Rumpelstiltskin” tale from the Grimm fairy tales with the popular TV show from the Disney-owned, ABC network, *Once Upon A Time*, focusing on the Rumpelstiltskin character and any direct connections found between the show and the tale. It is important to note that this thesis will only discuss the first three seasons of *Once Upon A Time*, currently in its fifth season. Although the Rumpelstiltskin character is still developing in the series, the first three seasons parallel the “original” tale the most. Therefore, the discussion will solely focus on

Rumpelstiltskin and, to a lesser extent, Cora (the miller's daughter), since that character has an important connection with Rumpelstiltskin in the "original"¹ tale as well; any analysis of other major characters in the original tale or the adaptation *Once Upon A Time* are beyond the scope of this thesis.

Before analyzing the differences between the "original" tale and the adaptation, however, it is important for the reader to be acquainted with both versions of the "Rumpelstiltskin" tale. In the Brothers Grimm version, the tale revolves around a young woman whose father has lied to a king about her ability to spin straw into gold. The King summoned the daughter and forced her to turn straw into gold, warning her that if she failed, she would be executed; "Get to work now. Spin all night, and if by morning you have not spun this straw into gold, then you will have to die" (Tatar 264). The King's command reduced the miller's daughter to tears and despair, since she lacked the ability to spin straw into gold. Suddenly, a gnome appeared and after listening to her story, offered to help her for a price. The King forced the miller's daughter to spin straw into gold three times, but the third time he offered her marriage as a reward. All three times Rumpelstiltskin came and helped the miller's daughter and on the final day, when she had nothing left to give, as payment he asked for her first born with the King and she agreed. When the day finally came to collect his payment, the miller's daughter, now queen, did not want to fulfill her end of the contract. The Queen pleaded with Rumpelstiltskin not to take her child. Rumpelstiltskin took pity upon her and agreed to give her a chance to keep her child by guessing his name. He gave her three days and three nights to guess his name. In the meantime, a

¹ The term "original" is in quotations to emphasize that the origins of certain fairy tale stories are almost impossible to trace and that using the term disregards the various forms of the same tale in different cultures and from different times. This concept will be discussed further in Chapter Two.

messenger overheard a strange gnome carelessly say his own name in a song about his assured victory over the Queen (“Oh what luck to win this game, Rumpelstiltskin is my name”). With this information the Queen was able to tell the gnome his name, thereby winning Rumpelstiltskin’s guessing game (Tatar 268). Upon losing, in his rage, Rumpelstiltskin stomped his leg into the ground so hard that he was unable to remove it and when he tried to, he ended up ripping himself in two. The audience can identify with the feelings of frustration and disappointment associated with losing a game, and they can also understand more complex life lessons presented in this tale, such as the idea that telling a lie (the miller to the King) can have harsh consequences or that desperate times call for desperate measures which might later lead to regret (miller’s daughter to Rumpelstiltskin). This tale speaks to the consequences of lies, greed, and manipulation and these tend to be topics audiences understand and have strong feelings toward since they are social mores. The Grimm’s *Children’s and Household Tales* in general and the tale of “Rumpelstiltskin” in particular are still sources of fascination for audiences, especially modern adaptations such as the ABC show *Once Upon A Time* created by Adam Horowitz and Edward Kitsis. This is evident through an email, in response to my inquiry, received from an ABC network corporate officer stating Season 1 had 11.8 million viewers, Season 2, 10.3 million, and Season 3, 9.3 million (Rongavilla).² This clearly shows that the story line and the characters are still relevant to modern audiences.

The modern adaptation of Rumpelstiltskin in *Once Upon A Time* does keep the general plot of the original tale, especially in Season 2, Episode 16 “The Miller’s Daughter.” The

² I received an email from Ponciano Rongavilla, corporate officer of rating/viewership, on August 8th, 2014 concerning the amount of viewers each episode of *Once Upon A Time* had per season. This is the reference sent to me by Rongavilla: “The Nielsen Company, NTI Total Viewers. Live+7: Season 3 – 2013-2014 (9/23/13 – 5/21/14); Season 2 – 2012-2013 (9/24/12 – 5/22/13) and Season 1 – 2011-2012 (9/19/11 – 5/23/12). Averages based on regular telecasts.”

creators changed and expanded the narrative primarily to provide answers for the character's actions, as stated by the creators of the show, Adam Horowitz and Edward Kitsis (Anneliese). In the TV show, Rumpelstiltskin is not a gnome; instead he is a human with a wife and son, eventually gaining power and magic, transforming the character from a human to a fairy tale villain. However, when he gained his fairy tale magic, he lost his son; his hunger for more magic while trying to overcome his cowardice set in motion a chain of events which placed Rumpelstiltskin on the road in search to reclaim his son. This search eventually lead him to meet the miller's daughter, now named Cora, and it is at this point in the story where the greatest parallels between the tale and the show exist. Although both stories end with the death of Rumpelstiltskin, in the TV series it was not a result of rage, but rather an act of love and self-sacrifice.

Horowitz and Kitsis created a TV series whose entire story line and eventual outcomes are dictated and orchestrated by Rumpelstiltskin. In a live Facebook Interview with Horowitz and Kitsis, the writers of *Once Upon A Time*, they were asked "how did you conceive the idea for this show?" and they responded with, when attempting to think about a world where evil could win, the only solution they came up with was our world (Analisie). Also, when they conceived the show, they wanted to answer questions left behind by the tales such as: "why is Grumpy grumpy?; Why is the Mad Hatter mad?" (Analisie). With this as the basis and focus for the show, Horowitz and Kitsis confirm what Jonathan Culler claims in *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* regarding the reason why people are so drawn to the narrative genre. Culler explains that "the pleasure of narrative is linked to desire. Plots tell of desire and what befalls it, but the movement of narrative is driven by desire in the form of 'epistemophilia', a desire to know: we want to discover secrets, to know the end, to find the truth...teaching us about the

world” (91). Similarly, Jack Zipes, in *Speaking out: Storytelling and Creative Drama for Children*, claims “it is our realization of what is missing in our lives that impels us to create works of art [stories] that not only reveal insights into our struggles but also shed light on alternatives and possibilities to restructure our mode of living and social relations” (4). The creators of *Once Upon A Time* took it upon themselves to answer the questions the original fairy tales left unanswered; in doing so, as Zipes suggests they are removing the original significance of the tale and the importance these stories may have had to the people living in the Grimm Brothers’ time. Creating a whole new representation or “story” as suggested by Cullers of the characters rather than the brief sketches the original tales provide.

The *Once Upon A Time* adaptation has given new meaning for Rumpelstiltskin’s need to have a child and this meaning seems reflective of why this tale endures in American popular consciousness; it focuses on the idea of wanting a family. In the show, the character’s desire to reclaim his own son helps audiences understand why Rumpelstiltskin makes so many deals/contracts. According to *Once Upon A Time*, in our world, he is given the persona of a businessman and contracts/deals are the driving force behind any business, thus giving Rumpelstiltskin the necessary twist that makes both the character and the story fit within a narrative that is relevant in terms of cultural expectations and the consumerist mindset of our times. In Western/American culture, businesses and those individuals controlling these businesses are the ones controlling money and wielding the most power. Rumpelstiltskin, or Mr. Gold as he is known in the show, is the most powerful; at first, in Fantasyland, his power stems from magic, but later on in the human world it stems from his wealth and his position as a powerful businessman, where a deal can literally mean life or death.

The basic narrative of the fairy tale stories is constantly changing in respect to its authors and the intended audience at the time. Ruth B. Bottigheimer, in her article “Fairy-Tale Origins, Fairy-Tale Dissemination, and Folk Narrative Theory,” argues, “folktales tend to reflect the belief system and the world of their intended audience” (211). If this statement is applied to the previous assertion that fairy tale narratives are ever changing and adapting to the needs of its audience and what the author wishes to put forward, it would make sense for authors of current reinterpretations of fairy tales to also change the context and general plot of the tale to conform and relate to the time period which their audience and themselves come from. In addition, these narratives change based on the media used to tell the tale (TV, movies, music, books, and blogs), the corporations in charge of reworking the tale, and the author rewriting or reinterpreting the tale for the audience. The author would take into consideration the demographics of the intended audience which could be based off of class, sex, race, and age. In short, the stories have thus become an extension of popular culture/cultural industries and as such, a reflection of certain ideologies, norms, and customs of the time they represent. The Grimm’s “Rumpelstiltskin” of the early 18th century has a far different meaning historically and culturally than the current version of Rumpelstiltskin due to the necessity of creating a relevant story for its twenty-first century audience; this idea takes into consideration that relevance is dictated through popular culture. Consequently, this thesis will explore the differences between the Grimm version of “Rumpelstiltskin” from 1812 through 1815 and the twenty-first century reinterpretation of the story and characterization of Rumpelstiltskin in *Once Upon A Time*. It is the premise of this thesis tales and adaptations of these tales say more about the ideologies, norms, and perceptions of the time in which they are adapted than of the original versions that influenced their creation.

With a basic understanding of the two stories that will be compared and the ideas that will serve as the foundation for their analysis, there are three questions guiding the scope of this thesis. The first question posed is: how have the stories changed or remained the same? This question attempts to gauge the amount of outside influences onto the “original” tale, since a story that has stayed primarily the same is just an adaptation told by duplication, but one that has changed drastically gives insight into cultural and societal changes. Second, why do those changes or similarities matter? Lastly, what can be understood about our world and ourselves by analyzing those changes? Based on these questions, this thesis will explore how adaptations of texts are more representative of the time in which they emerge rather than the “original” tales that influenced them. This is important because adaptations, when analyzed, help us understand ourselves, how we have ideologically changed our mores, progressed, or remained the same in respect to the time in which the “original” was written. We are dealing with changes that occur within a time span close to 200 years, from 1815 to 2011, so ideological changes are bound to be found.

While attempting to answer the above questions, this thesis focused on five major points where the show and tale either retained similarities or deviated completely from one another. The five points include: the fairy tale creatures’ transportation to our twenty-first century world, Rumpelstiltskin’s origin story, his involvement with the miller’s daughter, Cora, his reason for a child, and lastly, his death. Narrative and critical theory provide the methodology for this thesis; in terms of critical theory, this research will focus on Marxist, Cultural, and Feminist theory.

In Chapter Two, the methodology, sets up the discussion in an academic context and introduces the theories used for the analysis. First, a discussion on narrative theory, exemplifying how narratives change over time and how those changes are reflective of the time in which they

are created, is presented. This discussion will be contextualized around folk tales and fairy tales; this section will also introduce and define ideology in the context of the narrative and lead into the discussion on critical theory, which focuses heavily on the analysis of ideology as well. Next, a discussion of critical theory will take place, focusing on Marxist, Cultural, and Feminist theories. The final section of the second chapter will supplement the above conversation with the role popular culture and culture industries have in retellings, and what society can learn about itself by analyzing popular culture and culture industries, emphasizing what is being characterized as normative in our society or culture.

Chapter Three compares the Grimm “Rumpelstiltskin” tale and the modern version in *Once Upon A Time*, the Rumpelstiltskin characterizations, and the miller’s daughter to look at the specific similarities and differences between the two interpretations of the character. The focus will be on how the *Once Upon A Time* version gives a backstory to the decisions Rumpelstiltskin makes in the original Grimm tale, and the possible ideologies represented in both versions.

Chapter Four addresses the previous discussion on the similarities and differences between the tales, as well as possible reasons behind the changes in the adaptation, but the emphasis will be on why those changes matter. A study of the character representation and the narrative of Rumpelstiltskin in *Once Upon A Time* allows us to analyze the influences twenty-first century American ideologies have in the this adaptation. Furthermore, there will be a discussion on the popular culture trend of prequels, answering questions such as why did Rumpelstiltskin want a child and how all this leads to a better understanding of where we are as a society compared to the society/culture of the original text.

Finally, Chapter Five discusses how modern interpretations of fairy tales reflect the nature of the society that creates them rather than being simple extensions of the original tale. This discussion leads to the idea that the use of in-depth analysis of texts in the classroom, including children's stories, can lead to a better understanding of the world around us. Finally, the creation of critical consciousness and the use of relevant texts help students re-envision a world through their own power and choice.

Chapter II: Methodology

Before analyzing the questions posed in Chapter One concerning narrative change, the fairy tale genre, and the influences culture industries and popular culture have on the adaptation of the Rumpelstiltskin tale, the Grimm version of 1815 and the modern adaptation in *Once Upon A Time*, 2011, it is necessary to understand the theories used to guide this analysis and how those theories are used and discussed in the context of the fairy tale genre at various levels, from storytelling to popular culture representations. First, narrative theory will be discussed because in its most basic form, fairy tales are stories told by human beings in attempt to make sense of or change their world/reality and narrative theory is the study of stories. This will be followed by discussions concerning storytelling because of the oral history that influences the genre of the fairy tale, followed by folk and fairy tales to introduce the genre formally. Finally, two discussions will take place involving ideology and its role in narratives and narrative in the media because *Once Upon A Time* is a serial, not oral or written, and that has its own nuances to take into consideration.

Other theoretical groundwork for this thesis include critical theory, and that will encompass Marxism and Cultural theory together, followed by feminist theory in relation to fairy tales. These theories, Marxist, Cultural, and Feminist, are connected by the fact that besides looking at texts critically in the sense of economics or time or gender roles, for example, they all deal with ideology in varying levels; as mentioned previously, fairy tales are stories and when analyzing them it is impossible not to see the connection of ideology within the topic. This discussion on the critical theories mentioned above will be complemented by another discussion concerning culture industries and popular culture; as *Once Upon A Time* continues to keep the following it has, about 10 million views per episode, its popularity continues to grow, and so

does its ability to influence its audience and thus be influenced by the culture industry backing it, in this case Disney. Finally, the discussion will focus on examples of how other researchers have used the tenets of narrative and critical theory to analyze adaptations of fairy tale texts. All of the above would then allow a more comprehensive discussion of the Rumpelstiltskin adaptation seen in the *Once Upon A Time* narrative. The reason for using the theories mentioned above lies in their subjective approach to understanding narrative, especially in reference to the ideologies these narratives present, but also their critical approach to understanding how these narratives are comprised and disseminated. Throughout the discussion of these theories and their subsections, ideology is a term that will arise on a variety of occasions because of its importance to the discussion in this chapter in particular and the thesis in general.

NARRATIVE THEORY

In its most basic sense, narrative theory is the study of how narratives are told, created and representative of human experience across genres and media; Rosemary Huisman, in her article “Aspects of Narrative in Series and Serials” explains that “narratives in any medium or genre--oral or written, novel or letter, film or soap opera-- are ways of structuring and representing lived experience” (27). The study of narrative is divided into two major schools of thought regarding narrative genre: structuralism and post-structuralism. Structuralism is extremely influential in the field of fairy tales. For example, Vladimir Propp’s categorizing and analyzing of fairy tale plots, as well as the continuities he observed amongst them, are relevant in the analysis of a work like “Rumpelstiltskin” by the Brothers Grimm. Propp classifies the archetypes, like the villain, the hero, and the donor, and a study of “Rumpelstiltskin” using these archetypes proves to be an interesting endeavor, since at times the King fits the persona of a

villain, greedy and threatening, and Rumpelstiltskin serves as both the donor and the villain, helping the hero by giving her the tools necessary to stay alive and achieve a happy ending while planning to take her firstborn. Lastly, the miller's daughter serves as a possible hero, one who faces death and rises to power. However, post-structuralism is the focus in this thesis because although structuralism is very helpful in giving structure to the analysis of characters, plot, and archetypes, to name a few, post-structuralism takes into account the subjectivity of the entire work because of its focus on the author, as well as the subjectivity of words and their usage.

For post-structuralists, narrative is not a concrete topic that can be defined as clearly and as scientifically as structuralists attempt to do. Here, narrative is treated as a subjective piece which is influenced by a variety of factors, such as culture, society, author, producer, companies, and ideologies, among others; "post-structuralist studies, with their awareness of the perspective, the subjectivity of any interpretation, have paid explicit attention to the subject: that is, the human being doing the producing or interpreting of narrative" (Huisman 39). It is thus understood that post-structuralists look at all the factors influencing the creation, organization, and distributions of narratives to derive meaning. Much of the focus, especially in current works, focuses on ideology because it is almost impossible to extract one's personal beliefs when creating narratives or examining them. This belief is what drives a major component of this thesis; in analyzing the difference between the traditional text of Rumpelstiltskin and his current adaptation, ideological differences become apparent, facilitating an analysis based on differences that are a result of time, geography, culture and society.

STORYTELLING

The art of storytelling itself can be defined in multiple ways; “it might be regarded as telling a tale to an audience without depending on the written word, or it might be seen as taking the printed words from a book and giving them life by reading them orally to one or more listeners” (Zipes, *The Oxford Companion...* 501). The ability to story tell, in either form, has been the foundation for transferring information since the ability to communicate arose. Simply, a story is the recounting of oral histories passed down from generation to generation, fictitious works, or important events from our lives.

