

Chapter 4

Analytical Approaches to the Selected Fairy Tales

Critics and scholars of various fields have been attracted to fairy tales. Thus, approaches have been used for fairy tale analysis with different objectives. Some are interested in aesthetic points of literary matters. However, psychologists have paid attention to the meanings which can be interpreted as clues to the human mind while enhancing our understanding and appreciation of the tales like other literary works. At the same time, anthropologists and sociologists who consider fairy tales a rich source of earlier social behavior have shed valuable light on the interpretation. The above mentioned perspectives will, therefore, be eclectically used in the analysis of the selected tales, with a special focus on the sibling relationship.

As the fairy tale is a narrative genre, the analysis will be based on the literary elements of fiction. However relevant key concepts used in the folklorists' approaches to the tales such as functions or motifs will be applied to amplify the notable points, resulting in three main topics of the analysis of the tales: form, theme and motif, and characterization.

Form of the Tales

Two closely related words need to be clarified in the discussion of the form of the narrative: structure and plot. The structure is defined as a pattern of actions that is systematically shaped in a story; the structure is "the story at rest, while the plot is the story in motion" (DiYanni, 1990 : 28). Birkerts (1993 : 39) mentions two types of plot: the progressive and the episodic. The progressive form of the traditional plot consists of five sequences: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and resolution. The exposition introduces the principal characters and setting, and provides necessary background information of conflicts. The rising action leads the reader towards the highest point of the characters' emotional intensity, called the climax. The falling action and resolution are the solution of problems that establishes

the ending (Dube, 1979 : 7-9, Birkerts, 1993 : 39). Each unit or incident in the narrative is connected together under the leading characters' continuous actions.

Some stories, however, have many series of incidents, each of which loosely relates to the others. Besides, the turning point is built up more than once. Many Thai tales have a lengthy beginning because of the repeated focus on the conflicts among co-wives of the main character (Siraporn T. Nathalang, 2000 : 4). Such plot structures are termed episodic. An episode or a scene of such tales ends in itself. "Sang Thong", for example, has very long exposition during the protagonist's childhood and several ordeals caused by continuous conflicts among his father's wives. The rivalry and jealousy among co-wives are abundant in Thai tales. Later on, the protagonist's life is also full of adventures especially during manhood. At the end, the leading character reveals his true self and shows his exceptional competence in fighting against the odds and becomes king. Of the Grimms' fairy tales, however, the episodic structure is rarely found. Only two, "The Twin Brothers" and "The Kings of the Golden Mountain" may be considered episodic. The rest of the Grimms' tales in this selection have progressive plots with brief exposition of characters and the main conflicts which develop and move rapidly to the resolution.

Characters' actions are key elements of the tale structure. Vladimir Propp, a Russian Formalist folklorist, devoted his life to the study of the structure of one hundred Russian fairy tales, paying particular attention to the characters' actions. Propp believed that fairy tales share similar structures of "functions", defined as characters' acts "from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action" (Propp, 1979 : 21). Just like a sentence which is made of basic elements like subject, verb and object, a tale is made of actions (verb) of various leading characters (subject and object). Propp assumed that tales have similar characters' actions whereas the arrangement of the characters is inconstant (Propp, 1979 : 19-20). To Propp, there are four sub-structures of the Russian fairy tales: one, 'struggle-victory', two, 'difficult task-resolution', three, 'combinations of struggle-victory and difficulty-resolution', and four, 'happy-go-lucky protagonist'. Propp found that "all fairy tales are of one type in regard to their structure" (Propp, 1979 : 23). He believed that the tale structures of other regions are similar to those he developed.

Propp's studies have inspired such prominent tale scholars and structuralists as Claude-Lévy-Strauss, A.J.Greimas and Tzvetan Todorov (Selden, 1989 : 57-59). Among Thai scholars, Suthawadi Noonpakdi and Pitchayanee Chengkeeree used Propp's structural theory in their analyses of tales (1999) to analyze the plot structure of the Lao Phou-eur folk tales and found tales with comparable elements of actions to those in Propp's study. In addition, Pitchayanee Chengkeeree also found from her study of 61 Thai tales that Thai tales sub-structures are more struggle-victory rather than 'difficult task-resolution'.

In applying this method to the analysis of Thai tale structures, Siraporn T. Nathalang (1996 : 159-160) proposes four phases of the protagonist's life: childhood, courtship, marriage and adventure. Pitchayanee Chengkeeree (1999 : 51, quoting Siraporn T. Nathalang, 1996 : 159-160) finds these phases practical in examining tales, and adopts them in her study. She points out that during the childhood phase, an additional function characteristic of Thai fairy tales is the jealousy-related function. She considers this function the main determination of the Thai tale plot structure.

In the present study, while Propp's functions are considered in the discussion, they are grouped into only three phases: the initial situation, the adventure and the ending. Under this very simplified framework, the tale structures of both the brothers Grimm's and Thai fairy tales will be examined and compared.

