The Changing Nature of Female Portrayal
An Analysis of Gender Roles in Fairy Tales
This essay examines gender normative and patriarchal elements of the popular fairy tale *Sleeping Beauty* in order to expose how patriarchal ideals are upheld. The reason for this is that children may internalize the values taught in these stories, which may lead to them perpetuating patriarchal ideals and gender normative behavior. The popular version of this fairy tale, made by Disney, follows many of the typical patriarchal ideals with a strong male hero, a wicked female witch and a weak and submissive young female, close to nature. This is contrasted by a modern retelling by Cameron Dokey that is, in many ways, gender subversive and challenges the traditional gender roles and attributes. This essay finds that the version made by Disney is a product of its time, and portrays ideals from that period that could affect children of today into internalizing archaic patriarchal ideals. Dokey’s version is better adapted to the current socio-cultural environment and succeeds in aligning the story with modern values and provides a better option to teach children the actual values and gender roles of our society.

This essay is an analysis of the popular fairy tale *Sleeping Beauty*, in order to expose the gender normative elements of the version made by Disney, using feminist theory. I will contrast these elements with the gender subversion found in the modern version *Beauty Sleep* by Cameron Dokey. I will argue that the version made by Disney is gender normative and that it, like older versions, strives to teach and uphold values of a patriarchal society. This essay will show how the reinterpretations made by Disney and Dokey reflect the gender norms of the times in which each respective work was conceived, the 1950s and 2000s. This essay will also explore the older versions written by Charles Perrault and the Grimm brothers as a tool for better understanding what these patriarchal ideals are and how they are portrayed through the fairy tale medium throughout time, as well as why they are maintained. By including the two older versions I hope to better understand how Disney’s version is far more traditional than the modern, more gender subversive, version written by Dokey. The older versions I will look into are *The Beauty Sleeping in the Woods* by Charles Perrault, written in the 17th century and considered the original version of the fairy tale, and “Little Briar Rose” published in *Grimm's Fairy tales* in 1812. This is a collection of folk and fairy tales transcribed by the German brothers in the 19th century, whereof *The Sleeping Beauty* is perhaps the most famous.

Since the goal of this essay is to analyze the fairy tale *The Sleeping Beauty* and expose the gender normative aspects of earlier versions I will use feminist criticism as a basis for my analysis. According to Lois Tyson, “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). The purpose of feminist criticism is to study a text from a feminist point of view, enlightening the reader of the faults of patriarchy. The focus of such a reading of a text is on examining how men and women are portrayed differently, exploring female oppression and injustice. Feminist criticism examines further how the traditional gender roles and values of a patriarchal society are maintained through literature by the portrayal of female and male characters. A patriarchal society is defined by Tyson as “any culture that privileges men by promoting traditional gender roles”(85). According to the traditional gender roles of a patriarchal society, men are strong and powerful, have a strong mind, and are capable of great feats. Women, on the other hand, are governed by their emotions, are weak in body and mind, and submissive. They are portrayed as
inferior to men. In a patriarchal society, men are assigned all positive traits, giving them power over the women. These gender roles have been central to our society and are the basis for the inequalities suffered by women. Since we are raised in a patriarchal society with patriarchal values, we have internalized those values to such a degree that they are part of our identity, making it difficult to realize the injustice of such a society. Feminist criticism seeks to expose the ways in which literature is normative, imposing traditional gender roles on children and adults, and how it encourages certain behaviors in men and women, portraying other character traits as unwanted and untypical.