Stories are prominent in all aspects of life; people wish to hear a funny story, how someone else’s day went, or catch up on the gossip around the office. As Jonathan Culler observes in his book, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, “there is a basic human drive to hear and tell stories” (83). Storytelling has become an innate ability in all humans. Brian Richardson, in his article "Recent Concepts of Narrative and the Narratives of Narrative Theory," quotes Mark Turner as stating that “narrative imagining—story—is the fundamental instrument of thought [...] It is a literary capacity indispensable to human cognition generally” (Richardson 4-5). When individuals begin to think about their life and start to place all the events that have shaped who they are or have brought them to where they currently are, it is impossible not to create a story of those events. Stories help put life into perspective and help understand the things that seem impossible or unattainable. Jack Zipes, in his book *Speaking Out: Storytelling and Creative Drama for Children*, argues that “it is our realization of what is missing in our lives that impels us to create works of art [stories] that not only reveal insights into our struggles but also shed light on alternatives and possibilities to restructure our mode of living and social relations” (4). Stories have been a foundation in the passing of knowledge, whether historical,

personal, or just general, about the world around us; they “help us navigate ourselves and locate ourselves as we interact with others in our endeavor to create ideal living conditions” (Zipes, *Speaking Out* 5). As stories help the individual navigate and find him or herself in this world, stories also allow the individual to dream and attain what once seemed unattainable. Stories allow a young merchant girl to become Queen and a boy with no wealth or hopes for the future can be given the opportunity to change his stars by simply climbing a bean stalk.

Boria Sax addresses the way in which storytelling allows for both communication as well as selection of a story’s important elements for posterity in “Storytelling and the ‘Information Overload’,” concluding that:

Stories are a means of connecting events and deciding what is important. Several people may observe the same public incident – say, a brawl – and come away with several contrasting stories, depending on what they care about and what they notice. If, however, an observer does not come away with any story, he will not be able to make sense of, report, or probably even remember what happened. Stories were perhaps developed as a means to deal with the “‘information overload,” a contemporary word for what is actually a very archaic phenomenon. (166)

This “information overload” has led to the need to select what details to impart when telling a story and to share the experiences gained with others, whether it be to teach, to make fun, to criticize or to entertain. Life seems to demand the ability to tell a story, since experiences are constantly shared with others; a parent relays their experiences to their child, a teacher to their students, and a government to their people, everyone, in one way or another, shares their experiences in the world with others. As technologies change and time passes, new means of telling stories, like movies and television, become more and more prevalent, and stories that have

stood the test of time, like folk or fairy tales, continue to be disseminated, only in different mediums. These media have taken what used to be a performance by a storyteller to his or her audience, and now present them in a much lengthier and visually appealing way. Folk and fairy tales continue to be disseminated, as will be discussed further in this chapter, because they speak to our hopes and dreams, to the possibility of change with just a little magic, and they teach their audience about the world they live in. Fairy tales, in any medium, are reflections of our current world and as they continue to be readapted to fit a certain audience, time, and place, the tales endure and grow in popularity.

FOLK AND FAIRY TALE

Understanding the creation and the basics of the folk and fairy tale genres provides insight into how, when discussing the character tale “Rumpelstiltskin” with its *Once Upon A Time* adaptation, one is discussing a text that has never been static at all, but rather one that is ever changing and always being reinterpreted to fit a certain time. Moreover, to discuss the genres of folk and fairy tale narratives, it is important to understand their relationship to one another.

A distinction must be made between ‘folk tale’ and ‘fairy tale,’ for in spite of their frequent interchangeability, the terms have distinct etymologies and meanings. The words fairy tale can refer to both a category of oral folk tale and a genre of prose literature...The term folk tale is reserved for any tale deriving from or existing in oral tradition... (Zipes, *The Oxford Companion...* 167)

Consequently, differentiating folk and fairy tales becomes a difficult task for those who wish to write on the subject, and it becomes an issue of personal choice rather than one based on clear

definitions. When debating these terms, it is worth noting that in Jack Zipes' *The Irresistible Fairy Tale: The Cultural and Social History of a Genre*, he argues that:

Folklorists generally make a distinction between wonder folk tales, which originated in oral traditions throughout the world and still exist, and literary fairy tales, which emanated from the oral traditions through the mediation of manuscripts and print, and continue to be created today in various mediated forms around the world. (2)

The genres of folk and fairy tales are almost indistinguishable, but the distinction between the two tends to rely on the notion that one is more oral in tradition and the other one is commonly seen in printed form. Zipes expands on the inability to define the two genres and trace their histories by arguing, “in fact, together, oral and literary tales form one immense and complex genre because they are inextricably dependent on one another” (*The Irresistible Fairy Tale* 3). In that case, it is easy to see why the terms are indeed interchangeable at times and why the Brothers Grimm folk tales became known as fairy tales. As mentioned in Chapter One, Andrew Teverson, in *Fairy Tale (The New Critical Idiom)*, informs that the original intent of the Brothers Grimm work, the *Kinder Und Hausemarchn*, was the preservation of German folk narratives and, consequently, their national heritage. A mere mistake by an English translator led to these folk tales being called “fairy tales.” The term fairy tale is a direct translation of “contes de fée,” a term coined by Marie-Catherine Le Jumel de Barneville, Countess d’Aulnoy (Teverson 29). Consequently, it seems almost impossible to distinguish the folk and fairy tales based on definition or genre-specific attributes, but understanding that both genres wished to impart some kind of knowledge pertaining to the world or the history of a certain culture or time shows that the folk and fairy tale genres were created for very specific reasons.

As we tie storytelling with the innate need to share information and experiences with others, one should examine the purpose of these exchanges. As proposed by Sax, one can infer that one purpose of sharing our stories, both at the collective and individual level, is to give a sense of structure in a world which can, at times, seem very chaotic:

In “real life,” there is no beginning or end, let alone a “happily ever after.” There is no hero, around whom everything that happens revolves. But by imposing a relatively simple structure on experience, storytelling helps us to make sense of the world. The narrative structure of stories is an extension of grammar, which also imposes organization on the chaos of experience. (Sax 166)

Stories are consequently a means to an end. They help the author navigate what seems impossible in our world with what can be and what should be, at least in their minds. If something does not exist or is not right, one can simply create a story where the opposite is true and maybe if enough people read it or believe it, a change can be made. Brian Richardson, author of “Recent Concepts of Narrative and the Narratives of Narrative Theory,” notes that “narrative is the basic vehicle of human knowledge” and to pass on that knowledge, whether it be experience, social class truths, and gender norms or stereotypes, we apply a structure to the narrative that any audience would be able to grasp (169). In the case of fairy tales, it would seem the narratives are more temporal. Events occur in a sequence, and this makes up the “simple structure” Sax refers to in accordance to fairy tale narratives. Of course, that structure is not limited to events following a certain order, but includes narrative adaptations continuously readapting themselves to stay relevant, yet still maintaining their history.

Fairy tale adaptations show the tales in a different light, or rather, in a way that would seem more appealing and relevant to the audience it is being told to. In adapting the Brothers

Grimm Rumpelstiltskin character in *Once Upon A Time*, the creators of the show made the tale relevant by bringing it to the human world and making their adaptations deal with a world without magic or fairy-tale-like happy endings. Ruth B. Bottigheimer, author of “Fairy-Tale Origins, Fairy-Tale Dissemination, and Folk Narrative Theory,” claims that “folktales tend to reflect the belief system and the world of their intended audience” (211). Building on that premise, Teverson, in his book titled *Fairy Tale* argues that:

...any one narrative, because it is not owned by a single author, or produced in any one time or culture, must also be understood as being culturally and historically layered within itself. As a generic form, the fairy tale is a many-tongued genre, a cultural palimpsest; because even as it speaks of the time in which it is told, it carries the memory of the other times in which it has circulated and flourished. (4)

From this we can infer that folk/fairy tale adaptations are more reflective of the time in which they are adapted and that this adaptation is in accordance to the ideologies or cultural norms being promoted at that time and place, but of course, as stated above, “memories” of the texts which inspired the reinterpretation are still present. One example illustrating the point that stories reflect the time in which they are created can be seen in the children’s book *And Tango Makes Three* (2005). This book presents the story of two male penguins who befriend each other in a New York Zoo. These male penguins were inseparable and never sought a relationship with any of the other penguins, females included. When the time came for the penguins to lay an egg and take care of their eggs, the two male penguins had nothing to take care of until the zoo keepers gave them an egg which had no owner, enabling them to raise it together. The baby hatches and the three end up living happily ever after. Ideologically, this book may promote the idea that a

same sex couple can raise a child just as well as a heterosexual couple; however, this book is banned in most of the United States. The act of banning this children's book can imply that a majority of local government officials and state governments find the possible allusions to homosexual couples or homosexual partners raising a child to be problematic for the youth in their state. This could then bring into question whether the book's rejection is based on facts or rather assertions based on traditional Christian values that have strong roots in Western culture. Studying the book's acceptance by some can show ideologies that used to be considered controversial, taboo, or against traditional Christian beliefs are now finding acceptance; indeed, the very act of it being banned, in and of itself, becomes a source of controversy.

Texts thus become a multilayered script of what is going on in a given country, time, and place because they reflect the interests or what is popular at that time. Although fairy tales are often modified to reflect the ideology of the current times, this is not always the case. Jane Kelley's "Power Relationships in Rumpelstiltskin: A Textual Comparison of a Traditional and a Reconstructed Fairy Tale" addresses these two possibilities by explaining that "storytellers reproduce fairy tales either by duplication or by revision. 'Duplicate' fairy tales copy the original fairy tales without questioning or challenging the beliefs, customary habits, or attitudes of the original tale, thereby reinforcing dominant modes of thinking. 'Revised' fairy tales re-envisioned beliefs and attitudes" (Kelley 32). Kelley contends that revised folk/fairy tales are more reflective of a time and, more specifically, of the storyteller's ideologies and what they wish to impart. *Once Upon A Time* is a show that does not merely duplicate original content; the creators chose to revise almost all parts of the tales they included in their show. For example, the character Rumpelstiltskin is not merely Rumpelstiltskin, but also ends up being the crocodile from the Peter Pan story and the Beast from *Beauty and the Beast*.

Storytellers are now more than just individuals who tell stories and attempt to distribute those stories to as many audiences as possible; popular, successful retellings and are now controlled and distributed by big businesses. These retellings tend to say more about current Western culture than the actual traditional tales themselves; as Jane Kelly observes, “when authors write, they usually have a particular audience in mind. Also, either consciously or unconsciously, authors maintain an ideology they want to promote. Consequently, the ideology benefits someone” (33). In the case of *Once Upon A Time*, the Disney Company has considerable influence on the show because it is the mother company of the ABC network, where the show is aired; that influence also encompasses the ideology the show is promoting. Horowitz and Kitsis may be the creators of *Once Upon A Time*, but financial backing comes from Disney, giving the show a third storyteller. Jack Zipes argues that “stories have become commodities, and they are used to market the interests of big corporations and politicians or to promote ourselves” (14) and concludes that:

the work and customs of small tribes, villages, towns, reading circles, court societies, and small communities shaped storytelling, but today market forces, mass media conglomerates, governments, and the Internet determine how stories will be spread. There is an intricate “web dictation,” an arbitrary set of rules based on profit and power, that limits how far and how deep storytellers can go. (Zipes, *Speaking Out* 15)

The stories of today need to be approved by an editor, then by a group who would be willing to market it, followed by a book store who would be willing to buy, promote, and sell it, and finally, a person willing to read it. This process stems from the fact that all parties want to benefit financially and, as a result, they make sure a story will sell before backing it. Even then, the story

could be lost in the vast expanse which is the internet, and no one would know that this story actually exists. *Once Upon A Time* exists because of its ratings; as the credits for the show roll, the audience can see the multitude of writers, editors, directors, and stage hands, among others, which make the show what it is and what it needs to be, i.e. profitable. If ratings are lost, the show gets lost right along with the ratings. Stories have to promote an ideology favorable to someone in power in order to create a storm of interest; otherwise the story could be lost because it failed to attract financial backing. Narrative voice, storytelling, and fairy tale interpretations in general have begun to change dramatically as a result of those culture industries controlling production and distribution.

IDEOLOGY AND NARRATIVES CHANGE

In the general sense, ideology is “the study of ideas”; it is also defined as “something that’s *false* or *misleading* because it’s *mystifying*...Such understandings of ideology-as-falsity tend, of course, also to contain a notion of how things *ought* to be...Ideology...is prescriptive” (Nealon and Giroux 93-94). The mystery shrouding ideology stems from the fact that ideology is ever changing and can be based on abstract notions like freedom, democracy, and love, among others. This understanding of ideology states that what people think of as their ideological standing on certain matters is actually a notion prescribed to them by tradition or taught to them through some form of popular media, education, or government, to state a few. Even if the ideological stances we prescribe ourselves are based on false notions or notions on how things ought to be, these ideological stances do have an impact on those around us and, consequently, on popular media. For example, one could argue that there is a strong heteronormative ideology

being promoted in *Once Upon A Time*, since all characters and all happy endings revolve around the idea of the love between a man and woman, not between homosexual couples.

Ideology, in the end, is what you think *before* you think or act—what thinking and action silently take for granted. As such, ideology is another way that our attention is diverted from the *how* of meaning to the *what*; in other words, ideology is one of the devices by which cultural meanings—which are by definition “arbitrary,” not necessary in any mystical or transcendence way—are seen as “natural,” inevitable,” and “good” (Nealon and Giroux 99)

In the example presented above regarding *Once Upon A Time*, it can be inferred that the creators of *Once Upon A Time* have found that keeping the tales contextually heterosexual, which is the same kind of ideology held in the traditional texts, is a “natural” move to make and possibly even “good” on an ideological level because it either holds true to the tales which inspired the adaptations or because it reflects the dominant ideological beliefs they want to promote or maintain. Western American culture is firmly grounded on Christian beliefs and it is that premise which makes the ideology being proposed by popular media understandable; this ideology promotes heteronormative interactions and love rather than the also normative homosexual love that is very much a part of our society.

In the article “Ella Evolving: Cinderella Stories and the Construction of Gender Appropriate Behavior,” Linda T. Parsons argues that:

while we cannot know precisely how and to what extent fairy tales affect the unconscious [ideology], we do know that fairy tale storylines are specific to historical and cultural contexts, and because we ourselves are products of those

contexts, we tend to accept the gendered discourse embedded in them as natural, essential, and conclusive. (136)

As stated above, certain ideologies become “natural” or “good” because of the context surrounding one’s upbringing, but ideologies are formed by the community and by popular media, not concrete aspects of our world. Parsons discusses ideology in terms of gender norms, although this premise can be expanded well beyond gender norms. For example, in *Once Upon A Time* the two main villains, the Evil Witch and Rumpelstiltskin, share a lack of familial bonds. In the case of the Evil Witch, her mother was evil and her father killed; for Rumpel, his mother was missing and his father failed to raise him, just like Rumpel failed to raise his son. This fact in the show leads the audience to form conceptions and ideologies, unconsciously or consciously, about families and how families that stay together seem to be more successful at rearing good children than families of single parents, who, by the standards of the show, are more susceptible to raising a child that turns out “evil.”

In her analysis of ideology, in accordance to gender specifics, Parsons builds on the argument presented when she address the heteronormative perspectives at play in stories. She quotes Richard Beach and Lee Galda from their article “Response to Literature as a Cultural Activity” as stating that “readers expect characters to behave in what they consider to be culturally appropriate ways” (141). Parsons adds, “the heterosexual, romantic storyline incorporated in most fairy tales is so much a part of our being-in-the-world that it is extremely difficult to read and write outside it” (141). Ideological concepts reintroduced into society and popularized by popular culture and the culture industries make it very difficult for stories that try to change those ideologies to gain some kind of recognition or traction. The ideologies presented in *Once Upon A Time* are a mixture between traditional values, something Disney is known for,

and a contemporary view of the female role, the creation of evil, and the concepts of family. These changes in the narrative of Rumpelstiltskin between the Grimm tale and the show are reflective of those ideological changes; an understanding that change will give insight into popularized Western American culture and ideology.

NARRATIVE AND MEDIA

Thus far, narrative has been spoken of in the sense of oral or written texts, with some allusions to media and, more specifically, television. For this thesis though, while using a post-structuralist approach for analysis, a distinction must also be made between narratives of the written form and those of popular media like television, since the different mediums add levels of complexity to the analysis of the narrative. For example, the tale “Rumpelstiltskin” by the Brothers Grimm is confined to the story already recorded by the Brothers, but *Once Upon A Time* is a television serial that allows for varying subplots, expansions, and contextualization of the traditional narratives, all encompassed by the metanarrative in the show, the main plot.

