



Universidad de Oviedo

**Rapunzel vs. Rapunzel:  
From the Fairy Tale to *Tangled***

Trabajo de Fin de Grado en Estudios Ingleses

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## Introduction

Telling fairy tales is one of the most common things humans do; it is a cycle that begins when we are children who are told *once upon a time* stories by adults, and it ends up when we are adults telling these stories to children. Most of these stories, such as “Cinderella”, “Snow White”, “Rumpelstiltskin” or “Rapunzel” belong to the Brothers Grimm’s collection *Kinder-und Hausmärchen* (which can be translated as *Children and Household Tales*). As it has been discussed by scholars such as Jack Zipes, Jessica Tiffin, Linda Dégh, Madhu Malik and Roger Sale among others, fantasy and specially fairy tales transmit and support ideals and role models and act as guides of what is desirable in society. My aim is to focus on one of those stories, “Rapunzel”, and analyze how the cultural meaning it transmits has changed through time.

In order to analyze the story, I will use two sources and divide my work according to them. The first source will be Grimms’ version of “Rapunzel”; in this chapter I will explain the process of compilation used by the Brothers Grimm and how this process was affected by the context in which the Brothers Grimm lived. This chapter will end with the final version of “Rapunzel”. The second source will be the movie *Tangled* (2010), which was produced by Walt Disney Animation Studios. In this second chapter I will briefly describe the beginning of the Studios and how the schema of its fairy-tale cartoon movie evolved depending on the context. This chapter will end with a summary of the movie *Tangled*. The third chapter will focus on the comparison of both versions, as well as on the analysis of the socio-cultural ideas transmitted in both tales. Finally, I will conclude with a summary of the results of my analysis.

# Chapter I

## Grimms –Tailoring the Tale

Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm first began to collect their tales between 1807 and 1812 (Zipes, 2002:26), a period characterized by German Romanticism and the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815). The Grimms' initial interest in folk stories is to be found in two elements: nature and the pure essence of the German folk. Nature was very important for the Brothers Grimm, for they were Romantic writers and they thought that folklore "had been produced, as it were, by nature itself working through human instruments" (David and David: 187), therefore they thought that folk tales were pure in nature. From a Romantic perspective, folk stories were a way of interacting with nature, for both correspond to the same realm, as it can be seen in the following quote:

There are moments in our lives when we respond to nature – in plants, minerals, animals, and landscapes, as well as in human nature, in children and in the customs of country folk and primitive peoples – with a kind of love and affectionate regard, not because it pleases our senses, nor because it satisfies our reason or our taste... but simply because it is nature. (Schiller, in David and David: 186-187)

The Brothers Grimm also believed that the true meaning and essence of the German national soul was to be found in folk stories (David and David: 187, Zipes 2002: 25). As Linda Dégh points out:

According to the brothers, language, religion, and poetry as well as heroic virtues manifested in the ancestral epic, would make the Germans conscious of their national values and effective in the struggle for national survival and independence in their age of political turbulence. (85)

As a consequence of the subsequent success of the compilation of tales by the Brothers Grimm and the conservation of its connection with German nationalism, the compilation was used as an icon for German nationalism from the 1920s until the 1940s (Zipes 2002: 48); during the era of Nazi Germany, every German was advised to have a copy in their house and every school was advised to use it as a textbook (Dégh 94-95). What was not taken into account by the German nationalists was that the stories comprising Grimms' collection were, for the most part, non-German in origin. As Zipes (2002, 28-29) points out, in order to compile these stories, the Grimms invited storytellers or visited them. Most of these storytellers were educated female members of the middle class or aristocracy, who recounted folk stories they were told by their servants, nursemaids or stories they had read, and after a few hearings the Grimms would write the stories down. A great number of these storytellers were from Hessia and, within this group, a vast majority of the stories were told by members of the Hassenplugs family, who were descendants of Huguenots (members of the Protestant Reformed Church of France) and who spoke French at home (Dégh 86-87, Zipes 2002: 28-29). Consequently, most of the stories compiled by the Grimms had a French origin. But the Grimms did not always use storytellers as their source; they also used books, journals and letters (Zipes 2002: 29). In the case of "Rapunzel", the Grimms used a text written by Friedrich Schulz, and although the authorship of the tale was claimed by the French writer Charlotte-Rose de Caumont de La Force, there is an even earlier version by Giambattista Basile entitled "Petrosinella" or "Parsley" (Tatar 32-44).

Despite the current use of the Grimms' collection and what is commonly thought, their stories were not conceived, at least at first, for children. Instead, the Grimms' aim was to compile folk tales that would be addressed to a scholar and adult audience (Zipes 2002: 25). The shift towards a children audience can be appreciated in the successive rewritings of the stories. As an example, we can compare three different versions of an extract from "Rapunzel":

### "Rapunzel" –1812 Edition

At first Rapunzel was afraid, but soon she took such a liking to the young king that she made an agreement with him: he was to come every day and be pulled up. Thus they lived merrily and joyfully for a certain time, and the fairy did not discover anything until one day when Rapunzel began talking

to her and said, “Tell me, Mother Gothel, why do you think my clothes have become too tight for me and no longer fit?” (Killy, in Zipes 2002: 33)

### “Rapunzel” –1819 Edition

At first Rapunzel was frightened, but soon she came to like the young king so much that she agreed to let him visit every day and to pull him up. The two lived joyfully for a time and loved each other dearly, like man and wife. The enchantress did not catch on at all until Rapunzel told her one day: “Tell me, Godmother, why is it that you are much harder to pull up than the young prince?” (Tatar: 18)

### “Rapunzel” –1857 Edition

When he entered the tower, Rapunzel was terribly afraid, for she had never laid eyes on a man before. However, the prince began to talk to her in a friendly way and told her that her song touched his heart so deeply that he had not been able to rest until he had seen her. Rapunzel then lost her fear, and when he asked her whether she would have him for husband, and she saw that he was young and handsome, she thought, he’ll certainly love me better than old Mother Gothel. So she said yes and placed her hand in his.