Historically, fairy tales are prone to change according to the social and cultural changes that take place in a community: “Each historical epoch and each community altered the original folk tales according to its needs as they were handed down over the centuries” (Zipes 8). Fairy tales have gone through dramatic changes as they were told and re-told throughout history. Originally, they were actually matriarchal, meaning that they cast women as superior to men. As the influence of Christianity grew during the Middle Ages, the tales were altered to fit this paradigm. The entity once described as a goddess was transformed into the evil witch, fairy or stepmother that are still present in these stories today (Nemani). Originally, the purpose of fairy tales, created by European peasants, was to identify, teach and uphold culture, traditions, values and morals of the particular historical context. They have been told from peasant to peasant and used not only for teaching, but also for entertainment (Fredricks). As an effect of these stories being used as a tool to teach and reflect the values and morals of the society in which they were told, which was predominantly patriarchal, they also as a consequence functioned as a source for learning patriarchal values. Elisabeth Bell et al. describe the functions of fairy tales as an institution in middle-class society at the end of the nineteenth century. One of the most important functions of the fairy tales was that they “reinforced the patriarchal symbolic order based on rigid notions of sexuality and gender” (26). In the last couple of decades there have been attempts made by feminist writers to create more modernized adaptations of the basic story into a present context, where gender consciousness is a current political issue. One of these modernized versions is examined in this essay, Beauty sleep by Cameron Dokey.

In the paper “Media portrayal of Gender Stereotypes in the 1950s: Walt Disney’s Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty” Michelle Fredericks writes about media’s
(newspapers, television, magazines etc.) depiction of women in the US during the 1950s and how this affected both Walt Disney’s version of the Sleeping Beauty as well as the men and women of this time. In contrast to the 1930s when women were portrayed as independent, the focus in the 1950s was on family values and expected gender roles. Men worked hard all day to provide an income for the family, while the wife stayed at home, cleaning and taking care of the children, always happy and beautiful. The depiction of women in magazines, commercials and movies had a huge impact on the society as a whole, where women and men were keen to live up to the norm created by the media. Disney, as the businessman he was, wanted to be part of this mainstream media circus and thus altered the fairy tales he made into movies to fit into this new climate. He took the original fairy tales written by Charles Perrault and the Grimms and adapted them to fit the sociocultural norms created by the media. By doing this he created a very stereotypical version of the characters; perfectly matching the expectations of the audience and the society of that time. Disney, in producing the Sleeping Beauty, also produced the image of the perfect woman, setting up parameters and rules for how girls should be in order to grow up to be a princess and to find their dream prince. From the movie, certain assumptions about women can be made, such as they are to be beautiful, sing and dance beautifully and be obedient and passive and care for the home. As an effect of this portrayal of women, feminists regard many Disney movies as directly harmful to children since they so strongly support male dominance. The media is a very powerful tool when it comes to “forming the attitudes, values and behaviors of its viewers” (Sawyer 5). In combination with the fact that children learn typical gender behavior and values from social learning and imitation of models and how they are affected by social modeling in the creation of their behavior, the importance of examining how media portrays gender becomes apparent (Sawyer 5). There have been many changes even during the last 30 years, regarding the sociocultural roles of women and what is appropriate behavior and life styles for both men and women. This sociocultural change is, however, seldom portrayed in the media, especially in television, which still persists in portraying women as emotional, family oriented and dependent on males for emotional and financial support. This portrayal of women is not an accurate depiction of reality, and it may teach impressionable children values that do not fit in our contemporary society (Sawyer 5). From studying the Walt Disney movies, it is evident that they continue to display traditional gender roles; they may have changed slightly to better fit the culture, but
their focus is on duplicating the social structures of a patriarchal society rather than changing it or adapting it as society changes. A study made by Towbin et al. showed that certain themes can be noted in the portrayal of women and what it means to be a woman in fairytales: appearance is more important than intellect, women need protection, and they are inherently domestic (Sawyer 5).