1. Initial Situation

Generally, the opening of fairy tales introduces some necessary information about the major characters and the conflicts. In the Grimms' fairy tales, the beginnings reveal the young protagonists who have conflicts with their elder siblings caused by the latter's jealousy. Thai tales, however, often begin with conflicts caused by jealousy among the wives of the protagonists' father. Except in "Holwichai and Khawee" and "Manohra", we can find this kind of jealousy as the main function. Later, the conflicts cause negative relationship between the wives' children. Moreover, Thai tales often begin with the extraordinary birth of the protagonists as most of them are considered "*Bodhisatvas*" or incarnations of the Buddha. For

example, the protagonist in “Sang Thong” is born in a conch, while in “Sang Silp Chai”, the protagonist is born with a magical bow and a conch. The function of jealousy among the wives of the protagonist’s father extends to the protagonist’s generation and contributes to the length of the initial situation. The Grimms’ fairy tales, on the other hand, often portray short introductions of the main characters, and their conflicts caused by the stepmother and/or elder siblings.

The sibling rivalry is gradually apparent after the protagonist approaches the period of adulthood. The elder siblings and the protagonist’s stepmother are the usual villains. They attempt to deceive or get rid of the protagonist. Such protagonists as Phra Sang Thong and Phra Sang Silp Chai are banished while some major characters are abandoned, such as Nang Sib Song or Hansel and Grethel.

2. Adventure

According to Propp, (1979 : 26, 33) the functions of absence (‘one of the members of a family is absent from home’) and lack (‘one member of a family either lacks something or desires to have something’) are notable at the beginning of the tales. The protagonist will be approached with a request or a command which makes him or her leave home. Three main objectives of the journeys are found in the selected tales. The leading characters may flee from danger, search for fortune or prove themselves. The protagonist of the first type is either banished or has to escape from peril planned by the wicked (step) mother as seen in at least five of the Grimms’ and three of the Thai tales.

Seeking fortunes is more notable in the Grimms’ fairy tales than in the Thai tales. The heroes of ten in the brothers Grimm’s tales leave home for this purpose, for example, those in “The Three Trades” and “The Tailor’s Three Sons”. In two of the Thai tales-- “Holwichai and Khawee” and “Sang Thong”, the protagonists also seem to be fortune seekers who go roaming to find the women of their lives and kingdoms in which to settle down.

The journey objectives of most protagonists in this study fall into the category of proving oneself. The main figures of these two Thai fairy tales and twenty-three of

the Grimms' fairy tales must also complete ordeals with the help of magical agents and are finally rewarded. They have to prove themselves by going through difficulties and trials. This probably relates to the traditional initiation rites. As Cavendish points out "the transition from youth to adulthood, acceptance into an order or into a trade, are important to turning points in a person's life and marked with appropriate ceremony--initiation" (1983 : 1441). After the main character overcomes difficulties, she/he is recognized as a worthy mature adult of the community.

A few protagonists, however, do not leave home. Many of them are female. The only three exceptions of the male protagonists who also stay are in "The Royal Turnip", "The Singing Bone" and "The Three Sluggards". This probably reflects the traditional society which gave women a passive role at home. Notable examples are the female protagonists in "Cinderella" and "Pla Boo Thong" who are scorned and maltreated by their stepmothers. Zipes thinks that this is due to the social traditions in which home was considered as "a woman's best place" and her appropriate role was that of "a diligent, obedient and self-sacrificing wife" (1989 : 64). Most of the tales in which the female protagonists leave home show that they are forced by certain circumstances or hardships, for example, those in "The Twelve Brothers", "The Enchanted Stag", "The Water Sprite" and "The Seven Ravens". This point will be fully elaborated in the characterization section.

3. Ending

All the selected fairy tales in this study end with happiness: the protagonists triumph over the opponents, and the antagonists are punished. Very often the leading character inherits a kingdom as well as marries a prince or a princess. The protagonists' destinations of the journeys of Thai and the Grimms' fairy tales are either home (three Thai and twelve of the Grimms' fairy tales), or more often, getting married and staying the rest of their lives in a new land.

The structures of the selected tales of both cultures are similar but the plots of Thai tales are episodic whereas those of the Grimms' fairy tales are not. The beginning of the Thai tales generally includes the extraordinary births of the

protagonists and the extensive function of ‘jealousy’ among family members. These elements do not exist in the Grimms’ fairy tales. The structure of the middle part and the ending of both groups of tales are similar. The protagonist leaves home because she/he wants to avoid danger and tries to seek fortune. The pattern of struggle-resolution is prevalent. The endings of the selected tales are also similar: the protagonist’s victory, inheriting a kingdom or achieving a better status.