Expanding on those differences, “narrative in the media becomes simply a way of selling something. This means that the economic structure of media industries determines their output, the kinds of stories they can tell” (Fulton 3). An author of a text is limited by the power structures that be, like publishing companies and major book stores, when attempting to create a new text or an adaptation. Because print has gone primarily digital, companies like Amazon allow individuals to self-publish, thus expanding the field of narrative and making it even harder to publish and actually have revenue; however, the stories can still come out and be told. When it comes to television, the numbers control the narratives; these numbers are based on viewer ratings and the income brought in by commercial advertisements, which are factors that don't

affect written texts. *Once Upon A Time* has large viewer ratings, approximately 10 million viewers per episode, which begs the question about what in that narrative appeals to the masses, but also, what in that narrative sells or makes a profit for the ABC/Disney Company?

In the field of television, there is a multitude of “authors” or agencies wishing to impact the story being told, especially to maximize profit, thus viewer ratings. Rosemary Huisman, in her article “Aspects of Narrative in Series and Serials,” argues there are two major agencies which influence a story: first, the “creative activity” and lastly, that of the Television Company or organization (Huisman 156). The first consists of the producers, scriptwriters, photographers, and actors and the second, keeping with the text of *Once Upon A Time* in this thesis, would be the ABC network and the Disney company. Unlike a written text, where the creative agency will be the one controlling the outcome of the text, in a television series, it is the company that controls that outcome; “the television company agency is the primary agency, in that the pressures, both internal and external, generated and experienced by the company will be the context within which the other agency, of creative activity, can take place” (Huisman 157). This information allows one to enter the analysis of the Grimm text compared to the television adaptation with the knowledge that a variety of forces are at work when creating an adaptation of this magnitude and these forces are driven by money. Furthermore, the inclusion of culture industries like Disney and the fact that money is a driving force in this show allows critical theory to be used to analyze these changes thoroughly.

CRITICAL THEORY

Many of the tenets found in critical theory have surfaced within the discussions of narrative theory and the analysis of the secondary sources concerning storytelling, folk/fairy

tales, and ideology, such as economics, ideology, and popular culture/culture industries. As mentioned previously, this discussion will focus on the tenets of Marxism, Cultural theory and Feminism, although my discussion will specifically focus on the intersection of each school of thought with fairy tales rather than attempting to describe it in its entirety.

To begin, Marxism seeks to examine the economic systems that structure human societies, since “economics is the base on which the *superstructure* of social/political/ideological realities is built” (Tyson 53-54). In essence, Marxist theory, especially in relation to this thesis, seeks to understand and dissect how the economic structures that make up the American capitalist system, like culture industries, affect what is perceived to be the “norm” or “traditional” in any given culture or society. This understanding of the power of the ruling upper class, defined by their wealth and cultural capital, allows a discussion of what was mentioned in the previous section concerning a company’s ability to contextualize narratives to fit their own needs, including the need to make a profit.

Marx saw a company’s ability to promote, form, and create ideology by using its wealth as the root of manipulation of public consciousness. The belief systems that certain narratives continue to promote or wish to change, especially ones that enter into the popular imagination, portray themselves as “normal” or ideal when in actuality they are merely ideologies which are subjective in nature. For example, when one sees commercials for Weight Watchers or Slim Fast, the commercials are promoting an ideology which argues that a healthy and beautiful body is a slim body and the bombardment of that ideology in popular media creates a need in society, a need to fit that norm or beauty standard. That need turns its audience into consumers who will do anything to fulfill the “norm” presented to them and which benefits someone; “in other words, in economic terms, it’s in capitalism’s best interests to promote whatever personal insecurities

will motivate us to buy consumer goods” (Tyson 63). As capitalism promotes/argues the benefits of a certain body type, like health, they are building in its audience a sense of insecurity about themselves and thus programs like Weight Watchers exist because they exploit those insecurities by selling their alternative/solution.

The above notion does affect our interpretation of movies, television shows, and other types of media, such as *Once Upon A Time* and fairy tales in general, because these texts sell happy endings and show audiences how to achieve those endings. The methods presented to achieve those happy endings promote certain ideologies and, again, someone benefits from selling those ideas.

Marxist theory concerning ideology and the illusion of what is sold as normal in society feeds Cultural theory. The tenets of Cultural theory that serve as the primary focus for this work, in conjunction with Marxist economic views of culture and society, clarify how cultural theorists look at texts as reflections of a certain time or culture, and those how those reflections give insight into that culture or time period’s ideological stances, cultural/societal norms. Lastly, they help us understand how writers of narrative attempted to make sense of their world (Tyson 294). This way of looking at texts influenced the methods used in this thesis when analyzing the traditional “Rumpelstiltskin” against the contemporary representation in *Once Upon A Time*, and specific attention will be paid to the economic powers that influence the show’s narrative, the ideological differences presented in the texts because of the passage of time from 1815 -2011, and the assumptions that can arise about our current society. In short, the analysis will explore how *Once Upon A Time* is a reflection of our current capitalist society rather than representative of its inspiration.

Since this section should have provided the reader with a basic understanding of Marxist and Cultural theories, especially regarding its application in this thesis, the next section will discuss Feminism. Since the miller's daughter and other female characters in *Once Upon A Time* are discussed in this thesis, it is important to establish a theoretical basis for the discussion, followed by a discussion of culture industries and popular culture and their influence on main stream culture and ideology. Finally, as stated previously in this chapter, the final section will consist of other works whose scope and nature are similar to this thesis.

FEMINISM AND FAIRY TALES

As defined by bell hooks in her book *Feminism Is For Everyone: Passionate Politics*, “feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression” (1). She informs the reader that feminism is not the popularized notion of women wanting or deserving to be better than men; instead, hooks argues feminism is the ending of sexism for both women and men. Of course, the definition hooks offers is one of many in feminist theory, but this is the definition which will act as a starting point for the discussion in this thesis. This is because fairy tales, whether they have very strong female characters or traditionally strong patriarchal roots, all speak to the gender roles each character is meant to encompass or portray. In *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales*, edited by Jack Zipes, it is stated that “feminist theory about fairy tales, is fundamentally a critique of patriarchal literary and cultural practices in Western societies” and looks at the “representation[s] of women in literature and scholarship” (158). As the patriarchal tradition in fairy tales continues to come into question, so do the representations of women and men. Female characters in fairy tales are constantly being defined under patriarchal ideologies and as such, when these women attempt to go outside what is deemed to

be the norm or appropriate for a female character under that ideology, they are called “evil.” Lois Tyson in *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide* argues:

a patriarchal ideology suggests that there are only two identities a woman can have. If she accepts her traditional gender role and obeys the patriarchal rules, she’s a “good girl”; if she doesn’t, she’s a “bad girl.” These two roles---also referred to as “madonna” and “whore” or “angel” and “bitch”--- view women only in terms of how they relate to the patriarchal order. (89)

This “patriarchal ideology” influences our perceptions of the female characters in fairy tales because the gender roles being reinforced in the genre have been continuously reintroduced into the tales over the years. For example, in the movie *Cinderella* by the Walt Disney Company, the character Cinderella is perceived as a good person and deserving of the happy ending she gets because of her obedience, calm and caring nature, and her faithfulness to her family, especially her father. On the other hand, the stepmother is characterized as evil because she is the opposite of Cinderella; she takes power for herself, commands attention and order, and uses men as a means to an end. These two characters are defined in the context of patriarchy because one submits to that “tradition” and the other sees no use for it and looks out for herself, making Cinderella “good” and the stepmother “evil.”

The notions concerning ideology, gender roles and female perception interest feminist literary critiques. As Tyson explains, “feminist criticism examines the ways in which literature (and other cultural productions) reinforces or undermines the economic, political, social, and psychological oppression of women” (83). If we were to take a look at the Cinderella movie, we see each character was defined by their alignment with or against patriarchy, reinforcing the social and political oppression of women. To receive a happy ending, women are taught to live

by the rules set by patriarchy; failure to do so characterizes the woman as “evil” or “bad,” undeserving of a happy ending. As noted by Parsons,

Feminist criticism of fairy tales underscores the fact that the traditional canon reflects sanctioned patriarchal values and norms, while tales that portrayed heroes and heroines who stretch the boundaries of gender-appropriate behavior have, for the most part been ‘lost.’ (137)

Instead of challenging the patriarchal system or gender roles in general, tales tend to hold on to those beliefs in some form or another. For example, as will be discussed further in Chapter Three, the tale of “The Three Spinners” by the Brothers Grimm is a tale in which the helpers or savior of the protagonist is not a man, like in “Rumpelstiltskin,” but rather three women and yet this tale is not as popular as “Rumpelstiltskin.” One of the possible reasons this tale is not regularly adapted into American popular culture like more heteronormative tales, could be because in this tale the women take on the role men are typically described and pictured as doing in fairy tales, saving the young girl. As this tale goes out of the “traditional canon” by making women the heroes, the story gets stigmatized and pushed to the side as if it did not exist because it does not conform to “patriarchal values and norms,” as stated by Parsons above.

In respect to *Once Upon A Time* and “Rumpelstiltskin” by the Brothers Grimm, we find each stigmatizes their female characters in some way. In *Once Upon A Time*, the female characters who show great power and ambition are regularly portrayed as evil people and in the “Rumpelstiltskin” tale, the miller’s daughter, due to her submission to the patriarchal system, is shown as one who achieves the highest honor in a fairy tale, becoming Queen. These topics will be discussed further in Chapters Three and Four, keeping in mind the focus of this thesis is the

Rumpelstiltskin character. The miller's daughter, Cora, is added only because of her direct connection to the Rumpelstiltskin tale and the Rumpelstiltskin character in the show.

CULTURE INDUSTRIES AND POPULAR CULTURE IN THE FAIRY TALE GENRE

The term “culture industry” was first coined by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in their article “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception.” This term is most often used to “call attention to the industrialization and commercialization of culture under capitalist relations of production” (Kellner 202). These industries are thus selling and promoting what culture should be, where it is going, and sometimes, how it should stay. Disney is a culture industry and as such, it is necessary to see how a culture industry can influence works and create/alter popular culture because the show *Once Upon A Time* has become a significant part of American popular culture.

Culture industries are defining and redefining the basis for societal norms/mores and cultural progression through the manipulation of popular culture. Culture industries have an overarching influence on what is deemed as popular culture and as one begins to analyze the relationship between what is popular and the industries that have the ability to bring forward and promote this information, we then see a monopoly of ideas centralized in very few industries with huge influences in everyday life. Theodor Adorno addresses this idea in “Culture Industries Reconsidered,” by arguing

the culture industry turns into public relations, the manufacturing of ‘goodwill’ per se, without regard for particular firms or saleable objects. Brought to bear is a general uncritical consensus, advertisements produced for the world, so that each product of the culture industry becomes its own advertisement. (100)

The culture industry thus facilitates popular culture much like a public relations department of a company would deal with public complaint or praise; the CEO theoretically takes the comments and creates popular culture material around the needs it sees in the public sphere, and in doing so, controls the exposure to the ideologies and ideas that popular culture dictates are main stream; in his book *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, John Storey defines popular culture as “simply culture which is widely favorable or well-liked by many people,” the main stream of any given culture (6). Moreover, popular culture becomes a tool of culture industries to perpetuate certain ways of thinking and feeling, becoming its own advertisement in the sense that it “sells” the illusion of “a culture of the people for the people,” rather than presenting the reality of assimilation into an already functioning machine (Storey 9).

Popular culture is studied because of its direct relationship to its audience and as a byproduct of mass culture. Storey describes the relationship between mass culture and popular culture by suggesting that “mass culture is the repertoire, popular culture is what people actively make from it” (12). Mass culture, as it is refers to the mass production and mass consumption of goods, influences what is popular culture or a culture that seems to be built by the choices of the people. For example, *Once Upon A Time* is a product of mass culture because in every episode the ABC is attempting to reach as many people as possible, reaching over ten million viewers per episode. On the other hand, it has become a part of popular culture because the audience of the show have now become active in the show, creating forums, going to comic-con conferences, and dressing up as the characters for a variety of activities. As mass culture continues to produce, popular culture can be described as what sticks, not necessarily something that will reach the masses, like mass culture, but still remains popular. When an element joins the main stream or becomes a new “fad,” its effect on the audience is quite evident because of how they react,

assimilate, rebel, act like or accept that new artifact. Nealon and Giroux, in their book *The Theory Toolbox*, argue that,

one of the most crucial reasons to study popular culture is not so much to learn from it but to examine how it teaches us certain things: It teaches us how to have fun, how to be sad, how to be in love, what kind of body we should have, what we should be excited by, and what should bore us. (68)

Popular culture filters what we consider to be the norm, or what looks best, or how to act best because it is always there; it is a part of all things that are characterized as popular, constantly teaching the audience. If popular culture is the teacher of so many ideas and subsequent actions that seem to naturally emerge, such as what it means to have fun or fall in love, then understanding how fairy tales are used by culture industries to promote certain ideologies and norms helps us understand who we are as a society. Fairy tales have become embedded in the fabric of Western popular culture and culture industries, such as Disney, have promoted the genre and in doing so, promoted ideas/perspectives it sees as necessary or normal for societal growth. The adaptations of fairy tales have been in line with our own societal projection of normality/future and the corporation of Disney facilitates those ideologies/perspectives. Disney has a huge influence on the consumer “for better or worse, about gender roles, violence, consumerism, race, competition, manners, and a thousand other things” (Nealon and Giroux 68). Understanding this influence allows the audience to be aware of subjective tellings of what is normative or should be normative in society.

The study of fairy tale subtexts, especially when comparing the traditional or “original” texts with modern adaptations, leads to a deeper understanding of how popular culture and culture industries influence what is seen as standard and functional in our society/culture. The

premise of this thesis and the reason why the character Rumpelstiltskin from *Once Upon A Time* is compared to the Grimm tale is because the changes made to the character and story say a lot about what is popular in the American context and what ideologies are being presented and pushed in the twenty-first century by the Disney culture industry. Students who are taught to see beyond the “disneyfication” of the tales learn how to interpret and redefine conceptions that have no real merit beyond the fact that the notions have somehow become “popular.” For example, a notion that has remained popular in modern adaptations of the tales, especially in the movies/TV, is the idea that for a woman to be beautiful, she must be thin. Even in the most recent/progressive movie made by Disney in 2013, *Frozen*, based on the tale “The Ice Queen,” we have a promotion of the typical concepts of beauty that have always been at the forefront of popular ideologies in the west: to be beautiful one must be skinny, primarily light skinned, and upper class--and wealth certainly does not hurt. This movie, although forward moving in its empowerment of the female character, still promotes long-standing ideas of what is beautiful and acceptable in our society. *Once Upon A Time* also fits into that mold because all major heroines and villains are also extremely beautiful. They are thin and light skinned. They are far more powerful and independent than their traditional counterparts, yet they have maintained the same beauty standards.

These subtexts and recurring images are constantly reworking and cementing certain ideologies and beliefs in the minds of its audience. Fairy tales are an excellent way to highlight the repeated stereotypes in American popular culture. One of the more recent trends in the visual representations of the tales is the recurring theme of giving characters, whose story and purpose are typically left to the imagination of the reader, some backstory and in doing so humanizing the

tale to an even greater extent than the historical implications already associated with the tales ever could.

FAIRY TALES AND UNDERSTANDING CHANGE

Narrative changes happen constantly, especially when looking at the genres of folk and fairy tales, which are continuously being reimagined to fit the current needs of twenty-first century audiences and messages. There are changes in ideologies, motifs, context, and cultural and social representations, and these changes occur for a variety of reasons, including culture industries, popular culture, and the actual author or creator of said adaptation. For example, in the movie *Frozen*, the female characters are the heroines rather than following the old ideology of men being heroes and women being the damsels in distress. It is Anna, the younger sister of the main character, Elsa, who chooses to save her sister from death rather than allowing herself to be saved by a man. Her sacrifice for her sister allows for a happy ending; rather than depicting the stereotypical true love scenario typically seen in fairy tales, the movie advocates for sisterly love. This ending is far more in line with a feminist perspective because sexist gender roles are left aside to give way to a story that shows women helping other women get their happy endings, instead of resorting to the patriarchal, male-centered tale.