From a young age we are told stories and fairy tales such as the one of the sleeping beauty. This particular fairy tale comes in many versions and is perhaps most known nowadays as a famous and widely seen animated movie created by Disney in the 1950s. To most people this story might seem beneficial for children, since it displays typical good behavior where good conquers over evil. What most might not consider are the ways in which this story subconsciously teaches children to behave according to the norms in a patriarchal society. In the paper “Cinderella in the Classroom. Children's Responses to Gender Roles in Fairy-tales” Westland writes about a study performed on children to examine how the children imitated the behaviors seen in fairy tales. The study showed that boys were more prone to reduplicate the gender roles portrayed in fairy tales than girls, who favored stories involving more independent heroines and upside-down fairy tales. From this I draw the conclusion that the boys were reluctant to leave the more powerful position as the strong and independent hero because it is an advantageous position, whereas girls also seek a more independent role model. This stands in contrast to the findings of Karen E Rowe, who in her article “Feminism and Fairy tales” gives an account of how women internalize the values of a patriarchal society that are present in such folklore, and unconsciously relate to the social rules present. The women in these tales are assigned certain attributes that female readers internalize as they are suggested to be the norm, or the wanted and expected features of a good woman. “Subconsciously women may transfer from fairy tales into real life cultural norms which exalt passivity, dependency, and self-sacrifice as a female’s cardinal virtues suggest that culture’s very survival depends upon a woman’s acceptance of roles which relegate her to motherhood and domesticity” (Rowe). Rowe discusses the close relationship between fantasy and reality and how this relationship can explain why romantic tales so greatly can influence women’s expectations of their roles in society. She claims that even in our enlightened and liberated society women internalize the romantic patterns of fairy tales and hope that they will follow the prototype designed in these tales (252). Based on Rowe and
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Westland it therefore seems as even though girls often prefer stories involving a more independent heroine they can relate to, they still internalize the values of traditional fairy tales and hope that their lives will adhere to the norm set in these tales. One of the main points of Rowe’s article is the close relationship between reality and fiction, and that readers internalize values embedded in stories. It therefore stands to reason that it is possible that girls, and boys, internalize values depending on the nature of the stories they are exposed to. It is possible that they would internalize different norms and values if they are exposed to gender subversive stories and fairy tales, instead of gender normative.

French author Charles Perrault penned the original Sleeping Beauty fairy tale, called *The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood*, first published in 1697. He did not, however, invent it. *The sleeping beauty in the woods* was a popular folk story of that time that was passed on orally. Even though *The Sleeping Beauty in the Woods* is not technically a part of English literature, it was originally written in French, the seminal importance of this version makes it hard to overlook in the examination of gender roles in this fairy tale. It has been translated into English for hundreds of years and provides a starting point from which to examine changes to the story through some of its major iterations. For this reason it is included as necessary background material. When examining the original version it is clear how this story reflects the gender roles of that point in time and the society in which it was written, 17th century Europe.

In his classic fairy tale a king and a queen are blessed with a daughter and in celebration of this they hold a great christening. During the banquet a fairy enters the great hall and is upset that she did not receive an invitation. After the dinner the fairies bestow their gifts upon the young girl including the gift of beauty, temper of an angel, grace, and skill in song and music. The fairy who did not receive an invitation lays a curse upon her, saying she will die by the prick of a spindle. One of the fairies manages to change it to a hundred years of sleep. The king outlaws the use of spindles. 15-16 years later the princess comes across a woman who has never heard of the king’s proclamation. The princess pricks her finger on the woman’s spindle, she falls asleep and after a hundred a prince comes across the castle. He has heard stories of this castle and the princess sleeping in there. In his eagerness to seek love and glory he decides to set out on this adventure. He finds the princess sleeping in her chambers, sits by her bed and the princess wakes up. The prince declares his love to her. After
some time the prince leaves the castle to return to his father. The prince tells his father that he had lost himself in the wood, the father believes the prince’s lie but his mother does not, she was certain the prince had a love affair. The Prince did not dare to trust his mother with his secret since she came of a race of ogres. Later, the king dies and upon his coronation the prince declares that he is married to the princess. After a time the king declares war on his neighbor and appoints the queen mother as regent while he is leading the war. During his absence the queen mother tries to eat the princesses’ children, but is outwitted by her steward, and later caught in the act by the prince.