Theme and Motif

The theme or the central idea of a fairy tale may seem didactic, but in fact, it may come from some beliefs, dreams, goals or wishes of a particular regional group of people (Goforth, 1998 : 89; DiYanni, 1990 : 69). An example is, ‘gratitude and hard work bring reward’, a common theme of many fairy tales which reflects a value prevalent in most cultures. Another recurring theme is ‘the greedy will never achieve what they try to get’, which is found in numerous tales. Examples of this theme are the elder brother in “Mountain Sesima”, who is trapped in the mountain because of his greed, or the selfish and greedy girl in “White and Black”.

In analyzing fairy tales, the motifs or recurring parts of the main theme are usually identified and examined. A motif may be a recurrent image, verbal pattern, situation or idea (Burrows *et al*, 1973 : 458; Cuddon, 1998 : 522). According to Leeming (1997 : 35), a Finnish folklorist named Antti Aarne (1867-1925) first classified motifs in fairy tales and rearranged them into an index system. Later in 1928, the motif Index was translated into English by Stith Thompson (1885-1976), an American folklorist. At present, this motif index is well-known among folklorists and is presented as the *Aarne-Thompson Index*. This work is a six-volume guide to motifs found in a variety of folk literature.

This rather comprehensive index includes twenty-two motif types, each with alphabetically-ordered categories from A through Z, omitting I, O, U and Y. For example, type A concerns creation and the nature of the world, and the universe; type B animals; and type Z, the last of the motif types, includes a miscellaneous subgroup

of motifs. Under each motif type has hundreds of entries, such as under type A are AO-A99 mythological motifs, A100-A499 gods (Thompson, 1955 : 488-500).

Several interesting motifs can be found in the selected fairy tales, but only some motifs are chosen for discussion here, the most notable recurrent and relevant to the topic of this study. Motifs of the reversal of fortune (type L) and transformation (type D) are pursued through three themes: “the youngest child triumphs over the elder siblings (L300-L399), “The selfish and the greedy will be finally punished” (L100-L199) and “Appearances are deceptive”. The motifs regarding numbers and resurrection are just supplements to the major theme analyses.

1. The Youngest Sibling Triumphs Over the Elder Siblings

This prevailing notion in the selected fairy tales appears as a sub-motif of type L (the reversal of fortune). Five relevant sub-motifs under this type L are victorious youngest child, unpromising hero (heroine), modesty brings rewards, triumph of the weak and pride brought low (Thompson, 1955 : 5-25). The youngest child as the protagonist is generally presented as either the foolish, the unpromising, or the victim at first. Later, she/he becomes a heroine or a hero.

Of the selected fifty-five tales, forty-eight of the tales have the youngest children protagonists who reflect this sub-motif. The few exceptions are “Cinderella”, “One Eye, Two Eyes, Three Eyes”, “White and Black” and “The Three Little Men in the Wood”. The youngest-children protagonists are either victimized or appear as simpletons who are ridiculed at the beginning. Through their hidden qualities, usually uncommon wisdom, kindness and sometimes, sheer luck, they become victorious. Repeatedly, the youngest-sibling protagonists are at first underdogs, appearing foolish or weak. However, the fact that they prove to be the wisest or the most efficient suggests that they represent a bigger group of people in society. According to Duffy, the youngest child carries hopes for the underprivileged (1972 : 259). Along the same line of interpretation, Bettelheim points out that “on the simplest and most direct levels, fairy tales in which the hero is the youngest and most inept offer the child the consolation and hope for the future he needs most” (1991 : 105). The fairy

tale sphere of life is like a cycle of a wheel that gives either sources of success or rewards to the unpromising child or downfall to the proud (Thompson, 1946 : 21).

2. The Selfish and Greedy Person will be Finally Punished

The recurrent figures of the selfish and the greedy exist in the sub-motif ‘pride brought low’ of type L. This sub-motif generally provides the punishment for the overweening pride. This theme, of course, corresponds to the moral lesson in every culture. A great number of the elder children, for example, are at first proud of their ability or early triumphs over their youngest sibling, but are finally punished. Under this study, many of the protagonist’s elder siblings and the stepmothers are antagonistic towards the leading figures. The elder children often look down upon and take advantage of their youngest sibling. Likewise, the stepmother either tries to get rid of or kill her stepchild (the protagonist). Twenty of the fifty-five tales illustrate sibling rivalry between the elder and the youngest siblings as well as the stepmother’s cruel actions towards her stepchild. Competitions for honor, achievement or recognition are prevalent conflicts. In their attempt to succeed, the antagonists try to do away with the youngest sibling, very often, with the help of the stepmother. At the end, the antagonists are punished.

3. Appearances are Deceptive

To misjudge a person by his or her appearance is often a theme in fairy tales. This theme relates to the sub-motif type D0-D699: transformation (Thompson, 1955 : 490). With different purposes, both protagonists and antagonists transform themselves. As a rule, the antagonists present their deceptively charming forms to trick and harm the protagonists, whereas the latter often conceals their beautiful selves or hidden abilities in order to test the judgement or the true nature of others.