Analyzing these changes and by whom these changes are made gives insight into the authors' or creators' point of view and personal ideology, as well as the cultural and social norms/beliefs found in the time period in which that adaptation was created. The aim of this thesis is to find what "Rumpelstiltskin" and its adaptation in *Once Upon A Time* reflect in terms of our culture and those who have created it. Diane Wolkstein, in her article "Transforming Fairy Tales: The Princess in Transition," argues that

Myths and folktales are cauldrons of collected wisdom that are clothed in whatever culture in which they take shape. Each story suggests a possible way of acting, which also reflects the culture of the tale's origin...Once the story is retold, it is already being reshaped by the culture and beliefs of the new storyteller. (135)

Wolkstein builds on her argument by sharing the tale "Old Rinkark" by the Brothers Grimm and then looking at her own adaptation of the tale, titled *The Glass Mountain*. The first distinction between the original tale and her adaptation was a rather significant one; when she turned in her manuscript of the Grimm tale, her editor asked her to name the princess. In the traditional tale, the princess was merely the daughter of the king and, in a time period where women had no rights and were to do as their fathers or husbands wished, it is easy to understand why she had no name. However, Wolkstein was writing in the 1990s and her editor saw that this princess had "to be an individual" rather than just another piece in the story (134). One of the most significant historical changes between the nineteenth century and the twenty-first century was the women's suffrage movement and the rise of feminism; consequently, the change turning the princess from an unnamed piece of the story into a person is an indicator of the ideological/cultural changes that have taken place between the two stories, as well as the editor's personal point of view.

In the analysis of her own work, Wolkstein makes it a point to state that her ending was different and to her that ending meant something socially and culturally. "In the 19th-century version of the story, the princess frees herself and increases the king's wealth and power. In the twenty-first century version, she frees herself and also shares the wealth and power with her spouse and all living creatures" (135). The tale turns from one focusing on the princess as a daughter being her father's property and acting for his benefit, to one in which she determines

her own future and controls the path her life takes. This change is aligned with the ideology of twenty-first century America, in which women ideally share equal power and equal opportunity.

Ivy Haoyin Hsieh and Marylou M. Matoush's article, titled "Filial Daughter, Woman Warrior, or Identity-Seeking Fairytale Princess: Fostering Critical Awareness Through Mulan," analyzes the way in which adaptations speak volumes about the culture that creates them and which they represent. Their discussion focuses on the evolution of the Mulan ballad in three English adaptations, but the adaptation most relevant to this study is the one pertaining to the culture industry, which is Disney's movie adaptation of Mulan. The first difference, which can have some interesting implications for an American audience lacking knowledge of Chinese history, is the historical setting in which the Mulan film takes place. Hsieh and Matoush point out that Disney, in an attempt to make a two-page ballad into a full-length movie, obscured the actual history associated with the ballad and China by putting the Imperial City in the same time period as the villain of the movie, Shan-Yu, both of which were separated by more than 1,000 years (219). This lack of historical continuity on the part of Disney states a lot about their actual intention with the movie; the company chose to create a conflict that would lead to a more marketable and fairy tale-like movie, rather than maintain a historically accurate plot that is representative of the time and place it originated.

Disney took the traditional aspects of the tale and transformed them into something that was more relatable to Western American tradition and time. As Hsieh and Matoush point out

the storyline was transformed into the European fairy-tale structure that Disney has become famous for, without respect for the Chinese origins of the tale...

'Finding oneself' is a modern American concept and a noble goal from western

perspective, but one that conflicts with East Asian perspectives regarding the more communal nature of the self. (219)

These changes are representative of how a culture industry like Disney, which is constantly reinterpreting and adapting works, can make these materials far less cultural in respects to historical significance and placement and instead, take on a far more Western American approach to the topic in an attempt to make it relatable and sellable, while possibly forwarding an agenda or ideology.

In Disney's version of Mulan's story, the narrative was substantially rewritten so as to satisfy global tastes. It must be noted that those tastes are not only determined by Disney, but are much more closely aligned with Western colonialism than with authentic Chinese ways of knowing and doing. (Hsieh and Matoush 220)

Disney determined the changes it wished to make and in doing so created a perception of how Chinese people are culturally and socially to its audiences. Disney also made these Chinese characters far more Westernized than they actually would be. Moreover, the company also defined the extent to which the motifs and characters were Western; based on the success of the movie, American audiences seemed to accept this portrayal.

David L. Russell, in his article "Young Adult Fairy Tales for the New Age: Francesca Lia Block's *The Rose and the Beast*," also analyzes the differences between traditional tales and their contemporary counterparts by doing exactly as Wolkstein and Hsieh and Matoush have done in their articles. However, he finds "these stories [the adaptations], which seem at first removed from the traditional tales that inspired them, in fact, share their timeless themes, their dark undercurrents, and, in a guarded way, their hopefulness" (114). Russell's affirmation of the

influences the traditional tales have on their contemporary adaptations is seen in both his study and that of Wolkstein and Hsieh and Matoush. When analyzing an adaptation, it seems almost impossible to not notice how the adaptation was influenced by its predecessor. Of course, when it comes to fairy tales and folk tales in general, it is almost impossible to tell what previous version of a tale influenced another without the author of the adaptation simply stating it, but it is still possible to look at those differences and understand, at least in this context, the twenty-first century Western American world. Those changes can be reflective of a certain ideology, can emerge as a product of popular culture or culture industries, and/or simply demonstrate the modernizing of a traditional tale. Regardless of the intentions behind the adaptation, much can be learned from taking the two works, traditional and contemporary, to gain understanding about the circumstances and time in which those pieces were created.

CONCLUSION

Now that the theories and secondary sources that supplement, define, and enhance the theoretical discussion conducted in this chapter have been presented, a thorough analysis of the Rumpelstiltskin representations can take place. The analysis of the “Rumpelstiltskin” tale against the representation in *Once Upon A Time* will use the tenets of Narrative, Marxist, Cultural and Feminist theory to show how adaptations are more reflective of the society and author who writes them than of the actual traditional versions. The emphasis in this thesis is given to the above theories, but the tenets of storytelling, folk/fairy tales, ideology, and culture industries/popular culture will also be applied to this thesis, as shown by the final subsection, “Fairy Tales and Understanding Change.”

Chapter III: Noticing the Changes: From Grimm to *Once Upon a Time*

“Rumpelstiltskin,” like many other fairy tale narratives, has been rewritten and reinterpreted in a variety of ways in an effort to entertain, portray certain value systems, and promote certain ideologies and norms pertaining to the time in which it was rewritten or reworked. These changes, as shown by Diane Wolkstein in her article “Transforming Fairy Tales: The Princess in Transition,” have promoted the agenda or vision of its creators while making the tales relevant to the time in which they were readapted. Rumpelstiltskin has had a variety of names and has made an assortment of appearances throughout history;

Rumpelstiltskin goes by many names. Titeliture, Purzinigle, Batzibitzili, Panzimanzi, and Whuppity Stoorie are just a few of his sobriquets. Whether he makes an appearance as Ricdin-Ricdon in a French tale, Tom Tit Tot in a British tale, as Gilitrutt in Iceland, as Rompetailtailskin in Louisiana, or as Tambutoe in African American Folklore, his essence and function remain much the same.

(Tatar 262)

The essence and function of these Rumpelstiltskin characters is that of the helper, a character who comes to the aid of other characters, asking for something in return.

The most recent adaptation, at least in the Western popular imagination, comes from the ABC network show *Once Upon A Time*. In the show, Rumpelstiltskin (also known as the “Dark One” and Mr. Gold) fulfills that same function by being the character everyone calls upon when they need something; however, he also has his own plans for the characters: his primary purpose being to attain ultimate strength and power. As the “Dark One,” he seeks to increase his power, ensuring no other creature would be able to surpass or defy him.

This narrative attempts to fill in the many gaps left by the Brothers Grimm tales. For example, it addresses how a character becomes an evil witch or why Rumpelstiltskin would want a child. This form of analysis and questioning is exemplified by the work of Hsieh and Matoush in their discussion of the Mulan ballad compared to the Disney interpretation of Mulan. They examined the ideological, historical, and cultural/societal implications in the adaptation and found, for example, that Disney took the Mulan ballad and changed it without recognizing the historical time or importance. The ballad predates the Great Wall of China, the Imperial City, and the villain Shan YU and yet all these elements, from vastly different times, were put into the same movie constructing a false representation of China at that time period (Hsieh and Matoush 219). However, before discussing the specifics of the Rumpelstiltskin adaptation using the form used by scholars like Hsieh and Matoush, it is necessary to first discuss the tale “Rumpelstiltskin” by the Brothers Grimm in terms of plot, historical relevance and the mores being promoted, followed by the differences and similarities found in *Once Upon A Time*.

“RUMPELSTILTSKIN” BY THE BROTHERS GRIMM

As mentioned previously in this study, the Brothers Grimm began collecting German folk narratives with the intention of archiving and preserving German history and culture. *Children’s Stories and Household Tales* is one of the collections of that work, being more folk than fairy tale by their definition. This collection includes the tale “Rumpelstiltskin” and, according to scholars, represents or captures the transformation for women in terms of utility and their role in the household. Zipes observes the era of spinning primarily existed from the medieval period to the 19th century, when industrialism took the power of spinning from women and put it in the hands of men. Jack Zipes argues the importance spinning had for women before industrialism

and the role fairy tales played in documenting and reflecting this importance in *The Golden Age of Folk and Fairy Tales: From the Brothers Grimm to Andrew Lang*. As Zipes explains:

The importance of spinning in the economy of Europe from the medieval period to the end of the nineteenth century can be documented in the thousands of folk and fairy tales that were disseminated by word of mouth and through print. The most popular “spinning” tale is, of course, “Rumpelstiltskin,” and like many tales about spinning, it reveals how important spinning could be for women: a good spinner could rise in social status and find a husband through her diligent efforts. (285)

Spinning allowed women a semblance of control over their lives through marketable skills. In Zipes’ “Spinning with Fate: Rumpelstiltskin and the Decline of Female Productivity,” he argues “the spindle was associated with the womb, a woman’s ultimate power of creativity, her autonomy” (52). Whatever a woman brought into a relationship measured her worth, and the ability for a woman to spin well allowed her to have a greater chance of finding a good husband and improving her circumstances.

In his book titled *Fairy Tale (The New Critical Idiom)*, Andrew Teverson argues “the story of ‘Rumpelstiltskin’ (ATU500 ‘The Name of the Helper’) represents the fantasy that a life of drudgery in the spinning room might be miraculously replaced with life as a pampered queen...” (19). One’s life, one’s future, was literally based upon one’s utility and the coming of the industrial age removed that utility, thus domesticating even further the role of women in the home. In the Grimm’s tale, the main character of the tale “Rumpelstiltskin” is actually not Rumpelstiltskin himself, but rather the miller’s daughter, as she is known in the text since her name is never mentioned. Like most fairy tale heroines at the time, this daughter was beautiful, and the conflict of the story consists of the lie her father told; lie drives the plot of the story. The

miller told a king his daughter could spin straw into pure gold. The king, driven by greed, takes the girl and instructs her to spin straw into gold or she would be executed. As the miller's daughter begins to cry because she is unable to fulfill what her father told the king, a small gnome named Rumpelstiltskin appears to help the miller's daughter in exchange for her necklace. The significance of a male character helping the miller's daughter in the art of spinning is a testament to the changes occurring in the 19th century with industrialization, as argued by Jack Zipes in his article "Spinning with Fate: Rumpelstiltskin and the Decline of Female Productivity." This significance is further exemplified in a less popular Grimm tale, "The Three Spinners." This is a tale in which the young woman, much like the miller's daughter in the "Rumpelstiltskin" tale, is forced to spin straw by a royal and then promised marriage for the accomplishment of that goal. This tale, however, focuses on the utility of women, especially those able to spin straw, because the young woman, who is unable to spin straw and loathes the profession, is saved by three old women whose bodies show the wear and tear of working in the spinning houses all their lives. In this tale, we have women working and achieving their goal with the help of other women, a pre industrialism narrative; yet the tale "Rumpelstiltskin," is far from that reality and possibility. Instead, it tells the story of male power, dominance, and utility.

Rumpelstiltskin turns the straw into gold. The king, impressed with the miller's daughter, forces her to spin even more straw into gold. Rumpelstiltskin comes again and helps her in exchange for her ring. Again, the king is impressed and forces her to spin even more straw into gold, this time promising to marry her if she does. In this portion of the narrative, the audience sees the King's greed. The King does not settle for the gold he already accumulated the first two times he ordered the miller's daughter to spin the straw into gold; he asks her a third time and by promising to marry her, guarantees himself a future of wealth because of his new wife's

“ability.” The ideology surrounding kingship at the time, at least in this representation, is equivalent to the popular perceptions people have today of the rich, especially when talking about those who are considered a part of the 1%, a term coined by the Occupy Wall Street movement. The one percenters are defined as people who use the efforts of the 99% to make their wealth, giving no credit or financial backing to that 99%. The slogan against these one percenters, “we are the 99 percent” (Stelter) emerges from this concept.

This idea connects to the previous discussion of female utility in the tale. According to Jack Zipes in “Spinning Fates...” since the Brothers Grimm released their first edition of the *Kinder-und Housmärchen* in 1812 and the final version in 1857, towards the end of the Spinning era and the beginnings of the industrial revolution in Western Europe, the tale “Rumpelstiltskin” seems to represent a time in which even women with no skill in spinning were still able to achieve their dream; “the plot depends on the nature of spinning, on the inability of the girl to do her job as a spinner according to social expectations” (Zipes 48). The Grimm version of “Rumpelstiltskin” represents the end of the era of female productivity in the spinning realm because the male Rumpelstiltskin is the savior of the tale and the female character.

The miller’s daughter, surviving two requests by the King to turn straw into gold, thanks to Rumpelstiltskin, is forced to prove her “power” one last time by the King, but this time, he promised to marry her if she could do it. The miller’s daughter begins to cry about her situation because, of course, she cannot spin the straw into gold, but once again Rumpelstiltskin arrives. She requests his help and he inquires what she would give him, but this time she has nothing of value and thus he asks for her first born with the King. The miller’s daughter reluctantly agrees and Rumpelstiltskin spins all the straw to gold. Eventually, her baby is born and Rumpelstiltskin comes to claim his prize for upholding his end of the deal, but the Queen refuses and pleads with

him not take the baby. Rumpelstiltskin agrees not to take the baby on the condition she guess his name in three days' time; only then would he let her keep her child. The reason Rumpelstiltskin wants her child is never quite clear and this can lead to a plethora of interpretations and ideas of motive. Although the story alludes to the possibility of cooking the child when the guard overhears Rumpelstiltskin singing his rhyme, Rumpelstiltskin's desire for a child might signify his need to gain what the miller's daughter holds as priceless: the life of a child. Money, rings, and necklaces are easy to purchase and create, but life is not and holds inherent value.

Throughout the story, Rumpelstiltskin seemed willing to help the miller's daughter, for a price of course. The character would say "what will you give me if I spin it for you?" (Tatar 266), but even when he came to collect his final prize, the prize he worked for, he gives the main character an opportunity to negotiate or cancel their contract. However, this opportunity was based on an understanding it would be highly unlikely she would guess correctly. So Rumpelstiltskin's concession to allow her to go back on her word is not as benevolent an act as he would make it seem.

The miller's daughter is, due to her inability to spin, reduced to just a nameless "beautiful" character whose utility was in her ability to reproduce; the ability to manufacture or create with her hands is gone. As the tale comes to an end, the Queen has already failed twice at guessing the name of the individual who has helped her thus far. Eventually, a soldier comes to her and tells the Queen he was strolling through the forest one night and heard someone say:

Tomorrow I brew, today I bake,
Soon the child is mine to take.
Oh what luck to win this game,
Rumpelstiltskin is my name. (Tatar 268)

Thanks to the soldier, the Queen knew the name, but she wanted to play a trick on Rumpelstiltskin by allowing him to think he had won the game when she had the information he requested already. It is worth noting yet again, the Queen was saved by a male character because the ideology being presented throughout this tale is one of a patriarchal system, male dominance and power, rather than female utility and equality. Finally, Rumpelstiltskin entered the throne room, ready to claim his prize, since even on this final attempt, the Queen continued to guess the wrong name. When he had thought he had finally won, the queen said the name “Rumpelstiltskin.” Rumpelstiltskin had a fit of rage and he stomped his foot into the ground, ultimately tearing himself in two. When the Queen said his name, Rumpelstiltskin ceased to be a man in the patriarchal sense of the term because she gained power over him since she knew his name. His autonomy and mystery were lost and so was he.

The ending of this tale tends to leave many questions unanswered, particularly about Rumpelstiltskin and the Queen. Regarding the Queen, why did she have to make a fool of Rumpelstiltskin instead of simply telling him his name when he arrived on the third day? Of course, the power a name entails is also worth analyzing because knowing someone’s name or naming something that is unknown is a common practice, especially when trying to gain power over it or exhibit some form of control; naming humanizes the object or person. For example, in the book of Genesis, after Adam and Eve take a bite of the apple, God curses Eve by telling her Adam would rule her and, as a result, Adam is the one who named her Eve. He exerted the power given to him to name Eve and thus remain in control over her (*New Jerusalem Bible*, Gen. 3.8-20). Another question which surfaces is, what does the characterization of the miller’s daughter, the Queen, say about women of the time, specifically those who marry into power rather than earning it?