The female characterization in this version displays typical patriarchal notions of the female sex. The evil witch is easily angered and responds irrationally to not being invited to the christening, symbolizing women’s irrationality and disposition to become upset because of trivial matters. The seven good fairies bestowed upon Aurora several gifts, “all that a girl could want”: temper of an angel, beauty, grace, ability to dance, sing and play music beautifully, also the most desirable and ornamental attributes for a woman according to traditional patriarchal norm. The princess pricks her hand on a spinner owned by a woman who never had heard of the king’s proclamation, a sign of women’s ignorance. The queen is without voice in this version and is the image of a passive woman. The prince’s mother, who is an ogre, is another female impersonation of evil, much like the evil fairy. She is powerful and ruthless, capable of ordering men to do her bidding. She goes against typical patriarchal norms since she goes against the preordained notion that women should be silent, beautiful and graceful. She is however tricked by the male steward, who serves her animals instead of the Princess and her children. She is thus portrayed as less intelligent than the male steward since she fell for his trick, symbolizing female intellectual inferiority. Her only power comes from her position as queen mother. The queen mother and the evil fairy fit Tysons theory of females being portrayed as either good girls or bad girls in fairy tales. Here the evil fairy and the queen mother do not accept their patriarchal gender roles and therefore the only role left to them is that of a monster (Tyson 89). They are portrayed as petty, the fairy because she was not invited to the christening, and monstrous, the queen mother as she wanted to eat the queen and her children.

The characterization of the male sex also displays typical patriarchal ideals. The king is a decisive man who bans all spinning wheels to protect his daughter, symbolizing the importance for a man to protect his family. The young prince is fired up by the story of
Sleeping Beauty, and wants to go through an adventure and seek love and glory. “A young and gallant prince is always brave” (Perrault). The prince is portrayed as a decisive and courageous man, the ideal man in a patriarchal society.

In this story, the princess awakes without the classic kiss; she wakes up as the prince sits down beside her. However, they fall in love at first sight. The princess had dreamt about her perfect prince during her sleep. It is possible to interpret this as the right way to meet the prince of your dreams is to dream about him and one day, when the time is right, he will come, accentuating women as passive, in contrast to the active men.

Another important variation of the Sleeping Beauty narrative is the Grimm brothers’ version. It is very similar to that written down by Perrault, the only major differences are the ogre queen, who is not present in the Grimm brothers’ version, and the addition of the kiss in Grimms’ version. Considering the brothers’ agenda—that their work would in essence function as a media with which one could teach children appropriate behavior and values—the reason for removing the Ogre queen and the cannibalism she tried to perform is to adapt the tale to better suit a younger audience.

There is a distinct pattern in the fairy tales adapted by Disney (The Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella, Snow White etc.): a courageous prince meets a beautiful, young and innocent girl. The stories always end with a happy, heterosexual marriage. When analyzing the portrayal of gender in the characters of Disney’s Sleeping Beauty, it is easy to distinguish the gender roles of a patriarchal society and how they are assigned to the characters.