Six of the forty-eight selected fairy tales of the brothers Grimm vividly show the male characters in concealment caused by certain curses. Their transformed figures are wild animals, such as birds (“The Seven Ravens” and “The Twelve

Brothers”, a stag (“The Enchanted Stag”), a bear (“Snow-White and Red-Rose”), a frog (“The Frog Prince”) and a monster (“The Lion’s Castle”). The female protagonists mostly, the “competent” ones of these fairy tales, can break the spell and help all the male victims to turn into their former selves. What is the message implied here? Scholars’ interpretations will be elaborated in the next section, characterization.

While the above male characters are under spell, some heroes intentionally disguise themselves in order to find the perceptive ladies, The male protagonists of “Sang Thong” and “The Man in the Bear’s Skin”, utilize the mysterious and ugly identities for this purpose.

The two following motifs--numbers and resurrection are recurrent elements relevant to the topic of this study. Certain numbers of siblings and those of the repetitive tasks are prevalent as sub-motifs while resurrection is associated with ‘reincarnation’ of the type E (the dead).

4 Numbers

It is noteworthy that the numbers of the siblings in both Thai and the Grimms’ fairy tales strictly fall into the archetypal numbers of two, three, four, seven and twelve. In fact, mythological studies point out that these are special numbers representing “psychological relationships” with “various meanings and magical properties” (Burrows *et al*, 1973 : 459). Attempts have been made to explain these meanings. For example, two may represent opposition or dualism; the magic three is said to represent the holy unity or the trinity; four and seven are associated with the life cycle (Guerin, 1999 : 163), “universal order” and “the whole” (Achen, 1978 : 224-228), while twelve may represent perfection as well, since it comes from the magic three (associated with the male principle), multiplied by four (associated with the female principle), the number of the life cycle.

In the selected tales, the most frequent numbers of the siblings are two (nineteen of the Grimms' tales and two Thai tales) and three (seven of the brothers Grimm’s fairy tales but no Thai tale). In the Thai tales, we can find both the two supportive siblings (Holwichai and Khawee”) and the two rivaling, opposing siblings

(“Pla Boo Thong”). In the Grimms’ tales, however, the two supportive siblings are found less (four tales) than the two rivaling siblings, which are more frequent (nine of the Grimms’ tales). The group of three siblings cannot be found in the selected Thai tales, but they are very common in the Grimms’ fairy tales (thirteen tales). These groups of three are all competitive ones with the youngest as the winner in almost every case.

Among the tales in this study, only one Thai tale (“Jampa Si Ton”) and one of the Grimms’ tale (“The Four Clever Brothers”) display the unity of the groups of four siblings who join to complete their tasks. The groups of seven siblings are well-known in Thai tales as they occur in the famous tales, “Sang Thong”, “Manohra” and “Sang Silp Chai”. Such groups are less common in the Grimms’ tales. In “Seven Ravens”, the group of seven brothers are freed from the curse by their only sister, the eighth and youngest sibling while in “Six Swans”, the group of six brothers were similarly rescued by their only sister, the seventh sibling. In fact, these two tales are remarkably similar in the major motifs: the transformation of the brothers into fowls to be rescued by their younger sister. As for the groups of twelve, only one Thai tale, “Nang Sib Song” has this archetypal number, while a few such groups appear in the brothers Grimm’s tales: “The Twelve Brothers”, “The Dancing Shoes” and “The Sparrow and His Young Ones”.

The fact that certain numbers of siblings represent certain fixed patterns with the youngest (who is named in the Thai tales such as, Sang Silp Chai, Manohra, or Rotchana) versus the collective group of the unnamed older siblings, shows that the group functions as a unit with no individuality. When there are more than two siblings, the elder sibling(s) behave as a group, either as the supporter(s) of the protagonist or the antagonist who, in that case, is the oldest sibling. Probably, the number of siblings are not really essential to the plot; their significance lies in giving prominence to the protagonist, being themselves either the lesser ones or the undesirable opposite.

5. Resurrection

Resurrection is an act of rising from death (Leeming, 1997 : 392). The most well-known resurrection is that of Jesus rising from death and ascending heaven. This motif is close to transformation; the only different aspect is death: transformation has nothing to do with death, whereas resurrection always comes after death.

Under this present duty, three Thai tales—“Jampa Si Ton”, “Pla Boo Thong” and “Holwichai and Khawee” display the resurrection motif. Only two of the selected of the Grimms’ fairy tales—“The God Father’s Death and “The King of the Golden Mountain” depict this motif. In the Thai tales, the protagonists are killed and are given back new lives as rewards for their previous virtues. Such resurrection probably reflects religious concepts. For the Buddhist, resurrection relates to the concept of *Karma* and the belief that everyone has to move in the cycle of birth and death until he/she can transcend *Karma* and achieve *Nirvana*. For Christians, of course, resurrection relates to the concept of the new better life, revival in the cycle of life and death, in addition to the divine resurrection of Christ.