Rumpelstiltskin comes with a significant number of questions in this tale. What is his background? Why did he seek out the miller's daughter in her time of need? Why did he seek the child? Why did he allow the Queen to keep the child after it was already promised to him? Why did he rip himself in two when he lost the game if he was powerful enough to steal the child for himself? This character arrives suddenly and without explanation, and as quickly as he enters the story, he exits it. However, *Once Upon A Time* tries to answer these questions pertaining to the Queen and Rumpelstiltskin. For this thesis, the primary focus is Rumpelstiltskin: his modernization, his reasons for seeking a child, and his eventual death by his own hands. Since the Queen's role in this narrative is an important one and she is present in the show, even if for only for a brief episode, she will be discussed briefly as well. As stated in Chapter two,

while we cannot know precisely how and to what extent fairy tales affect the unconscious [transmitting ideology], we do know that fairy tale storylines are specific to historical and cultural contexts, and because we ourselves are products of those contexts, we tend to accept the gendered discourse embedded in them as natural, essential, and conclusive. (Parsons 136)

In essence, it is impossible to pinpoint what ideologies are being created or taught through fairy tales in general and Rumpelstiltskin in particular, but because *Once Upon A Time* is being considered against a tale from almost 200 years ago, reflections of each society can be seen. This enables a discussion of ideology to take place because these texts are influenced by the culture and person that creates them in any given time. Analyzing an adaptation against the text which influenced it allows the reader to determine/analyze the contexts that brought about those texts.

ONCE UPON A TIME: FILLING IN THE BLANKS

When reflecting on the adaptation of *Once Upon A Time*, it is worth noting it is a T.V. show rather than an adaptation in a written medium. As discussed in Chapter Two, this choice of medium, a serial, allows for a deeper interpretation of the “original” texts, allowing the creative agency to give characters a more extensive backstory and purpose. Furthermore, instead of relying purely on the text or storyteller to bring the story to life, the images tell the story. Also, the mysteries the “original” texts carried are gone because all questions, like why Rumpelstiltskin is a “villain,” are answered for the audience.

Once Upon A Time is a show aired on the ABC network and owned by the Disney Company. Its connections to the Disney Company become apparent with the names of the characters and the narratives used to influence the story. For example, Ariel from Disney’s *The Little Mermaid* makes an appearance in the show and her connection to the movie is not made clear, but if one looks at the original tale by Hans Christian Anderson which influenced the film, one sees it was Disney who named the mermaid character Ariel. Disney’s influence in the show signifies the tropes and characteristics which tend to make something Disney-like, for example, happy endings and the romanticizing of stories, will be present in the show.

As the plot of *Once Upon A Time* is far too extensive for this thesis, the focus will only be on Rumpelstiltskin the character, from seasons 1-3, with an occasional reference to the Queen of the Grimm tale. Moreover, the focus of this discussion will be geared toward the similarities and differences between the “original” Grimm version of the tale and the current interpretation. This chapter as well as Chapter Four will deal with specific examples regarding the character’s backstory and answers to the ambiguous elements in the Grimm tale, such as the desire of a child and his death.

It is important to bear in mind the Rumpelstiltskin of *Once Upon A Time* encompasses a variety of villains who come from the Disney universe, including all copyrighted names, movies, books, and shows under the Disney umbrella, like *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Little Mermaid*. In this show, for example, Rumpelstiltskin is also known as the crocodile from *Peter Pan*, the beast from *Beauty and the Beast*, the “dark one,” a universal evil, and Mr. Gold in the human world. The fact Rumpelstiltskin encompasses so many forms (in name only, since he never actually changes) makes the important aspects of his character difficult to analyze when focusing on minor character details. Luckily, the allusions to the tale of “Rumpelstiltskin” only deal with his characterization as the “Dark One” and Mr. Gold, since the other surnames he has are merely subplots to the metanarrative in *Once Upon A Time*.

The Rumpelstiltskin of *Once Upon A Time* starts as a human with no powers and, as the story develops, he gains the powers which come associated with the character from the Grimm tale. These powers include the ability to spin straw into gold and the power of magic. As a boy, his father was addicted to gambling and owed many debts, forcing him to leave Rumpelstiltskin with three old spinsters. This is where he learned to spin, a trademark of the character (“Think Lovely Thoughts”)³. One could draw a connection between those three spinsters and the tale “The Three Spinners” by the Brothers Grimm, in which three old women help a young woman become queen much like the Rumpelstiltskin character of the Grimm tale did; however, in this adaptation they are helping him. This is significant because the importance women had in spinning is exemplified by the fact that it was these three women who taught Rumpelstiltskin to spin, not as a result of another man or a natural ability.

³ All episodes from *Once Upon A Time* that are specifically mentioned in his thesis can be found using the references to seasons 1-3 of the show

In Season 1 of *Once Upon A Time*, the episode titled “Desperate Souls” (Episode 8) continues with Rumpelstiltskin as an adult. Rumpelstiltskin was married to a beautiful wife called Meliah and had a son named Bae. He wished to sever the association with his father by proving he was not a coward like him because, as mentioned above, Rumpelstiltskin’s father leaves his son to be raised by others rather than raising his son himself. Rumpelstiltskin’s chance to prove he has what it takes to help his family instead of abandoning them like his father did comes during the “ogre wars” in the Enchanted Forest, where he lives with all manner of fairy tale characters. However, he fails, comes home disgraced and his wife promptly deserts the family. As mentioned before, one’s name carried power and pride and in the original tale, the Queen gained power over Rumpelstiltskin because she knew his name. In *Once Upon A Time*, Rumpelstiltskin’s name is again put on the metaphorical chopping block because of his cowardice. Much like in the tale, by fleeing the war, Rumpelstiltskin committed a symbolic suicide because his name is all he had. To destroy one’s own name, one’s reputation, made people wary of you. This idea is still prevalent today, where many individuals struggle to make a name for themselves. For example, Lindsay Lohan is a celebrity whose name shone brightly as she was growing up because of her wholesome image and the movies she made. However, due to some bad decisions and much negative publicity, her name has been tarnished and she is known as a cautionary tale, propelling her to publicly talk about her struggles and continuously seek treatment for addictions as a way to redeem herself in the public eye.

Rumpelstiltskin encounters a worse issue soon after his wife leaves when those fighting the war against the ogres tell him his son must fight. Rumpelstiltskin finds the courage to defy that order and finds the original “dark one,” killing him and gaining his powers, which are immeasurable. At this point in the *Once Upon A Time* adaptation story, we have the

Rumpelstiltskin who can spin straw into gold, officially connecting the “original” tale and the character in the show. Rumpelstiltskin becomes so consumed with this need for power, that after saving his son from the war, his son makes him choose between the world of magic or him by using a magic bean, a reference to the *Jack and the Beanstalk* story, as transport between our world and the world of magic. Rumpelstiltskin, only thinking of himself, much like his own father, chooses magic over the life of his own son. His son is thus transported into the human world to live out his life without his father because of Rumpelstiltskin’s lust for power.

It is at this point where Adam Horowitz and Edward Kitsis, creators of *Once Upon A Time*, answer one of the crucial questions of the original tale in Season 1, Episode 19, “The Return,”: why does Rumpelstiltskin want or need a child? Unlike the Grimm version, where no connections are made between the child and Rumpelstiltskin’s need or want of one, *Once Upon A Time*’s basic premise suggests Rumpelstiltskin instigated and manipulated a variety of events and people to allow him to come to the human world and find his son. Rumpelstiltskin’s need for a child is effectively given purpose in the show because now that need stems from the fact there is a blood connection between them. Rumpelstiltskin does not want any child like the case in the “original” tale; he wants his own child back and will make any deal necessary to achieve his goal. It is because of this need he convinces the “Evil Queen” in the show to cast a curse on all the fairy tale creatures to bring them to our world, where his son is.

The next part of Rumpelstiltskin’s story in *Once Upon A Time*, is shown in Season 2, Episode 7, “The Millers Daughter.” This episode is closely related to the Grimm version because the miller’s daughter from the original tale is finally introduced; however the narrative does go through some changes to make the story connect with the twenty-first century audience watching it. Rumpelstiltskin sought out the miller’s daughter because he saw her ambition and he thought

she could be an important piece in enacting his plan to get to his son, giving a reason for Rumpelstiltskin to appear before the miller's daughter in the Grimm version. The two strike up a contract to aid each other, but in this deal the miller's daughter, Cora, does not wish to have riches given to her, as in helping her turn straw into gold. Instead, she wishes to learn to spin straw into gold; she wishes to learn magic. Cora wishes to have power above all else, especially the power to maintain and have control over her own life. Using her newly acquired talents, she tells the King of her ability and eventually marries the King's son after proving she can turn straw into gold. Together, Cora and the King create the baby, unknown to them, that would set Rumpelstiltskin's plan into motion: a curse over the entire Enchanted Kingdom which would bring all to the human world.

As stated previously, the miller's daughter will not be discussed as much as the character of Rumpelstiltskin, but at this point in the narrative of *Once Upon A Time* huge changes have been made that affect the "Rumpelstiltskin" narrative, primarily her want of power rather than her submission to it as exemplified in the Grimm version. The miller's daughter now has a name: Cora. Furthermore, Cora may not be a spinner, but in her pursuit for power she meets Rumpelstiltskin, learns to use magic, turns straw into gold and casts other spells, effectively turning herself from damsel in distress to powerful witch.

A feminist understanding interprets this change as an empowerment of the female character in comparison to the Grimm Version because, by giving her a name and allowing her to gain power for herself, Cora, the miller's daughter, is rebelling against the patriarchal values which would keep her in the same socio-economic status she found herself in. Giving a character a name empowers that character, makes them more human, rather than just stating their subjugation to another being, like saying the "miller's daughter." Also, the fact that Cora gets

power for herself is very much in line with a feminist ideology surrounding women in the home and workplace, stating they are equally if not more capable than their male counterparts.

In the adaptation the miller's daughter, who was innocent of all her crimes in the Grimm's tale with the exception of the trick she played on Rumpelstiltskin at the very end of the story, becomes an evil witch who would do anything to serve her own interests, even betraying and hurting Rumpelstiltskin who, after first meeting her, begins to fall in love with her, and pretending to fall in love in return. Cora's characterization as "evil" is even more complicated when we take into consideration Lois Tyson's discussion of the "patriarchal ideology" and its effect on the female characters' identity in a text. Tyson points out women only have two identities they can choose from when dealing with "patriarchal ideology"; "these two roles---also referred to as "madonna" and "whore" or "angel" and "bitch"--- view women only in terms of how they relate to the patriarchal order (89). In essence, the strong, feminist character Cora could have represented is pushed aside because the creators of the show, two men, decided to make this very powerful and nonconformist character "evil." Also, her betraying of Rumpelstiltskin's love for her, the ultimate choice she made to go against the patriarchal system of the kind of romance which leads to marriage and children, cements the premise in the mind of the audience that this person, although a strong individual, is a witch or as Tyson puts it, a "bitch."

Cora disregards her love for Rumpelstiltskin for pure ambition. In the original tale, the Queen does toy with Rumpelstiltskin at the end because she does not come right out to guess his name, but her choice of actions seem to be influenced by the fact that Rumpelstiltskin was toying with her. In *Once Upon A Time*, Rumpelstiltskin does not toy with Cora at all; she betrays him because she wishes to, whereas in the original the Queen's actions seem more playful than anything else.

The love Rumpelstiltskin had for Cora in *Once Upon A Time* attempts to answer why the Rumpelstiltskin of the Grimm tale would go through so much to help the miller's daughter, basically giving a backstory to the Grimm tale, closing all loopholes in the original tale for the audience. The Rumpelstiltskin of *Once Upon A Time* did want Cora's first child, much like in the Grimm tale, because he saw a future in which that child would be able to cast a curse which would bring him to his oldest child. However, while teaching her to spin straw into gold as the contract demanded, he fell in love with her and revised the contract so that her first child would be conceived with him rather than the prince ("The Miller's Daughter"). Unfortunately for Rumpelstiltskin, she betrayed him and in doing so voided the contract for the child. Rumpelstiltskin's need for children in the show is based upon the notion that with time, these children will grow up, fulfill the task he has for them and eventually reunite him with his son, Bae. These changes and additions to the original story effectively provide the once unknown answer as to why Rumpelstiltskin would want a child to the current need to find his son. This is important because, again, the ambiguity of the original is turned into a defined answer and at least in this case, Rumpelstiltskin's search for his son is the metanarrative in the show; all that happens surrounding his search are manipulations he made to achieve his goal.

The final link between the show and the original tale is Rumpelstiltskin's death. Before Rumpelstiltskin dies in *Once Upon A Time* ("Going Home"), the audience finds out Rumpelstiltskin did finally find his son, but his son, remembering the betrayal by his father, rejects his father's plea for forgiveness ("Manhattan"). It is revealed that Rumpelstiltskin's father is actually Peter Pan now, a much more evil interpretation of the character, who is consumed with youth and power, much like Rumpelstiltskin ("Think Lovely Thoughts"). For this thesis, most of the occurrences and revelations which led to Rumpelstiltskin's death after his encounter

with Cora are inconsequential because they are all contracts and deals he manipulates to achieve his end goal: seeing his son again. It is worth mentioning that when Rumpelstiltskin comes to the human world, he becomes the owner of a pawn shop and owns the entire town where the fairy tale creatures live; also goes by the name Mr. Gold. His power in the real world, money and the material, are reflective of the popularized idea of the evil CEO, a person who makes bloodthirsty contracts and deals to benefit himself, mirroring the power the King exhibited in the Grimm version. However, in the context of this thesis, the act of ripping himself in two is far more telling than his representations as a CEO type, but both will be discussed further in the next chapter.

This thesis only covers Rumpelstiltskin's story until his death in Season 3, Episode 11, not his resurrection or continued story, since the adaptation's continuity with the original ends at that point. Rumpelstiltskin's death occurred unexpectedly because much like the tale, it ends in death, but this time it is an act of self-sacrifice. Peter Pan, Rumpelstiltskin's father, has Rumpelstiltskin's son and his entire family captive. He was ready and willing to kill them all to keep his powers in the human world, thus keeping his youth, but Rumpelstiltskin intervenes. The only issue which arises is that Peter Pan's powers are on par with those of Rumpelstiltskin. The only way for Rumpelstiltskin to kill him is to stab his dagger, the dagger of the "Dark One, through Peter Pan and himself. The dagger is what gives Rumpelstiltskin his power and magic, and without it, Rumpelstiltskin could be controlled or killed. Knowing the power of his dagger and what he had to do, Rumpelstiltskin, for the first time in this whole adaptation, throws away his selfishness and drives the dagger through himself and Peter Pan.

The Rumpelstiltskin of the Grimm tale ripped himself in two when the Queen called out his name, making him the loser in their guessing game and leaving him without his prize, the

child. In *Once Upon A Time*, its creators chose to keep the narrative in terms of his eventual death; however, they chose to change the reason for it. Narratives change based on the intended audience and the perceptions and purpose of the creators of that narrative; since *Once Upon A Time* is a televised serial on the Disney-owned ABC network, this death needed to be heroic because of the ideological stance of suicide in Western culture even if, like in the tale, that suicide seemed accidental or not intended. First, suicide is a sensitive topic in mainstream culture, not one discussed lightly, and second, suicide is not an easy act to portray on television without affecting or offending someone. Disney is known for sanitizing aspects of the original fairy tale texts; ripping one's self in half over a game, as portrayed by the original text, would have come under scrutiny for showing suicide as a weak person's decision or a coward's way out, thus generating controversy; instead it is done in a heroic way because he saves his son, keeps true to the Grimm text, but does so without offending or pushing a stance on the topic. Rumpelstiltskin finally did achieve his end goal and was reunited with his son again, but he failed to keep a place in his son's heart because of his cowardice and so, to prove his love for his son, he chose to kill himself to save him and his newly acquired family. His suicide turns to self-sacrificing from being one of childlike anger for losing a game to one of heroism, a father protecting his son and his son's family with his life. *Once Upon A Time* romanticized Rumpelstiltskin's death. He was pure evil before Peter Pan and his son arrived, but at the very end of this season, the only one who could save the town and his own family was Rumpelstiltskin. He is the messiah of this story.

In the Grimm version, we have the topic of suicide, even if accidental as shown below, being portrayed as something that can be committed easily and for petty reasons; "the devil has told you that! The devil has told you that," cried the gnome, and in his anger he plunged his right

foot so deep into the earth that his whole leg went in, and then in rage he pulled at his left leg so hard with both hands that he tore himself in two” (Tatar 268). This is indicative of a time in which tales were much darker than we see them today. For example, in the original Little Mermaid by Hans Christian Anderson, the little mermaid actually chooses to sacrifice herself rather than murder the prince. Her fate is literally turning into foam and being forced to serve years of repentance, as a spirit, for making the deal with the sea witch. These kinds of tales and endings seem normative in a time where board censorship and Disney did not exist, since all popularized tales of today are sanitized versions of their predecessors. Disney sanitized many of the tales to make them both more child friendly and appropriate for Western audiences of the twentieth and twenty-first century.