Aurora, the princess and heroine of the fairy tale, is described as a beautiful young woman. Before she is cursed by Maleficent, the good fairies bestow her with the most important gifts a girl can receive. She is given the gift of beauty by Flora: “Beauty rare, gold of sunshine in her hair, lips that shame the red, red rose” (Disney). By Fauna she is given the gift of beautiful song: “Melody her life long the nightingale’s her troubadour, bringing his sweet serenade to her door” (Disney). By comparing Aurora’s beauty to that of nature’s red roses, and sunshine, and even to some extent creating her as a portrayal of natural elements (roses, sunshine), a bond is created between her and nature, which is further reinforced in the way she communicates and sings with animals of the forest. As an effect of this closeness to nature instead of culture, she, or any other woman, is deemed inferior in a patriarchal society: “research has shown
women are commonly ‘identified as being closer to nature than to culture,’ which in a patriarchal system makes them ‘symbolic of an inferior intermediate order of being’ ” (Bacchilega 9). In addition to this closeness to nature, and therefore distance to cultural and important aspects of a patriarchal society, Aurora is portrayed as a truly obedient woman. This is most evident when she returns to the cottage from the forest after instantly falling in love with Prince Philip. After receiving the news of her real family and her betrothal to an unknown man, or so she believes, she bursts out crying, but she resigns and, being the obedient and good girl she is, she follows the fairies to her parents, sacrificing herself and her love to the will of the fairies and her parents. When analyzing Aurora’s song in the woods, we get the only glimpse of Aurora’s own desires. It is however only one—to find a suitable husband, someone who is tall, handsome and romantic. In addition, she sings that she wants him to find her, adding to her passivity. When first arriving at the castle, Aurora is left on her own by the fairies and Maleficent appears before her and guides her to a tower where she pricks her finger and falls asleep. In essence, this is a portrayal that women must not be left alone, because they cannot be trusted with themselves. When she is trapped in the castle, asleep, she is the typical damsel in distress, in need of a hero to save her. This strengthens her character as a lady in need of a man to protect her and keep her safe from danger, a concept in perfect correlation with patriarchal norms.

The Queen is, apart from Aurora, the only human woman present in the story, and she is barely noticeable. She only has one line throughout the entire movie, in which she calls Maleficent “your Excellency”. By talking to Maleficent as though she is of a higher rank, she shows weakness and submission, which is a tell-tale sign of a woman in a patriarchy. Also, by showing weakness and submission to Maleficent she is empowering Maleficent, she treats her as a being of higher authority which proves that Maleficent falls outside the typical patriarchal norm of women as being powerless and without authority, and thus threatens this norm.

Aurora’s father, the king, is a powerful and decisive man. After the witch has cast her spell, he immediately orders all spinning wheels to be burned, and agrees with the fairies’ plan to keep his daughter safe from the witch. He is a typical example of a good man in a patriarchal story; he is strong, decisive and protects his family.
Prince Philip represents the ideal man in a patriarchal society and he is therefore the perfect man for the ideal patriarchal woman, displayed in the obedient Aurora. He has all the character traits of the perfect man, decisiveness, physical strength, good looks and strong love for his woman. When riding through the forest and hearing Aurora’s song, he shows curiosity, and the need to explore, a behavior that is rewarded by him meeting Aurora. Unlike Aurora he breaks rules and commands, as is evident when he arrives at the castle on Aurora’s 16th birthday. When he is told by his father, king Hubert, that he is engaged to the daughter of king Stefan, a girl he has never met (or so he thinks), he disobeys his father’s commands and the sociocultural rules, ignoring the position he puts his father in and selfishly goes after the girl he loves, following his heart. Since his intentions are good and honorable, and because he is a man, this makes him a hero. Aurora on the other hand is following the commands and will of her father instead of following her heart and thus following the patriarchal norm of obeying the father. The Prince receives two gifts from the fairies, the sword of truth and the shield of virtue, making him the bearer of truth and virtue. The sword is a phallus symbol as well as a symbol of man’s power, it is a powerful weapon wielded by men. With this powerful sword of truth, the prince is capable of destroying the evil, represented by the character Maleficent.