Characterization

Belonging to one of the oldest types of short narratives, fairy tales have been examined through several perspectives. Although fairy tale characters seem simple and formulaic, after a careful look, a few intriguing questions arise. First, when the protagonist is not the only child of the family, why does she/he seem the least promising? Second, in contrast to the traditional stereotype of passive and helpless women who stay home, why do the Grimms’ female protagonists heroically play the savior’s role of their older brothers’ rescuers? And third, why do the stepmothers in the tales have the outstanding villainous role as the number-one antagonist, outdoing the older siblings, or sometimes instigating the older siblings’ wicked plots, while the real mothers or fathers seem obscure or absent altogether? Discussion on the above questions will be attempted in this section, based primarily on the psychological, mythological and sociological approaches of literary study.

1. The Youngest Child as the Protagonist

The characters of fairy tales are generally “flat”, that is, “they have limited range of characteristics and do not change in the course of the story” (Norton, 1987 : 209). Typically, the youngest child is modest, kind, courageous, patient, as well as hard-working, while the older siblings, usually led by the oldest, are envious, greedy, and selfish. Being obviously standard character types, they lack real-life complexity. They hardly correspond to the psychological studies of siblings’ characteristic traits which have been theorized since the 1920’s. Neo-Freudian psychologist Alfred Adler (1870-1937), for example, alleged that “last-borns are often spoiled and lazy”, having no younger siblings to challenge them (Cowley, 1996 : 54). In his recent birth-order research, the science historian Frank Sulloway studied biographical data of 6,566 public figures in science and politics over the past five centuries and concluded that first-borns are aggressive defenders of the status quo, dominant, jealous status-conscious and achievement-oriented, among other things; the later-borns are sociable, agreeable, open to novelty and innovation, while the last-borns have a strong tendency towards change, or revolution (Cowley, 1996 : 52-57). Although Sulloway pointed out the first-born’s tendency towards jealousy and the later-borns’ inclination towards innovation, this study has nothing to do with the all-bad or all-good traits of the first-borns or the last-borns. As a result, the portrayal of the youngest child as the virtuous protagonist has other bases than literal psychological reality.

Traditionally, the polarization between the oldest child and the youngest child, in effect, corresponds to the common practice of inheritance and succession where either primogeniture (eldest son as sole heir) or ultimogeniture (youngest son inheriting alone) was the rule in different parts of the world, for example, in medieval England (“Kinship”, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1981 : 484). Leach suggests that in Southeast Asia the rule of succession by ultimogeniture can cause jealousy and sibling conflicts between older and youngest brothers. This is the case when the youngest son is “the residual heir” and “the older brothers stay at home according to the post-marital residence rule” (1964 : 167, quoted in Siraporn Nathalang, ed., 2000 : 3).

Such a situation, clearly, can lead to the depiction of the youngest son as the protagonist and the older ones as the jealous antagonists.

However, in fact, ultimogeniture is less well-known in practice than primogeniture as witnessed in the European royal succession or the Chinese inheritance. The victorious youngest child in many cases, therefore, is the wishful dream of the youngest child. Interestingly, it was also noted that Charles Perrault, the seventeenth century French collector of fairy tales which later became one of the Grimms' sources, was himself the youngest son (Messière, 1981 : 8). The fact that the youngest child is almost always the winner at last generally leads the reader to the conclusion that the fairy-tales youngest sibling represents the lowly, the underdog, the weak as a whole, and that the protagonist's final triumph signals the high hopes of this disadvantaged class. This is why Thompson's type L motif "Reversal of Fortune" includes, "Unpromising Hero (Heroine)", "Modesty Brings Reward", "Triumph of the Weak", and "Pride Brought Low", besides "Victorious Youngest Child" (Thompson, 1955). In describing fairy tales as the means to help children cope with their feeling of smallness and helplessness, the psychologist Bruno Bettelheim (1991 : 239) extends and elaborates the same point as follows.

Whatever our position within the family, at certain times in our lives we are beset by sibling rivalry in some form or other. Even an only child feels that other children have some great advantages over him, and this makes him intensely jealous... "Cinderella" is a fairy tale which makes nearly as strong appeal to boys as to girls, since children of both sexes suffer equally from sibling rivalry, and have the same desire to be rescued from their lowly position and surpass those who seem superior to them.

Following this line of interpretation a step further and we will see that, being the traditionally second or weaker sex in real life, the fairy-tale youngest sister has to be the most competent sibling who helps her older brother(s) to break the spell in the magic world.

2. The Heroic Youngest Sister

Although numerous tales in this study have male protagonists (four of the seven Thai tales and twenty-eight of forty-eight in the Grimms' tales), when a brother or a group of brothers and a sister appear in the same tales (only in the brothers Grimm's fairy tales, nine altogether), curiously, it is the sister (always, the only sister and the youngest child) who is the protagonist, the heroic rescuer of her brother(s). As noted in Chapter Three, the sibling relationships in these tales are harmonious. While the phenomenon can be explained through the above extension of the folklorist pattern "Triumph of the Weak", other explanations, both sociological and psychological approaches have been proposed.