Bestowing a past, contextualizing the encounter with the miller’s daughter, focusing on the loss and search for his son, and portraying the character’s death are significant because they are reflective of current Western society and ideology, especially in the context of popular culture and popular media. The need to humanize the Rumpelstiltskin character by giving him a backstory, a family, love, and heart break, all reasons as to why the plot of the Grimm tale occurred. They made him a father, the miller’s daughter a feminist version of herself, and his death heroic, all factors allowing for interpretation of the ideology that would inspire those changes. These elements tend to be created and reinforced by popular culture in general, but mostly by culture industries like Disney, which control and manage distribution and publication on a large scale. Chapter Four will deal with the changes presented here in respect to the ideologies being promoted or reinforced in Western society/culture by the show, as well as the effects popular culture and the culture industry have in this adaptation while looking at the Grimm version as context.

Chapter IV: Change as a Reflection of Ideological Shifts

Jack Zipes, in his book *Speaking Out: Storytelling and Creative Drama for Children*, argues that life, as he sees it, requires stories because experience needs to be written down and then passed on, to learn from, but also show how things could change and possibly get better (4). People's experiences of the world and the changes they wish to see require the dissemination of stories. They give life structure, open new possibilities as to how life could be or should be, and allow reflection. Boria Sax, in her article "Storytelling and the Information Overload," concludes, "[that] by imposing a relatively simple structure on experience, storytelling helps us to make sense of the world" (166). If there is an element, either political, cultural, or social that needs changing or preserving in the eyes of the creator or promoter, stories allow those beliefs and ideologies to be heard and disseminated to larger groups of people. This is especially true of current mediums used to tell stories, such as television, movies, and the Internet. *Once Upon A Time* transports the happy endings, supernatural elements, the fantasy, and the wonder of fairy tales to the human world. In doing so, the show takes what seemed to be only possible in "fairy tale land," like happy endings or defeating evil, and portrays it as possible in the our world.

Once Upon A Time uses television to impart its adaptation of "Rumpelstiltskin" and other fairy tale narratives and by using the model of the serial, its creators have the creative license to expand, explain, and reconsider the traditional texts. This adaptation carries with it certain ideologies, histories, and culturally relevant material adjusted for the twenty-first century audience. This is done by the "creative activity" and the television company, ABC/Disney, exerting their individual agencies on the product, either consciously or unconsciously, relaying

certain ideologies and reflections of our world.⁴ However, the characteristics of the stories which influenced the retelling are clearly present, like setting or characters or even similarities in plot. In the case of *Once Upon A Time*, Disney, along with the writers, producers, editors, and all others which form a part of the “creative activity,” are the ones that have an overarching influence on what the show imparts, sells, and promotes. As seen in “Power Relationships in Rumpelstiltskin: A Textual Comparison of a Traditional and a Reconstructed Fairy Tale” by Jane Kelley, it can be understood that “when authors write, they usually have a particular audience in mind. Also, either consciously or unconsciously, authors maintain an ideology they want to promote. Consequently, the ideology benefits someone” (33). The ideology or perception of our world, as well as how it is promoted by the parties involved in the creative and distributive process of *Once Upon A Time* influence and create what is deemed as normative or popular in our culture. As this show continues to have a large viewership, it is safe to say it influences that viewership in some fashion, primarily ideologically, where ideas about gender roles and the characteristics needed to achieve a happy ending, for example, are presented as fact or the norm.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, popular culture is studied because popular culture teaches us such things as how to have fun and how to fall in love; as noted by Nealon and Giroux “it’s fairly clear that Disney movies and Saturday morning cartoons teach children an enormous amount, for better or worse, about gender roles, violence, consumerism, race, competition, manners, and a thousand other things” (68). As popular culture is ever present, it reinforces certain ideas and modes of thinking. For example, TV shows or movies where the protagonist is

⁴ The “creative activity,” as defined by Rosemary Huisman in her article “Aspects of Narrative in Series and Serials,” refers to those who directly influencing the creative process, such as the scriptwriter, the actors, and producers. (156).

skinny and beautiful/handsome reinforces the idea that to be attractive, one needs to look a certain way.

Keeping in mind all these influences when looking at the differences between the Grimm version of “Rumpelstiltskin” and *Once Upon A Time*, it can be understood, as suggested by Diane Wolkstein Ivy Haoyin Hsieh and Marylou M. Matoush, and David L. Russell, these differences (i.e. the confrontation with the miller’s daughter, the transportation to our world, the desire for a child, and Rumpelstiltskin’s death) reflect cultural, societal, and ideological changes present within the adaptations’ time and creators. Agencies set forth certain ideologies, again either consciously or unconsciously, about gender, economics, and politics and by analyzing differences in texts, those ideologies can be examined and discussed as reflections of both society and culture, as well as promotions of certain norms or needed changes in that culture. For purposes of this thesis, this is done by using the views provided by narrative and critical theorists.

TRAVELING TO THE HUMAN WORLD

When watching *Once Upon A Time*, the first major difference the audience encounters in Season 1 is that the fairy tale characters have all been transported to our twenty-first century world and have been given twenty-first century jobs. This placement leads to a variety of questions regarding the use of magic, the notion of happy endings, and how villains and heroes interact in a world ruled by twenty-first century laws/customs. Adam Horowitz and Edward Kitsis stated in an interview on YouTube titled “Once Upon A Time - Live Facebook Interview with Adam Horowitz & Edward Kitsis [May 9th 2012] - Part 1,” that they asked themselves some questions when creating the show, one being, “where can evil succeed?” Their answer was

“our world” and it was that answer, among others, which inevitably led them to create Storybrooke, a small town in Maine where the characters now live (Analisse). However, their choice of bringing the characters to our world does not mean that the texts which influenced the story Horowitz and Kitsis are telling are completely gone. Andrew Teverson, in his book titled *Fairy Tale (The New Critical Idiom)*, argues

...any one narrative, because it is not owned by a single author, or produced in any one time or culture, must also be understood as being culturally and historically layered within itself. As a generic form, the fairy tale is a many-tongued genre, a cultural palimpsest; because even as it speaks of the time in which it is told, it carries the memory of the other times in which it has circulated and flourished. (4)

Teverson seems to sum up quite well what Horowitz and Kitsis do in *Once Upon A Time*.

Although the show itself takes place in our time, these characters and their traditional individual stories do influence who they are and how they act in Storybrooke. The stories presented in *Once Upon A Time* play with different time periods, constantly presenting memories of the past while living in the present. For example, the Brothers Grimm’s Rumpelstiltskin is an individual who makes deals and acquires goods, such as the necklace, the pearl ring, and the child. He is presented as a magical being who has the power to turn straw into gold and rip himself in half. His *Once Upon A Time* characterization and adaptation is of Mr. Gold, a rich man who owns a pawn shop and the town of Storybrooke. He earns his living by service contracts, helping the townsfolk of Storybrooke, but for a price. The pawn shop contains precious items connected to all individuals in the town as collateral to be used against them if need be. He is a reflection of the Rumpelstiltskin from the Brothers Grimm, but modernized to fit our time. Due to his wealth

and cultural capital, the Rumpelstiltskin of *Once Upon A Time*, would be considered a segment of the population known as the super-rich or as the 1%, as coined by the popular Occupy Wall Street movement. The majority of the towns' occupants are all forced to bend to his will even though he has no magic because of his economic standing. A Marxist's critique of this Rumpelstiltskin character would see him as representative of the economic superstructure that manipulates and controls the structure of Storybrooke in general. This characterization of Rumpelstiltskin as businessman, is a curious one by writers Horowitz and Kitsis because the ones giving financial backing, promoting and distributing this show is the Disney Company, a multibillion dollar company. Making the villain rich can be analyzed as an attack on the rich because the ideology stemming from that is that the rich are evil, corrupting and manipulating the common man. This point is further elaborated upon by looking away from Rumpelstiltskin himself for a second and actually looking at the Evil Witch from *Once Upon A Time* who is also rich and the mayor of the town, exemplifying the fact that the rich are "superficially" represented as villains.

When analyzing the choice of the present for the setting of this narrative, the actual characters, and the relationships they form, certain ideological beliefs held by the creators and the company backing them, Disney, comes to the forefront. The first belief is that good wins over evil, a belief which is representative of the works created by Disney, but also of Western society in general because that belief is representative of the stories we wish to hear and see in our world, a world where good triumphs and evil gets what it deserves. Throughout the show, villains are constantly reminded, even if they try to turn good, villains do not get happy endings, at least not those of a hero. Villains can find some form of ending which leaves them relatively

happy, but never what they actually wanted. For example, when Rumpelstiltskin found his child, Bae, his son, rejected him;

RUMPELSTILTSKIN: There is no greater pain than regret.

BAE: Try Abandonment...Now it's my turn. Now I'm letting you go.

(“Manhattan”)

Rumpelstiltskin, a villain, finally achieved his end goal, getting his son back, but his son rejects him and wants nothing to do with him. Also, as will be discussed further in this chapter, Rumpelstiltskin falls in love early in his story, but is betrayed and left alone once more, promoting the belief that villains do not win, no matter what in his story.

Another ideological stance within the narrative of *Once Upon A Time*, which is also similar in the Brothers Grimm fairy tales is one favoring heterosexual couples (Nealon and Giroux 89). A heteronormative ideology is enforced by the show and that choice seems very much aligned with the Disney ideology. There have been no Disney movie releases which have presented same-sex couples, which is especially apparent when looking at its most recent releases of movies like *Tangled*, *Frozen*, and *Maleficent* all of which revolve around heterosexual relationships. In addition, the Disney classics like *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, *Mulan*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Aladdin*, are also movies that avoid the topic of homosexuality. Instead of challenging the trope from the original tales about love and those able to attain it, Disney ideologically holds that the heterosexual couple gets the happy ending and same-sex couples are nonexistent. Beach & Galda, as quoted by Linda T. Parsons in her article “Ella Evolving: Cinderella Stories and the Construction of Gender Appropriate Behavior,” argue that “readers expect characters to behave in what they consider to be culturally appropriate ways” (141). Parsons elaborates on this point, adding that “the heterosexual, romantic storyline

incorporated in most fairy tales is so much a part of our being-in-the-world that it is extremely difficult to read and write outside it” (141).⁵ This constant lack of promotion or belief in the existence of love other than that found between heterosexual people is a part of popular culture in the Western world, where more traditional, Christian beliefs are held at the forefront of discussion and popular media. The portrayal of different kinds of love is very much absent within Disney narratives.

Lastly, one of the biggest changes and very much in line with current feminist ideology is the empowerment of the female characters in *Once Upon A Time*. For example, the main character of the show and “savior” is a female character. She is the one who defeats all the villains as they appear and she does it all without the help of a man;

EMMA SWAN (Savior): People are gonna tell you who you are your whole life. You just gotta punch back and say, ‘No, this is who I am’. You want people to look at you differently? Make them! You want to change things, you're gonna have to go out there and change them yourself, because there are no fairy godmothers in this world. (“The Price of Gold”)

Emma fights for what she wants and who she is. She doesn’t fall victim to the patriarchal system typically depicted in fairy tales. Another example would be the Miller’s daughter, Cora, who will be examined further on in this chapter. In either case, the female characters are empowered individuals and that is very different when compared to the fact that the miller’s daughter in the

⁵ This clearly echos Kristeva’s concept of the abject. As fairy tale texts continue to promote heteronormative realities, all other variations that disturb that system or symbolic order become abject. For further readings on this topic please see *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* by Julia Kristeva.

“Rumpelstiltskin” tale, for example, had her life controlled by the actions and decisions of the male characters rather than by herself.

It is these major differences in plot and characterization that make *Once Upon A Time* an excellent tool for understanding shifting ideologies, cultural/societal norms, and what might have remained the same in accordance to the traditional texts, in this case, just focusing on Rumpelstiltskin from the Grimm Tales. This isn't a retelling of the original tale, but rather readapting the narrative and making the tale “human”/relevant in respect to the lives of ordinary men and women who have to deal with heartbreak, love, and loss without the help of magic at all.

RUMPELSTILTSKIN: THE ORIGIN STORY

When Edward Kitsis and Adam Horowitz conceptualize the storyline of *Once Upon A Time*, one of their goals was to understand “why”; for example, “why was the Madhatter mad?” (Analisie, “Once Upon A Time... Part 2”). They wanted to give reasons to the actions and decisions that characters made in the traditional fairy tales. This belief falls in line with the current trend of prequels, especially when it comes to Disney movies, the most recent of which being *Maleficent*, a story describing her decision to curse Aurora and eventually save her. Horowitz and Kitsis created a world in which the traditional fairy tale characters would have a history, a context for the things we already know about the characters, like the Mad Hatter being mad. In that world, they also gave reasons to the unanswered questions associated with the tales, such as why Rumpelstiltskin would want a child in the first place. In essence, these origin stories mixed with the characters' present situation, i.e. stranded in our world, do away with the lack of information the traditional tales possessed, which, as mentioned above, tends to fall in line with

the narratives of today. In the recent past, an individual would read a fairy tale and be left with questions, if they even thought about it, concerning the origins of the characters, the reasoning behind their actions, and what happens after the story found its resolution. Now, at least in the case of *Once Upon A Time*, the audience is not left to wonder or imagine; apart from the episode to episode and season to season cliffhangers, the stories are planned and laid out for the audience to consume rather than speculate or critically think about. The audience is given representations and structure to their own lived experiences through these fairy tale characters and it is all tied together nicely with no loose ends, giving the audience closure. However, in meticulously planning all the events and experiences that would guide the fairy tale characters to their present situation in Storybrooke, the authors are relaying their own ideologies, biases, and thoughts on a variety of topics as they construct their adaptation. In trying to create something different, something realistic to our twenty-first century world, Kitsis and Horowitz had to change the story to make it understandable and relevant to the viewers.

In the case of Rumpelstiltskin, the creators of *Once Upon A Time* saw fit to humanize him and relate him a representation of pure evil, the “Dark One.” As mentioned in Chapter Three, Rumpelstiltskin was a mortal before he became the “Dark One.” This choice of making him human and giving him a family, something modern audiences can relate to, is an understandable decision because it transforms the gnome of the Grimm tale into a human character with very real human fears and weaknesses. Rumpelstiltskin, as a human, was given the characteristics of a coward who succumbs to fear, rejects his duty and chooses self-preservation; RUMPELSTILTSKIN: “I am the town coward. The only choice I have is which corner to hide in” (“Desperate Souls”). Rumpelstiltskin, after being drafted to fight in the ogre wars, threw away what was left of his good name and was deemed a coward when he decided to

injure himself rather than fight in them. Due to that self-inflicted injury from his cowardly act and the shame he brought upon his name, his wife, Milah, left him, and further on in his tale, to add insult to injury, Hodor, the person collecting those who were drafted to fight, tells Rumpelstiltskin “you see, women do not like to be married to cowards” (“Desperate Souls”). His son also gets drafted into the war, but unlike his father, wishes to fight in order to redeem his families honor. Ironically, Rumpelstiltskin, out of fear for losing his son goes deeper into villainy by killing Hodor and making sure that no one would come after his son again. The character Rumpelstiltskin is thus humanized to the point that he was forced to choose between what seemed noble or honorable (i.e. fighting the war), but instead used his recently gained magic to do neither. His cowardice takes over and he does not fight.

Rumpelstiltskin’s cowardice in *Once Upon A Time* represents the ideological stances the creative agency and the company wish to promote and sell. Of course, it is important to note that courage is constructed and subjectively defined, and the definition of courage or the lack thereof given by *Once Upon A Time* defines Rumpelstiltskin. The feelings associated with the lack of courage exhibited by Rumpelstiltskin are well known by all humans, since it is one of the most basic human emotions and as such, that character flaw allows people to connect to him better than if they were asked to connect to the Rumpelstiltskin of the Grimm tale. Rumpelstiltskin’s seeming humanity allows the viewers to connect to those human emotions he exhibits and, as a result, viewers get attached to the character because they wish to see how someone without courage may one day redeem that “fault” or limitation. They may also feel empathy for the character, by default, an attached audience will continue to watch a show, which is conducive to good rating. The more interesting connection shown by this lack of courage is the inference which can be made about those who lack courage, and especially those who even lack the

courage to change like Rumpelstiltskin, because the one character with this kind of stunting fear does anything to stay alive and anything to maintain his own power when he gets it. In contrast, people like Snow White or Prince Charming, who did fight in wars and gained honor doing so, by being perceived as selfless and courageous, turn out to be the heroes rather than villains. Twenty-first century ideology defines the nuances of good and evil as the decisions that one makes. For example, for choosing to stand up to the Evil Queen, throughout seasons 1 and 2, Prince Charming and Snow White are constantly being entrusted with the fate of the people, even in Storybrooke, because when the curse enacted by the Evil Queen was broken at the end of season 1, they were chosen to lead the fairy tale characters again. So what are the agencies promoting and putting on this show saying about those who lack courage? They seem to be stating that if you lack courage to live your life or progress then eventually that fear drives you into a darker hole than the one you were in; Rumpelstiltskin becomes the “dark one,” and it says that those without courage look only after themselves and will do anything to protect that sense of self, in his case kill his enemies or those that could do him to harm, self-preservation.