Maleficent is depicted as a beautiful woman, unlike most of witches present in fairy tales. She is capable of very strong magic, more so than the three good fairies, as is obvious from the christening, where the fairies are unable to undo her curse. In addition to her power, she is also intelligent and independent. She is a free woman, not controlled by any man. In having these attributes, she can be interpreted as a symbol of matriarchy, where women are more powerful than men and therefore a challenger of patriarchal power. By making Maleficent, the powerful and free woman, the impersonation of evil, these traits are in turn associated with evil. These attributes in a woman are not considered as beneficial in a patriarchal society, and are therefore assigned to the evil witch. Prince Philip, the impersonation of righteousness and patriarchy, must overcome the obstacles before him in the form of a hedge of thorns and the evil witch, the symbol of matriarchy. By piercing the witch’s heart with his sword of truth, he is able to save the princess, and fulfill the ultimate goal of a man and a woman in a patriarchy, a happy, heterosexual marriage.
The introduction of the kiss as an important aspect of the fairy tale in Disney’s version holds a significant symbolic value, it is also one of the most significant alterations Disney made to the original. Aurora is put to sleep by the fairies, instead of being killed by Maleficent’s curse. While the fairies cast their spell, they sing: “one day He [Prince Philip] will come, riding out of the dawn, and you’ll awaken to love’s first kiss, till then sleeping beauty sleep on!” This sleep has been interpreted in many ways, of which the perhaps most common is the woman’s dormant sexuality, or the patriarchy’s wish for women to be sexually dormant and passive until such a time when a man whom they are going to marry comes along (Tyson 89). It is also a symbol for women’s passivity, them not needing to go looking for the man of their dreams, he will heroically come and save them. The kiss is the symbol of the sexual awakening of the woman; the sexuality is awakened by the man of their dreams, when the time is right, not before.

Unlike previous versions where the narration has been given by a nameless and genderless entity, sometimes from a male perspective, Cameron Dokey’s version, Beauty Sleep (2002), is narrated by the protagonist of the story, the heroine Aurore. By using Aurore as the narrator the author is giving the female the voice of the story and it is told through a female perspective. The story in itself has been heavily modified but it relies on some basic features shared with the older versions. The time and place is still medieval France, the girl is born a princess and she has two loving parents. There are fairies, one of whom casts the spell that would kill Aurore, another who modifies the death into sleep. In addition, there is a heroic journey, the princess is kissed in order to wake up, and she finds happiness in marrying her true love. The most striking aspect of how the story is modified is the way the new story affects the way the characters are portrayed and perceived. Instead of the story revolving around the distressed and helpless princess, the story is about the young life of an independent, strong-willed, brave and adventurous girl. Instead of Aurore being awakened by true love’s first kiss the author uses a more sensible approach: “If it's true love that awakens her, so much the better, but this is a thing I cannot promise. For true love comes when it will, not when it is called” (Dokey 18). This is one example of the many ways in which this version differs from the one made by Disney. Instead of making the princess destined to fall in love with, and marry, the person who wakens her with a kiss, the author chose
to use the kiss simply as a means of waking the princess, defusing the old love’s first kiss phenomenon of the Grimms and Disney versions while keeping the tale’s trademark kiss.

The characters in Dokey’s version differ vastly from the characters in earlier versions. In Dokey’s version the christening is told from Aurore’s perspective years after it happened, and everything we are told about Maleficent, in this version called Jane, is narrated by Aurore. Jane is a member of the family, Aurore’s mother’s cousin, who was in pain over feeling like an outcast, feeling invisible. This pain makes her obsessed with magic, which consumed her and changed her. The pain becomes too much and she releases it through taking revenge on those she thought wronged her, Aurore’s parents. Aurore argues that Jane is not evil at all, but rather was driven to cast the spell because she felt ignored and unseen, the pain of which she believed would be released if she took revenge. (Dokey 10, 13). This disarms Jane as a true entity of evil, as in previous versions, and humanizes her. Here Aurore, the sufferer of the spell, defends Jane’s actions, explaining how she was driven to it by others.