In his chapter on "Exploring Historical Paths" (Zipes, 1989 : 43-61), Zipes discussed the origins and developments of the four in the Grimms' tales: "The Twelve Brothers", "Brother and Sister" ("The Enchanted Stag" in this study), "The Seven Ravens", and "The Six Swans", all with the youngest female sibling as the protagonist. Zipes pointed out flaws in a study by Peter Taylor and Hermaan Rebel who related the tales to "ultimogeniture and the attitude of sisters towards brothers who were drafted into the army" in Hesia at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, and "the importance of the female peasant storytellers" (48). Zipes argues that the Grimms' source was not the peasantry, but the bourgeois in origin, and was later modified to fit the Grimms' moral principle of the nineteenth middle-class ethic (48-49). Besides, according to Zipes, such "tale types can be found in many different countries and are hundreds of years old.... They show signs of matrilineal initiation and marital rites that may be pre-Christian" (50).

Matriliney seems very obvious, at least in "The Twelve Brothers" and "The Seven Ravens". In the first tale, the king and queen "who had twelve sons, all bright and intelligent lads...were not quite happy", and the king told his wife that "if a daughter should be born, all the sons would die and their sister alone inherits his kingdom and riches" (Owen, 1981 : 36). Similarly, in the second tale, the parents with seven sons and no daughter were "very unhappy"; when they finally had a daughter, they were overjoyed, and sent the sons to bring some water for the youngest

child's baptism. When they did not return with the water, the father cursed them and they turned into ravens. In both stories, the youngest female siblings are the cause of their brothers' misery. The youngest female children of these two tales as well as, the others, however, dedicate themselves to rescue them or restore their former forms and happiness. According to Zipes who compares the Grimms' version to the earlier, the Grimm brothers modified the tales, emphasizing "two factors: the dedication of the sister and brothers to one another, and the establishment of a common, orderly household in the forest, where they live peacefully together" (Zipes, 1989 : 40). Zipes concludes his Chapter on "Dreams of a Better Life" from which the above quotation comes, that the Grimms' reworked sibling tales present the idea "based on a sense of loss and what they sense should be retained if their own family and Germany were to be united" (Zipes, 1989 : 42).

Zipes seems to ascribe the sibling relationship's cooperation and the brothers Grimm's yearning for the peaceful home to the latter's dream resulted by their loss of their father, their separation from home and need to help each other to reconstruct a perfect home in real life. Such an explanation, while suggesting their need for the feminine element of home, does not strongly clarify the somewhat untraditional outgoing heroism on the part of the sister. A clearer explanation of these heroic younger sisters should be built upon Jung's archetype of anima, the feminine component of the soul-image (Burrows, 1973 : 449) which can be projected in the character of the heroine. This archetype is defined as "a man's life force...the living thing in man, that which lives of itself and causes life" (Guerin, 1999 : 181). Assuming this life-giving feminine figure, the heroic sister acts as the older brothers' mother surrogate, the nourisher, or life-savior.

As a whole, however, we can only say that the heroic female protagonists are relatively few, in only nine of the Grimms' tales and none of the Thai tales (unless we consider "Manohra" as one). This points to the general conclusion that fairy tales reflected patriarchal bourgeois society, in which women were supposed to be domesticated. Indeed, even in the nine of the brothers Grimm's tales, the youngest sister of "The Twelve Brothers", for instance, ventures to the forest to join her brothers and helps them keep the house clean, and cooks, that is, doing all the

housework. Later in the story, to break the spell, she has to remain dumb for seven years (the ladylike virtue of keeping quiet), and sits knitting on a tree (once again, doing the woman's work). Besides the above causes, the scarcity of tales with heroic female protagonists is said to relate to the preference of the male tale collectors or editors who tended to suppress active heroines (Attebery, 1992 : 293).

3. The Wicked Stepmothers and the Obscure Parents

While the heroic female protagonists are much fewer than their male counterparts, female antagonists abound in both of the Grimms' and Thai tales, especially, in the forms of stepmothers and the wicked witches, the latter are sometimes also the stepmothers, for example in "The Six Swans". In some stories, there are both a witch and a stepmother, for example, in "Hansel and Grethel". In Thai tales, the wicked mother figures are commonly known as the co-wives of the protagonist's fathers. These evil women are sometimes ogresses as well. Mythologically, such a universal female antagonist is called by Jung the archetype of the "terrible mother".

But why are the good nourishing mothers rare in fairy tales? And what kind of fathers appear in fairy tales? Why aren't they protectors of their threatened children? Why aren't there wicked stepfathers or wizards? These questions have fascinated scholars of many fields, especially sociologists, psychologists, and feminist critics. The explanations for the above points seem to evolve around the social conditions of the past, the situations involved in the tale narration, the narrators and their audience, as well as the tale collectors' values and preferences.