That extreme sense of self-preservation portrayed by Rumpelstiltskin and the destructive forces around his actions to preserve his strength, as well as his new-found courage as a result of the immense amount of magic power he acquired, can also be a criticism of Western ideological stances about the self and achievement. In Western society, achievement is defined by the amount of wealth one has and the paths taken to achieve that wealth; in popular understandings of how to achieve the “American Dream,” the path to wealth and success is full of tireless hours of working and is mostly a solitary, cut throat style of living. Marxist critique sees this kind of extreme individualism as a part of “an oppressive ideology because it puts self-interest above the needs—and even above the survival—of other people” (Tyson 60). Rumpelstiltskin is so

consumed by his own wellbeing that he loses his son, tortures the fairy tale creatures, and allows the curse that brought the characters to our world to happen because his own ambitions.

Presently, the perception of the popularized super rich or that of corporate executives is one that is equivalent to what the “Dark One” is in *Once Upon A Time*: beings with ultimate power and control over the happenings of everyday life and everyday individuals. In *Once Upon A Time*, these powerful individuals, like Rumpelstiltskin, are the villains and are lonely individuals always seeking to fill the void the common folk or those without the kind of self-preservation have, like love and family. Again, if we look at the Evil Queen, she is another example of a villain wishing to fill the void in her heart with love yet never being able to because she is a villain: she is one of the 1%, and thus never gets her chance even though she actually makes a real attempt to change her ways compared to Rumpelstiltskin. For example, the Evil Queen helped saved the town from Peter Pan much like Rumpelstiltskin did, but at the end she is forced to sacrifice what she loves most, her adopted son Henry: “Henry, I was wrong, too. It wasn't your fault. It's mine. I cast the curse out of vengeance. And I'm... I'm the villain. You heard Mr. Gold. Villains don't get happy endings” (“Going Home”). This ideological stance against those with extreme power or those with extreme wealth like Rumpelstiltskin, who is both the “Dark One” and the owner of the town of Storybrooke, is very telling of the creators own personal views. This stance is also ironic given that the Disney Company is one of those very rich 1% corporations which are studied as a culture industry, and as maker of physical and cultural capital. However, the ideological stance presented stays in line with the “99%” mentality, which is far more popular, keeping ratings high.

The ideology being presented in regards to opposing those with extreme power and wealth is also similar to the Grimm version, since one of the villains in that tale is the King, who

is driven by his greed and desire for more gold. The King in the Grimm version is representative of the modern day one percent, someone with overwhelming control over society and culture because of his wealth and status. His power is made abundantly clear when he tells the miller's daughter "get to work now. Spin all night, and if by morning you have not spun this straw into gold, then you will have to die" (Tatar 264). In the case of this tale, it's possible that the storytellers were spinners who made up a part of the 99% as compared to the King who was a part of the 1% and as such, could have held certain prejudices or anger towards those with wealth. This ideological stance of the rich versus the poor is one that transcends time and could be another reason the creators of *Once Upon A Time* wanted to keep that traditional belief or archetype. People understand the premise of the haves and have not's and that resonates with them, especially when the have not's come into their own and win over those who seem to have everything.

THE MILLER'S DAUGHTER

As discussed in Chapter Three, the episode titled "The Miller's Daughter" is the only episode which resembles the actual tale recorded by the Brothers Grimm, since it tells the origin of the miller's daughter, Cora, and her ascension to the throne. As mentioned before, the two elements that differed drastically from the traditional tale are that Cora learns to spin straw into gold from Rumpelstiltskin and Rumpelstiltskin falls in love with Cora; his desire for her firstborn child in the modern version stems from love rather than greed because the child would be a product of their union.

These changes are representative of twenty-first century ideological beliefs, especially Western American ideology. Cora represents the strong female character who stands on her own

two feet to get what she wants, as opposed to the miller's daughter, who was entirely subject to the will of the men in the Grimm tale. For example, when Cora finally learns to spin straw into gold and shows her talents to the King, she refuses to be belittled by him:

KING: Did you really do it?

CORA: You saw it with your own eyes.

KING: You're just a miller's daughter.

CORA: I am so much more. ("The Miller's Daughter")

In this modern version, Cora also manipulates Rumpelstiltskin by pretending to fall in love with him and acting as if she wishes to have a child with him, all to learn magic and then become Queen without him by her side;

CORA: I'm sorry my dear Rumpel. I am not going with you. You see, I have a wedding to go to. My own...

RUMPELSTILTSKIN: You never loved me. Never. You're not getting away with this. We had a contract. I'll take your baby.

CORA: We changed the contract, Rumpel. You only get your own child. And any baby I have... won't be yours. ("The Miller's Daughter")

Cora, at first glance, is the perfect representation of a feminist reinterpretation of a classic fairy tale character because she is transformed from a character who's ruled by the world of man, to one who wants to break away from that tradition and does, but instead of being considered "good," she is characterized as "evil," as defined by a patriarchal ideology. The creators of *Once Upon A Time* made the miller's daughter stronger, but in characterizing her ambition and her rise to power as evil, they superimposed stereotypes that would be associated with a scheming, immoral person who doesn't get their happy ending, instead of giving her the characteristics of

someone like Snow White, who would be worthy of a happy ending due to her kindness and benevolence.

In the adaptation, Cora herself told the King she could spin straw into Gold, and, she wanted to prove to the royals she would not easily kneel before them again (“The Miller’s Daughter”). She, unlike her Grimm counterpart, gains the strength, knowledge, and drive to change her own life and improve her circumstances by becoming Queen, and does whatever is necessary, even using men like Rumpelstiltskin instead of being used by them. She is the epitome of a self-made woman, but by fitting the “lonely at the top” trope like Rumpelstiltskin does, she is also portrayed as a villain.

In comparison to the other characters in the show who gain power from the friendships they made and the love they found, like Snow White or Prince Charming, Cora is portrayed as evil because she unrivaled in her ambitions to empower herself. The creators of *Once Upon A Time* draw a clear distinction when defining characteristics that embody a person who is evil and one who is good. For example, a character who seeks love, friendships, acts with benevolence, or shows mercy, is viewed in a positive light ; those who seek power to better themselves or their own situation, or act out to compensate for their own insecurities are viewed in a negative light. This ideology is sold as a norm, but in reality it is a subjective perception on how the world and its people should be; however Nealon and Giroux, argue this perception “is one of the devices by which cultural meanings—which are by definition ‘arbitrary,’ not necessary in any mystical or transcendence way—are seen as ‘natural,’ ‘inevitable,’ and ‘good’ ” (89). This definition of the characteristics that make someone good or evil is also a stance against the basic instincts all animals have concerning their own lives; humans, like all animals, have the basic instinct to

survive at all costs and that kind of survival requires looking out for one's self and demonstrating many of the qualities these villains, like Rumpelstiltskin and Cora, portray.

The defining characteristics that every type of character, whether good or evil, should portray are quite clear in this show, but the creators of *Once Upon A Time* complicate that perception by making Rumpelstiltskin fall in love with Cora when he had been looking out for himself up to that point. Love in popular culture is portrayed as a beautiful experience, something worth seeking, which is illustrated by the fact that the genre of the romantic comedy, for example, is one of the most popular genres in the United States. Also, even in Disney's most recent movies like *Frozen* and *Maleficent*, one of the key factors to move the plot forward is love. Companies have capitalized on how love has been sold to the public by making it a profitable subject, corresponding to the promotion of holidays like Valentine's Day or Christmas, where love is shown by how much you spend on your loved ones. People connect to the topic of love and fantasize about the concept of a happy ending, and in making Rumpelstiltskin fall in love, they are humanizing him even further and giving the audience hope that love will transform him from a villain to a hero. Rumpelstiltskin not only loves Cora, but also wants a child with her.

RUMPELSTILTSKIN: What if I, uh... amended or contract? Instead of you owing me some random firstborn child, you owe me... my child.

CORA: I can make that deal. ("The Miller's Daughter")

In the traditional sense, his desire for the child is transformed from a prize into a symbol of love, giving the audience a sense that evil can change, especially when it comes to the power of love. Another popularized belief stemming from the genre of romantic comedies and Disney movies in particular is that love can fix anything and transforms anyone. Of course, Cora betrays

Rumpelstiltskin and this drives him deeper into the darkness, reaffirming the belief that bad people do not get happy endings.

RUMPELSTILTSKIN'S REASON FOR A CHILD

As mentioned above, Rumpelstiltskin's want for a child, in the context of the Grimm version, most resembled the episode titled "The Miller's Daughter" because of his love for Cora, thus the child together, but in the show, the metanarrative driving his want for a child is based on the need to get his son back. Rumpelstiltskin loved his son, Bae, proven by the fact that when a seer told Rumpelstiltskin during the "orge wars," "your wife will bear your son, but your actions on the battlefield will leave him fatherless" he crippled himself to be with his son, to not abandon him as his father did him ("Manhattan"). However, his love for power and his fear of reverting to his ordinary, cowardly self was far more powerful and when he had to choose between power or love, he chose power, losing his son. This loss forces him to act, make choices, and create deals that would eventually bring him to the human world where he lost his son. But why the need to contextualize the reasons the Grimm's Rumpelstiltskin wanted a child? Why not leave the matter up to the imagination as the Grimm version did?

These questions can be answered by looking at the metanarrative of *Once Upon A Time* as a whole, since Rumpelstiltskin's need to find his son again sets a series of events into motion that eventually leads the fairy tale characters to Storybrooke, and by default his son, whom he finds in New York City. The creators of this narrative needed a creature powerful enough and a backstory believable enough to lead someone to make all the fairy tale creatures come to our world at whatever the cost, and Rumpelstiltskin fit that mold. Luckily for Horowitz and Kitsis, the "Rumpelstiltskin" tale leaves most of its story up to imagination because there is no real

character development. All one knows is that the Rumpelstiltskin character is a mythical creature, a gnome, that he can spin straw into gold, and that he is strong enough to split himself in half. He also likes games, likes to sing and brew, and that his name is Rumpelstiltskin, but nothing else is really mentioned. This lack of information and ambiguity present in the Grimm's "Rumpelstiltskin" allows Once Upon A Time the room to create and adapt the tales to their own goals. Using what has been discussed previously in this chapter, it is clear how one driven by such desires as self-preservation and self-empowerment would do anything possible to hold onto the only thing he really loved and loved him back, his son.

Now that the audience has a clear understanding as to why Rumpelstiltskin wanted a child, what does this adaptation say about the context of our world? Clearly, the ABC and Disney networks, known for their wholesome, family-oriented entertainment, changed the possible reasons Rumpelstiltskin of the tale wanted a child to that of getting his child to attract audiences. In an attempt to make profits, capture audiences, and perpetuate the traditional ideologies held in the United States, certain aspects of the father-son relationship between Rumpelstiltskin and Bae would have to resonate with the public. First, when Rumpelstiltskin is left to raise his child alone and then fails to do so by choosing his powers over his son, the agencies in charge of the show could be unconsciously or consciously holding on to the traditional belief that a single father will find it harder to balance the role of mother and father, than a single mother would. For example, as the protector figure, Rumpelstiltskin took his role to dangerous lengths and instead of having the nurturing qualities typically associated with a mother, he went to extremes to protect his son:

BAE: I don't want magic. You're different now. You see it don't you, you hurt people all the time.

RUMPELSTILTSKIN: I need more power so that I can protect you. I can conjure anything you desire. Name it, what do you want?

BAE: I want my father. (“The Return”)

It is a common trope in Disney films that single parents tend to be primarily mothers. The fathers are either away or missing, and single parent households tend to have step-mothers, who turn out to be evil. Single fathers tend to be stigmatized in the American popular culture because the “norm” is that a mother is needed to take care of the children and this belief is illustrated by many commercials, movies, and TV shows. concerning parenthood. For example, in Disney’s most recent fairy tale adaptation *Maleficent*, the father of Aurora turns out to be the true villain rather than Maleficent herself and he is a single father. Also, commercials like the new 2015 Bounty commercial continue to show mothers cleaning and taking care of the kitchen and children rather than the father figure (NEW Bounty... Youtube). Even in our progressive culture, the father in a family is still characterized as the moneymaker and the mother is the domestic figure; fathers are left out of the popular representations of what it means to be domestic or to take care of children “successfully.”

What about Bae and his upbringing away from Rumpelstiltskin? Bae grows up to be a criminal, stealing and cheating his way through life. Is the perception about children growing up without their biological parents a negative one, where these children are seen as more likely to become criminals? This ideology regarding family is also evidenced in the cases of Pinocchio and Emma Swan, the “savior,” both orphans due to the curse that brought all the fairy tale characters to the human world. Both characters end up being criminals in their own right, stealing, cheating, and lying their way through their specific narratives until they arrive at

Storybrooke to reconnect with their family. Family in these cases involves the traditional concept, including mother, father and child.

Popular culture continues to promote this traditional perspective of the family because it is so deeply imbedded into the American narrative; deviation from it would counter the established “norm” of the United States because, as Parsons has argued previously in this chapter, it is very difficult to write or look outside of the already established “norm” (141). For example, in each Presidential race in the United States, a candidates’ family is brought into question, especially his or her ability to maintain and take care of one. The popular opinion seems to be that if a candidate fails to maintain a traditional concept of a family, they could not possibly succeed in running a country. Almost all U.S presidents at this point have had traditional families, or rather families that fit the public’s perception of what is traditional, and have made their family unit a clear selling point to the public. When Bill Clinton was in office and his scandal with Monica Lewinsky occurred, his presidency was brought into question not because he broke his oath as President, instead it was because his character was questioned. They attacked his will to continue as president and his character as a leader on the world stage based on his infidelity, as proven by a press conference in 1998 when he was asked if he would be stepping down and was questioned about his character (Clintonlibrary 42).

Disney is known for its family friendly and typically conservative retellings of the tales which is arguably one of the main reasons why the company is so successful; it entertains, but does not attempt to make radical changes that could potentially alienate particular groups within their worldwide audience. This fact is evident when one notices that Disney did not release a movie with a black princess until President Barack Obama took office, thus changing their typical storyline to keep up with perceived national values/changes. This understanding of

Western American values concerning our world could be why *Once Upon A Time* decided to depict those familial circumstances as they did. They are promoting the ideology that families that stay together end up being stronger and create heroes. On the other hand, families that dissolve and harbor resentment between each other creates villains like Rumpelstiltskin, who let his child go after he himself was let go as a child by his father Malcom/Peter Pan:

MALCOM/PETER PAN: These nice ladies are going to look after you for a little while.

Spinsters: Do you know how to spin? We can teach you.

RUMPELSTILTSKIN: Papa please, don't leave me here.

Malcom chose to leave Rumpelstiltskin because he wanted more out of life and was too afraid to take on the responsibility of being a single father. Rumpelstiltskin let go of Bae because he was too afraid of reverting back to his cowardice after losing his power. It was these actions that made Rumpelstiltskin a villain. He was too afraid to end up like his father and that fear made him just like Malcom and in turn, made Rumpelstiltskin follow in his footsteps when he gave up Bae for magic.

LIFE AFTER DEATH

While the adaptation of the Rumpelstiltskin character in *Once Upon A Time* has taken on many forms in respect to his character as an individual and his specific narrative in the *Once Upon A Time* universe, it isn't until his death that Rumpelstiltskin becomes a hero. In the Grimm's version of the tale, Rumpelstiltskin, after losing his game to the Queen because she finally guesses his name, rips himself in half: "The devil told you that! The devil told you that!" shouted the gnome, and with anger he stomped his right foot so hard into the ground that he fell in up to his waist. Then with both hands he took hold of his left foot and ripped himself up the

middle in two” (Tatar 268). It is not made clear as to why someone wielding an immense amount of power and an extraordinary ability to turn straw into gold would accidentally kill himself merely because someone guessed his name, but he does it nonetheless. His death can be seen as representing the effects uncontrollable rage can lead to, such as killing of oneself. That kind of rage can only hurt one person and it did. It is possible however, that context might provide the key to understanding the ending; at a time where written records about people were not as readily available as they are today, a person’s name meant everything and held ultimate power over that person. If your name was associated with foul play, thievery, or the like, people would not want to work with you or do business with you, and that in itself was like committing your own figurative or social suicide amongst your people, since it would entail isolation and marginalization. Even in *Once Upon A Time* social suicide, the tarnishing of a name, is made apparent; when young Rumpelstiltskin wishes to go back with his father after he left him with the spinsters, they tell him “Rumple... even with your talent, too many people know your father is a cheat. And a coward. If you are to have a happy life, you must go somewhere where your father’s name cannot follow you” (“Think Lovely Thoughts”). A name is made to be the most important thing an individual can have and if your name becomes tarnished, such as when Rumpelstiltskin broke his own leg to not fight in the “orge wars,” you are doomed to social isolation and community distrust.