Aurore is a very free-minded child; she disobeys her mother, and ignores her duties (Dokey 8-9). She is born into a patriarchy and is expected to behave accordingly by her mother; however, her father is more open-minded. He realizes Aurore’s ambition and desire to play in a more boyish manner and to learn how to fight. Aurore is very reasonable, and unlike the other versions we get an insight into her mind and are able to track her thoughts. Her ability to sympathize with Maleficent and seeing the events from her perspective makes the Aurore of this version a more complex and smarter being. She is from a young age aware of the curse and she learns to live with it, and her main concern is that she is forced to stay inside the castle, when all she wants to do is to explore the world outside it. By exploring the outer world she also explores herself. By portraying the princess as adventurous the author once again shows a distancing towards the traditional gender roles, where the female is not supposed to be adventurous but rather stay inside. Aurore is not a passive, delicate princess doing typical women duties and chores, as is proven when she explores the grounds outside the castle and embarks on helping the peasants with their duties and learning skills normally not befitting a princess. She explores the world outside the castle and socializes with the lower classes. She even learns to shoot a bow and to throw knives, thus mastering skills that are traditionally typically male. Unlike the princess in
previous versions she cannot dance beautifully, but rather steps on people’s shoes. This strengthens her position of being different from other princesses and girls of fairy tales. Instead of being described as the most beautiful of girls, she is plain, and other girls described as beautiful. By not focusing on the beauty of the princess, but rather the inner qualities, the author manages to create a princess that is far from the princess in earlier versions. She is portrayed as a self-sacrificing brave princess when she runs away from the castle to rid the castle and the lands of plagues that were brought upon it by the spells cast upon her. This shows that this princess is able to choose her own destiny, that she will not sit idly by while people are suffering or in danger. She seeks to find the answer to her curse, all by herself, proving that girls can be independent. Her eagerness to be independent and to go on the adventure alone can be seen clearly in the following quote: “I had expected to face it on my own. I might even have been looking forward to it, in a funny sort of way. A test of my inner strength, or something like that. Of my ability to be brave, to do what was right, even if that meant hardship and sacrifice” (Dokey 72). In the very end of the story instead of accepting a marriage to the prince who kissed and woke her up, she follows her heart, and chooses her true love, Oswald, now in the form of a very old man. This further emphasizes how she is the maker of her own destiny; she will not do what is expected or asked of her, she does what she believes is right in her heart.

In the same way Aurore is portrayed very differently from the earlier passive females of this story, so is the portrayal of the prince called Iron Heart, the young man she meets in the cottage in the forest is not the strong and heroic prince that figures in previous version of the tale. He is not like the other knights; rather he is a more sensitive and clumsy young man. He is not the image of the patriarchal ideal man, who is superior to women and practical. As he says, “I did my best, but the truth is, I'm not very good at practical things. My hands never seem to know what to do, no matter how often they've been told how” (Dokey 72). He is on a quest to find the sleeping beauty, though he does not seem so strong willed, he is more interested in the adventure and exploring the nature of the forest.

The Queen is unlike the quiet and passive woman in previous versions. She shows decisiveness when it comes to dealing with the curse by requesting that someone do something about the spell and is in essence taking over the role played by the king in earlier versions in this scene. The characterization of the king has also changed; from
being a king mostly defined by his actions to a man who supports his wife, not only through action but also as a close support through touches and showing sympathy and empathy, a trait that traditionally is given women instead of men.

Through her adventurous spirit, Aurore is made heir to the throne, even though Prince Oswald, Aurore’s cousin, had that title. He, on the other hand, is not adventurous, but rather preferred to remain indoors and socialize with the nobles. He is thus portrayed differently from the princes in earlier versions of this fairy tale, not as macho and masculine, but more feminine. Prince Oswald was ironically called Prince charming, because he was everything but charming. He later changed, into a truly charming man. He is left feeling unwanted when the king proclaims that Aurore will be the heir of the throne instead of him. By making Aurore the heir of the throne instead of the prince, the author shows that character traits are more important than gender and that females are capable of becoming rulers. All Prince Oswald ever wanted in life was to be seen and loved as in a family and this earning to be part of a family gives his character a more traditionally feminine touch instead of a strong independent prince. He is portrayed as double sided throughout almost the entire novel, and believed to have a hidden agenda. This double-sidedness is far from the clear distinction of good and evil of earlier versions, where the prince is pure goodness and no one ever questions his intentions. Oswald is believed to be a kindred spirit to Jane, the fairy who cast the spell, rather than the exact opposite as in earlier versions where the prince is the symbol of righteousness.