First of all, why wicked stepmothers and not wicked stepfathers? It seems that there were more stepmothers than stepfathers in the societies in this question. In a polygamous society like that in Thailand, until less than a hundred years ago, it was not difficult for a child to find more than one stepmother in the same household. Conflicts among the co-wives which lead to rivalry among stepchildren are mirrored in at least four of the seven Thai tales. In Europe, the prevalence of stepmothers come from the fact that "death at childbirth was the most common cause of female

mortality” and that “80 percent of widowers remarried within the year” while “widows remarried less frequently” (Warner, 1991 : 281-2). Of course, it is unlikely that a stepmother would love her stepchild as much as her own, not to mention conflicts of interests that can easily arise. From the young protagonist’s point of view, a stepmother is definitely the powerful and menacing interloper, the wicked witch at home.

But the wicked stepmothers in these tales are not necessarily real stepmothers: they may be the real mothers who are cruel in the children’s views. In discussing the widespread child abuse by their real parents in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Zipes observes from his study of the Grimms’ adaptation of their sources that the brothers “consciously changed the mother figures in the tales they collected into stepmothers” (Zipes, 1989 : 121), as well as concealed a father’s child abuse and incest (*Ibid* : 124). A similar interpretation has been advanced by the psychologist Bettelheim (1991 : 67), and the following is remarked by the critic Duffy (1972 : 258).

Stepmothers in fairy stories are often real mothers disguised. The dislike aspect of the mother is displaced onto the stepmother, allowing her to be hated and so removing the guilt of hating one’s own mother.

In fact, there are traces of cruel real mothers (that probably the Grimms failed to hide) such as the biased mother in “One Eye, Two Eyes, Three Eyes” who cruelly maltreats the protagonist, her own daughter.

Commenting on the inadequate portrayals of women’s coming of age in “fantasy” or children literature, Attebury remarks that besides indoctrinating women’s passivity, fairy tales also offer the “image of older woman as threatening rival rather than as mentor” who guides the young female protagonist to maturity (1992 : 297). Attebury attributes the image of the cruel and hypocritical stepmother to “the fact that mother and daughter must compete for favors from a dominant male” and at the same time, the daughter feels that the mother is “one of the force pushing [her] in to the constricting mould of female adulthood.”

Another view on the general absence of the good mother and the dominant negative role of the wicked stepmother is proposed by Warner who relates these phenomena to the old female narrators of the tales, “the old wives”, who had an insecure position in the audience’s family (1991 : 278-287). Warner points out that since the ancient Greece times, tales of fantasy have been said to belong to the “the old wives”. The imagined “Mother Hubbard” or “Mother Goose” invented by the Victorian tale collectors testifies the central role of the grandmotherly figure traditionally occupying the narrator’s role in the oral genre of fairy tales. “Such an old woman storyteller”, according to Warner, “may be a grandmother, or a mother-in-law” who “had good reason to feel intense rivalry with her son’s wife, when she often had to strive to maintain her position” in the household. Consequently, the old woman replaced the child audience’s natural mother “with a monster” and presented herself “as a good old fairy working wonder on their behalf” (*Ibid* : 282). The following is how Warner furthers her compelling argument (*Ibid* : 287).

If you accept Mother Goose tales as the testimony of women as old wives tales, you can hear vibrating in them the tension, the insecurity, jealousy and rage of both mothers-in-law against their daughters-in-law and vice versa, as well as the vulnerability of children from different marriages ... But another set of conditions set women against women, and the misogyny of fairy tales reflects them from a woman’s point of view : rivalry for the prince’s love.

Warner finally concludes that such stories flatter the male heroes whose position is that of the saviors or the providers and this is why the tales have been successful with audiences of both sexes and all ages (*Ibid* : 287).

Besides the above group of the window grandmothers and mothers-in-law, Warner also points out that the old female narrators of the tales also includes spinsters, old nurses, and servants of the household, all the insecure dependants. Because of their vulnerable position, the “ragged old women” in the tales turn out to be powerful fairies in disguise rewarding kind and polite children who give them help, punishing the selfish and greedy wicked mothers or their unkind and proud children. Warner believes this proposed social situation can explain “a picture of strain across

three generations, in which the old struggle to survive and plead for the mercy of the young” (*Ibid* : 284).

If we accept the above picture of the tale narration in the past as the acts of the old vulnerable women for the young audience, or the case of “women against women” as Warner states, then this explains, at least, partially why the father or older males have neutral or relatively positive roles. Their brutal deeds were scrapped out of the literary fairy tales edited by the male collectors like the Grimms, or happily said to be urged by the stepmother, for example, the child abandonment in “Hansel and Grethel” which is shown to be the wicked stepmother’s plot. According to the tale, this not-really-unkind father “had not had a moment’s peace since the children had been left alone in the forest” (Owen, 1981 : 58). He was overjoyed to see his children back at the end and now “they had nothing to fear, for their wicked stepmother was dead” (*Ibid* : 50). The same phenomena can be found in Thai tales. While “not really wicked”, the father seems weak, ineffectual, credulous and susceptible to his co-wives’ bad influence or wicked schemes. In five of the selected Thai tales, the protagonist’s fathers, almost all kings, behave cruelly towards his wives and their children when they are “prompted by the wicked wives”. We can safely say that even though they are excluded from the wicked role of cruel stepfathers by the patriarchal society, they are not really praiseworthy.