In the modern adaptation, the traditional premise of the power of a name is carried on in the form of the “Dark One’s” dagger, besides the example given above, which has inscribed on it the human name of its wielder. Rumpelstiltskin killed the previous “Dark One” with his own dagger, thus using his own name against him and in doing so chaining his own name to the curse of the dagger instead. That dagger controlled the “Dark One” and if anyone were to take hold of

it, the “Dark One” would be forced to do his bidding or the wielder could use it to kill the “Dark One” and take his power away from him. In essence, when Rumpelstiltskin decided to kill the previous “Dark One” he signed a contract with the dagger. This point is made especially clear when Rumpelstiltskin, soon after gaining the powers of the previous “dark one,” tells his son, who wishes that Rumpelstiltskin would give up his power, “if someone kills me with this [the dagger], then they gain the power” (“The Return”). Rumpelstiltskin’s fate is tied to the dagger and it is simply because his name is now on it. He gained all the powers necessary to overcome his past and his fears, but he in turn became tied to the dagger and the possibility that someone could utter his name while holding the dagger and thus control him. This connection to the traditional tale illustrates the twenty-first century importance of a name; contracts and documents may exert great power over those who sign them, making it almost impossible to break one’s word and providing a challenge if one chooses to forfeit the agreement.

In the modern adaptation, Rumpelstiltskin does not die by having his name uttered as was the case in the traditional text; Rumpelstiltskin used the dagger on himself. As mentioned previously, Rumpelstiltskin’s relationship with his son did not reestablish itself when he finally found him again. Instead, Bae turned him away and did not want anything to do with his father;

BAE: I have no interest in talking to you. You can go.

RUMPELSTILTSKIN: I’m not going anywhere.

BAE: Get out of my apartment. (“Manhattan”)

Bae simply wanted to be left alone and not see the man who abandoned him so long ago. After a series of events, Bae and his family were being threatened by a darker interpretation of Peter Pan and the only one who could stop him was Rumpelstiltskin, but that could only be achieved by the ultimate sacrifice: a life for a life. Rumpelstiltskin, in his last moments, tells Peter Pan, “you see,

the only way for you to die...is if we both die. And now...now...I'm...ready” and that sacrifice was done for his son, it was his redemption. Rumpelstiltskin took his dagger and murdered Peter Pan and himself with it, effectively sacrificing himself and saving his son along with his family. Rumpelstiltskin became the hero at last, overcoming his cowardice and saving his son, rekindling the love between them. Again, Rumpelstiltskin became the martyr of this tale with his self-sacrifice. Instead of succumbing to the rage which killed the character in the tale, he saves his family, and in so doing so, saves the entire town of Storybrooke. It is a romanticized ending for a very popular character in the show.

The question brought to mind concerning this change in the character's outcome is, why the change from meaningless death to self-sacrifice? Why did Rumpelstiltskin's only redemption lie in his death? Do villains not deserve proper happy endings? The first question might be answered by looking at the perception of suicide and its acceptance in the public sphere. Suicide is a sensitive topic because Christianity defines suicide as a taboo and the U.S is greatly influenced by conservative Christian mores and taboos. For example, is committing suicide an act of great strength or an act of weakness? A more theological approach to the topic would broach the issue of whether suicide is forgivable in the afterlife or whether it condemns a person to an eternity of damnation. For example, in the Bible Christ's death is a self-sacrifice; he was aware of what would happen and he was willing to go through with it. Again, Disney does not seem to try to create controversy and risk tarnishing the image they have constructed for themselves thus far, so turning a suicide into a heroic one basically takes the discussion of suicide, in general, off the table and focuses the viewers' attention only on the heroism in the act of saving his own family, much like Christ's death. The show's approach seemed to sanitize a topic which could have been discussed in a larger scale using the show as reference and Disney

Company's power as a springboard; instead, like most Disney adaptations, the text is sanitized for American audiences. For example, the movie *Tangled*, a Disney company production, is meant to be an adaptation of the fairy tale "Rapunzel" by the Brothers Grimm, but the darker aspects of the tale, such as Rapunzel having twins and the prince having his eyes poked out by thorns, are omitted. In addition, as mentioned before, the example of the "Little Mermaid" by Hans Christian Anderson shows how the tale was changed to have a happy ending rather than the death the Little Mermaid actually suffers as a result of her deal with the sea witch. The extent to which texts have been sanitized for the American audience of the twenty-first century illustrates how coddled modern audiences have been compared to the audiences of the traditional texts, who were told stories about death, pain, and suicide with ease and a light heart. Of course, most of these adaptations are meant for children, hence the sanitizing, unlike many fairy tales which were actually told and shared among adults and were not necessarily meant for children; nonetheless, the adaptations are sanitized drastically and that can speak volumes about Western culture.

Beyond the sanitizing of texts, the question about villains and what they deserve is also prevalent. Rumpelstiltskin, in the traditional tale, deserved to have the child because he fulfilled his end of the bargain for the child and yet he lost his prize. In the modern adaptation, Rumpelstiltskin gave up his prize, the love of his son, for power and when he finally earned it back, he had to kill himself to do it. Why is it that in both cases Rumpelstiltskin had to die and what does that say about the creators or the time in which the versions were created? The Brothers Grimm tale seems to require his death because it closes the story in a dramatic, yet, entertaining way that proved unexpected for the audience; there was no real reason for him to

die. However, in *Once Upon A Time*, there is justification for his death and Rumpelstiltskin dies heroically. The villain finally turned good only to die.

This choice of ending can be interpreted in different ways, one of them being that even villains can earn redemption. However, they must atone for their mistakes in some fashion. This ideology about the concepts of good and evil being along a continuum rather than being complete opposites speaks to the human condition and its modern interpretations within science and psychology. Humans are not born good or bad, as once thought; those attributes are taught or manifested over time through living, and humans will always have the capacity to change either gradually or suddenly. Rumpelstiltskin is a representation of the belief that evil is not born, but rather created through life experiences or as a result of extreme emotions and fears, redeemable by a strong force of love. This characterization of Rumpelstiltskin allows the creators of *Once Upon A Time* to promote the topic of redemption, a topic that rings true for every human being that has ever done wrong. This notion captures audiences and makes them emotionally invested because self-sacrifice and changes like those that Rumpelstiltskin went through appeal to audiences, even though the outcome in this case did not provide the typical happy ending. Rumpelstiltskin's final words speak volumes about his attempt at redemption and his view of his own fate:

...and what needs to be done has a price—a price im finally willing to pay. I used the curse to find you, Bae, to tell you I made a mistake, to make sure you had a chance at happiness. And that happiness is possible—just not with me. I accept that. I love you, Bae... And now...now...I'm...ready... (“Going Home”)

He gave up his life for the son he so dearly loved and who he hurt. He discarded his cowardice in that instant and saved his family. That makes for great storytelling and audiences member become very involved in the plot.

In addition, Rumpelstiltskin's death is necessary in light of his actions and his past wrongdoings, as shown by the serial. The creators of *Once Upon A Time* made it very clear by killing this character, even in a heroic way, that there are consequences for one's actions. All villains in this show, in some way or another, were denied their happy endings no matter how much they changed for the better. In his final moment, right after he stated the above, Rumpelstiltskin spoke to his father, Peter Pan, who was trying to convince him that together they could be happy, but Rumpelstiltskin responds with "Ah, but I'm a villain. And villains don't get happy endings" ("Going Home"). Rumpelstiltskin spoke those words in a straightforward way. He understood that his past and his side, the side of evil, made it impossible for him to have a happy ending. He had resigned to that fact. This stance on forgiveness, redemption, and new beginnings is quite dark for a show that sells itself as politically correct, or ideologically positive, but shows no hope of overcoming difficult experiences or troubled pasts. Villains are still being defeated and killed, even by their own hands; they do not change for the better and enjoy a new beginning, but rather are defined by their past, since whatever good they do leads to events and circumstances which either force them to pay for their "sins" or serve as constant reminders of their past transgressions. These circumstances inevitably led them to revert to their old ways, since they are always judged. This cycle is indicative of a much bigger societal discussion that occurs regarding defining people by their past rather than their present. A person who goes to jail is forever labeled as a criminal no matter how much good they do. If a person previously incarcerated were to run for office, they would be ridiculed and their past would be used against

them, assuring their failure for mistakes that were made long before, whether consciously or unconsciously. This reality begs the question of whether this system rehabilitates those who have done wrong or merely creates a permanent mark which others can use to judge and attack.

CONCLUSION

The comparison between modern adaptations and the traditional texts which inspired them provides insight into how cultures and societies of certain time periods and backgrounds portrayed their world, each with their own ideological standpoints, biases, and gender roles. The function of any narrative is to define and portray human experience, and analyzing narratives of different time periods illustrates how those experiences change with time. The Rumpelstiltskin of the Brothers Grimm functioned by forming verbal contracts and deals, and the Rumpelstiltskin of *Once Upon A Time* created his deals by creating legal contracts. The modern Rumpelstiltskin's power is not merely defined by his magical ability, but by his characterization as a one percenter businessman in Storybrooke. He was a wealthy landowner who had special items from every citizen of the town, proving he didn't need magic to control people. His characterization, as it is, can only be achieved and understood in our time. He is a representation of our culture and yet historically influenced by his traditional text. This allows for interpretation and the awareness that adaptations are representative of the circumstances and context in which they are created rather than the texts which influenced them.

Chapter V: Adaptations as Reflections of Their Time

Due to the simplicity of its vocabulary and plots it is very easy to dismiss the genre of fairy tales as being intellectually undemanding and exclusively for children. These misconceptions are corrected when one looks at the original text and compares the different adaptations. Fairy tales and their subtexts lend themselves to the analysis of cultural and societal folkways, mores, and taboos of a given time. In addition, when analyzing these texts alongside secondary sources, it is clear these tales, especially the more traditional ones, were and arguably still are created for adults. The history of the genre suggests they were told amongst adults, rather than read to children.

As argued throughout this thesis, narratives are reflections of the author's lived experiences. Fairy tale texts with their magic are not only stories which reflect those lived experiences, but also agents that allow those experiences to change, for better or worse, at least within the confines of whatever media the author uses. Furthermore, adaptations, including those of fairy tales, reflect change, providing insight into what cultural and ideological norms/mores are changing or being reinforced in a given culture.

Brothers Grimm's "Rumpelstiltskin" follows a traditional heteronormative storyline where the male characters initiate the development of the story. Clearly, the miller's daughter was subordinate to the father, the king, and even Rumpelstiltskin, until she got the upper hand on Rumpelstiltskin by guessing his name. Even then, the character found her power and salvation in her marriage to the King, which is a staple of a patriarchal mentality. This storyline also fits the argument concerning the Rumpelstiltskin tale as a representation of a time of decline for women,

when their utility shifted from the work force to the home due to industrialization as noted by Jack Zipes in “Spinning with Fate: Rumpelstiltskin and the Decline of Female Productivity.”

Similarly, *Once Upon A Time* reflects our current society, and it includes the empowerment of female characters, even if their actions defined them as “evil” under patriarchal ideologies as was the case of Cora, the miller’s daughter, because of her ambition to become queen. The differences found between the Rumpelstiltskin characters and their meanings are also significant. In the original tale, Rumpelstiltskin made deals and held the life of the miller’s daughter in his hands; in the adaptation everyone fears Rumpelstiltskin because he has great wealth and power, which in turn make him very influential in the community. In short, the character represents the modern day idea of an evil corporate capitalist. Furthermore, in what seems the current Western societal film trend for prequels, the creators of *Once Upon A Time* gave a past to Rumpelstiltskin, a narrative life before magic and a family to care for and lose, which ultimately sets him on his evil path. Finally, his death, rather than superfluous, is self-sacrificing and heroic, since he dies to save his child Bae.

Throughout this thesis, these works, the tale and the show, were analyzed using tenets of narrative theory and contemporary critical theory. These theories together gave the necessary insight to make the argument presented in this study that adaptations, especially, as is the case here with *Once Upon A time*, are representative of the time in which they are made. Narrative theory, for this thesis, allowed the fairy tale to be looked at through the lens of a story. As this theory seeks to understand narrative in relation to its author, culture/society, and ideological background, it fit perfectly with analyzing adaptations. From that, Marxist theory give insight into how big business, for this work that would be the ABC network and ultimately Disney, have control over the narrative that can be transmitted via *Once Upon A Time*. Cultural theory, by

taking cultural history into account, helped with the comparison of the Grimm tale with the show. Finally, Feminism gave the framework for how to look at characters and character perceptions because what is found, at least in this thesis, these characters were defined under patriarchal ideologies.

Although *Once Upon A Time* does reflect the changes that have occurred since the time of the Brothers Grimm, ideologically, it represents conservative American mores/taboo. As it continues to present women as only finding their happiness in the act of marriage or in child rearing and defines the archetypes of their characters based on patriarchal ideologies, *Once Upon A Time* is promoting and reinforcing a Christian conservative representation of the United States and its people. Again, the show does not address same-sex marriage, it defines their female characters as evil or good based on a patriarchal understanding of those terms, and as it attempts to promote a way of interacting/living in our world, it does not call for change, rather, it asks its consumers to ideologically stay the same, to go back in time, and be “good” as defined by traditional conservative societal mores.

Rumpelstiltskin’s character and storyline changes are representative of the current cultural and societal experience, which is influenced by the past much like the “original” tale influences the show. Within an adaptation’s representation of both the past and the present, we are able to analyze how far we have progressed as a society/people or if we have simply remained the same. By analyzing these changes and similarities, individuals engage in critical thinking concerning the world surrounding them, rather than accepting what they are told or taught about.

AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Possible research areas include analyses on how other various media (film, TV, books, and graphic novels) adapt a fairy tale text to fit their own version of the narrative. For example, Snow White is the prominent character in the original Grimm's tale, but also in modern adaptations such as comic book series *Fables*, in the TV show *Once Upon A Time*, and movies like *Snow White and the Huntsman*, *Mirror Mirror*, and *Snow White A Tale of Terror* to name a few. It would be interesting to explore how the different mediums, creators, and backers affect her narrative. An in-depth analysis of the Snow White character, much like the Rumpelstiltskin character analysis in this thesis, could address what ideologies are being preserved and changed in the texts and present how the different mediums allow for different methods of expressing the kind of character the creators/companies want to illustrate for their audience.

Further research could focus on the female characters in *Once Upon A Time*, specifically villains like Cora, in an attempt to analyze how the character's traits portray them as "evil" are defined by a patriarchal ideology. This kind of study would demand a more extensive analysis of Feminist ideology in an attempt to understand how women are described as evil when they fail to live or act according to the dictates of a patriarchal society. In this thesis, Cora was discussed alongside some of the tenets of Feminism, however, she was not the primary focus, only her relation to Rumpelstiltskin was, and thus Feminism did not receive the same attention as Narrative, Marxist, and Cultural theory did. In the future, expanding the analysis of Cora and incorporating other female characters from *Once Upon A Time* would be of benefit and could yield some interesting conclusions, as shown by the short analysis of Cora.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

One of the major benefits of using the results and the methodology of this thesis in the classroom setting is that even though students might not have studied fairy tales formally, they have probably seen Disney movies concerning fairy tales, as well as a few TV shows like *Once Upon A Time*, or even read graphic novels on the genre, like *Fables*. This prior experience and knowledge make the texts relevant and allow the students to bring in their prior experience in the genre, resulting in an increase interest in the discussion. By analyzing the fairy tale adaptations and dismantling past perceptions of the tales they thought they knew, students might begin thinking and conversing critically about the topic, and applying critical thinking to other topics as well.

Another use for the fairy tale genre in the classroom setting is to create critical consciousness about popular and mass culture and what is being taught or promoted. As shown in this thesis, discussions about popular media like *Once Upon A Time* enable dialogues on a variety of cultural mores, which would include topics such as gender roles, love, and families. Once a student becomes aware of all the information they consciously or subconsciously consume as they participate in or watch the artifacts of popular and mass culture, they can become critical judges of what they consume. This awareness would enhance the dialogue in the classroom, allowing students to take what they learned in an academic setting and apply it in the real world.

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