Considering the difference in character traits portrayed by the characters of Dokey’s modern version and the Disney version it could be argued that Dokey has, in some ways, reversed the typical gender roles and functions as a response to those earlier versions. The princess is independent and does what she pleases rather than obeying everyone else. Furthermore she is adventurous and learns what are commonly regarded as masculine skills such as mastering a bow and arrow and even agricultural work. The Prince, Iron Heart, is sensitive, in touch with his feelings and clumsy, he is not given any typically masculine attributes other than his name and his longing to find a spouse. Aurore’s mother, the queen, is decisive and takes action against the witch who cast the spell, instead of being silent and passive as in earlier versions, whereas the king takes on the typical, passive female role. In addition, the king in Dokey’s version is more supportive and empathetic than in earlier versions, thereby adding to his more female
appearance. In earlier versions where a female character displayed attributes that would not fit the typical patriarchal norms, such as being submissive, graceful etc. and instead have attributes such as power, she would often be given the role of a monster as in Perrault and Grimm. In Dokey’s version Aurore displays many attributes traditionally given to male characters in fairy tales such as an adventurous spirit and bravery, while being given the role of the protagonist as well as the heroine of the story and not that of a monster. By giving female characters voice in the fairy tale and assigning them attributes traditionally only given to male characters and monsters it is possible that Dokey attempts to not only show how twisted earlier versions of the traditional fairy tale are, but also lead the way to a more modern and politically correct culture of storytelling. It can be seen as an attempt to take over the traditional fairytale medium and adapt it to modern ideals as a means of promoting a more modern view on gender roles instead of perpetuating patriarchal values in traditional fairy tales. In doing this Dokey also exposes the fundamental gender inequalities displayed in the story’s predecessors in a way that may lead the reader to contemplate on how these stories give an outdated portrayal of gender roles.

The idea of women being inferior to men and portrayed as Other is upheld in early versions of Sleeping Beauty as well as more recent ones, such as the one produced by Disney. The heroines of these stories are portrayed as passive, helpless and close to nature in a demeaning way. Instead of being associated with culture and what is considered important from a male perspective, the heroines are associated with nature. From my analysis of the versions of the fairy tale Sleeping Beauty, it has become clear that the earlier versions are gender normative in the sense that they uphold and enforce patriarchal values and portray characters in typical male/female stereotypes. The princess in these stories will be rewarded with the dream prince in the end and live happily ever after if she obeys the rules of the patriarchal society. The version made by Walt Disney is affected by the media and culture of the time and the environment in which it was created. It does not contain proper genderization for our time and is therefore archaic in its portrayal of character and gender attributes. In accordance with the research provided in this paper it is therefore possible to draw the conclusion that this still highly popular fairy tale version may teach children values of a patriarchal society even as society itself is leaning towards becoming more gender neutral.
The modern interpretation of the fairy tale studied in this essay, *Beauty Sleep* by Cameron Dokey, shows a deep awareness of the classic portrayal of women in this kind of text. This is a highly gender-subversive novel that succeeds in aligning the story with modern values. The princess is portrayed as an independent and brave individual and the men of the story are given more traditionally feminine character traits. In her quest to write a modern interpretation of the classical fairy tale, the author has in many ways reversed the traditional gender roles. As a result, it provides a better option to teach children the actual values and gender roles of our society as it portrays its characters as individuals instead of being of different sexes and therefore given certain attributes that the individuals of the sexes must follow. With the rise of this kind of gender-subversive texts and stories it is possible to replace the typical gender stereotypes that are portrayed in older versions with modern retellings while keeping popular fairy tales relevant as stories for children.
Works cited