The psychological explanation for the obscure fathers in fairy tales has not been quite satisfactory. Bettelheim seems to suggest that because of his oedipal complex, the male protagonist tries to obliterate his father or probably even turn him into an evil dragon in order to emerge with the starring role (Bettelheim, 1991 : 111). Or do the fairy tale fathers disappear because the Grimms’ themselves lost their father in their childhood? This interpretation would not explain why the obscure fathers also exist in non-Grimm tales as well. In fact, even towards the end of the twentieth century, the critic Valpy complained in his article entitled “Fathers Fare Poorly in Children Books” (1989 : 301-2) that he could hardly find any children books with fathers as the main actors. Most likely, this is not their realm.

Certain ambiguity regarding grandparental figures in fairy tales, in fact, can be found in the magical helpers. In the Thai tales, most of these helpers are hermits

(found in at least five of the seven tales) and the well-known God Indra, both acting as the kind and powerful grandfather figures. Female helpful ogresses surprisingly, also appear in Thai tales: a transformed mother figure who helps the young Phra Sang, and the ogress's the young beautiful daughter who helps Phra Rot during his mission for his mother. Interestingly, both male protagonists heartlessly desert the two kind ogresses after receiving their help on the grounds of their being non-human, that is, treating them only as instruments for their purposes. Heartbroken, the two ogresses die. Such ingratitude seems to suggest characteristic aspects of the Thai patriarchal culture.

Magical helpers in the Grimms' tales do not usually appear as grandfathers but rather as fairies or godmothers or animals. The fact that the older females can be both the number-one antagonists and the protagonist's helpers points to the women's ambivalent position.

From the above analysis it is clear that the flat character types in fairy tales have been shaped by socio-psychological factors and the narrators/the tale editors as well as the intended audience. Because of the long tradition spanning over different layers of cultures, some aspects of these flat characters are perplexing and cannot be all explained.

The selected Thai and the Grimms' fairy tales have many similar literary aspects. Yet, their differences reflect interesting psycho-social characteristics. While the tale structures are roughly similar, the Thai tales are generally more episodic and have a much more extensive initial part which elaborates the conflicts of the protagonist's father's co-wives (a result of Thai polygamous culture which could not exist in the Grimms' tales), and the wondrous appearances of the protagonists at birth. Although not exactly the same, the function patterns which lead to the happy ending of both Thai and the Grimms' tales are alike.

Regarding the themes and motifs, the reversal of fortune is the key concept of the tales in question, with the supporting theme of deceptive appearances of both the protagonists and antagonists. The resurrection motif is more pronounced in the Thai tales, as it relates to the common Buddhist beliefs in *Karma* and reincarnation. Archetypal numbers occur in all the selected tales, with the Thai preference for seven

for the number of siblings and the Grimms' preference for three. However, the numbers, especially those more than two serve only to emphasize the prominence of the protagonist as the outstanding person or to contrast him/her with the unidentified older siblings.

The fairy tale characters are types but have long and complex development. The similar points concerning the characters in the tales of the two cultures are: the youngest child as the protagonist, the stepmother as the main antagonist, and the obscure and ambivalent position of the parent figures. The youngest child seems to represent the unpromising or the lowly and their final victory suggests that the fairy tale may function as consolation for this disadvantaged class of people. The stepmother prevails in the fairyland, possibly, because of the high mortality rate of the mothers at childbirth as well as the Thai practice of polygamy. Her wickedness, however, stems from many reasons: negative mother-child relationship in disguise as well as the rivalry between the mother-in-law (who was the tale-narrator) and the daughter-in-law, as well as patriarchal bias on the part of the tale collector/editor. However, women also appear as the protagonist's helpers in both of the Grimms' and Thai tales, as the fairies or god mothers in the Grimms', and as the kind ogresses (in the disguised form of beautiful women) who are not appreciated by the Thai heroes.

The grandfather figure often functions as the divine savior of the Thai protagonists although the father seems vague, credulous as well as ineffectual in both Thai and the Grimms' tales. In general, the old men do not play active role in the Grimms' tales.

Although the female protagonists are portrayed as passive victims in both Thai and the Grimms' tales, a number of the brothers Grimm's tales represent the female youngest sisters as the saviors of their brother(s) from wicked spells. Some critics consider these exceptional females representatives of the matrilineal practice while psychologists may ascribe them to the feminine archetype of the life-giving element, if not the wish-fulfillment of the second and weaker sex in the patriarchal society.