“I want to go with you very much,” she said, “but I don’t know how I can get down. Every time you come, you must bring a skein of silk with you, and I’ll weave it into a ladder. When it’s finished, then I’ll climb down, and you can take me away on your horse”.

They agreed that until then he would come to her every evening, for the old woman came during the day. Meanwhile, the sorceress did not notice anything, until one day Rapunzel blurted out, “Mother Gothel, how is it that you’re much heavier than the prince? When I pull him up, he’s here in a second.” (Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, in Zipes 2002: 33-34)

As a consequence of rewriting the story, any reference to sexual intercourse between Rapunzel and the prince was eliminated and instead of being the tightness of the dress the cause of the lovers’ revelation, it is Rapunzel herself who tells Gothel. One reason for this rewriting can be that the Grimms were devout Christians (Zipes 2002: 55) and therefore they could consider the explicitness of the act as something immoral. It is also worth remarking that they decided to include a petition of marriage, maybe as a way of making the scene less “sinful”. Another reason for these changes could be found in the criticism the Grimms received after the first edition of their collection, since some scholars considered that the stories were targeted to children and the language used and scenes recreated were not apt for them. One example of this is Friedrich Rühs, who said about “Rapunzel”: “What proper mother or nanny could tell the fairy tale about Rapunzel to an innocent daughter without blushing?” (Tatar: 18).

To understand what elements are appropriate may be difficult, for morals and values change from one country to another and they also depend on historical time that country is going through. In order to appreciate in more depth the morals transmitted in “Rapunzel” at the time it was compiled, it may be useful to compare how the discovery of the secret relationship takes place in both Giambattista Basile’s “Petrosinella” (1634) and Mlle de La Force’s “Persinette” (1698). In the first story we are told that Petrosinella and the prince have secret meetings where the prince “feasts with that sprig of parsley at the banquet of love.” (Basile, in Tatar 45). Then, we are shown that the ogress is told to pay attention,

for Petrosinella and a youth were in love with one another and she heard, from the buzzing of that big fly as he went in and out, that things had gone pretty much far; also she thought those two wouldn’t be waiting till May before they were flitting, carrying of with them all there was in the house. (Basile, in Tatar: 45)

In “Persinette” the discovery happens as follows:

The prince was happy, Persinette also grew to love him; they saw each other every day, and soon thereafter she found that she was pregnant. That unfamiliar state worried her seriously the prince know of it and did not want to explain what had happened for fear of making her unhappy. (De La Force, in Tatar: 45)

In these stories we are explicitly told about what Petrosinella and Persinette do with the prince and there is no sign of shame in it, although there are subtle differences among them: in the first story the love affair is treated even more explicitly than in the second case and it seems that both Petrosinella and the prince enjoy the act in the same degree. In the second story, even though the love affair happens and is told, Persinette remains innocent due to her ignorance of what had happened (Tatar: 45).

In origin, the Grimms’ stories had crude language and violence and could be considered even as gruesome stories, features that the Grimms thought of as natural in the folk tradition. It was in the preface to the second edition when the Grimms stated that the tales they had compiled were useful for children, since they wanted the collection to act as manual of manners (Tatar: 19, Zipes 2002: 47). As we have previously seen, some of the features that were considered non suitable for children were changed or eliminated during the transition of the collection from a scholar audience to a children audience. We must bear in mind that, even though they pretended to soften the degree of toughness of the stories, some of them still kept “dark” lines, for

the Grimms thought it was necessary in order to learn something (Zipes 2002: 47). From the Grimms' point of view, they were telling stories full with natural morality and "what was natural, could not be harmful" (David and David: 194). With the successive rewritings length was also changed; as we can appreciate in the extracts from "Rapunzel", more narrative was added to the stories, maybe in order to catch the attention of children for longer time. In order to make the collection more appealing for children, as from the 1819 edition, scholar notes were also eliminated and published in a different book (Zipes2002: 47), and in 1823 the Grimms' published a selection of 50 tales with illustrations (Dégh: 88).

Despite the changes made in the stories throughout the seven editions of *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, Wilhelm Grimm stated that "We have added nothing of our own, nor have we embellished any incident or feature of the tale, but we have rendered the content just as we received." (Hunt, in David and David: 188). Since the Grimms had different sources for the same tale, they actually selected what they considered the best combination while being faithful to the content of the tale, and, as they were expert scholars at folk tradition, they thought that they were perfectly able to distinguish what real folk was and preserve it (David and David: 190). We can conclude that the Grimms' tales were, eventually, stories aiming to transmit morals and norms to children. As a consequence, it is possible to determine what those morals and norms were and what kind of society they wanted to support and protect.

The final version of "Rapunzel" by the Brothers Grimm is as follows:

There once lived a man and his wife, who had long wished for a child, but in vain. Now there was at the back of their house a little window which overlooked a beautiful garden full of the finest vegetables and flowers; but there was a high wall all round it, and no one ventured into it, for it belonged to a witch of great might, and of whom all the world was afraid.

One day that the wife was standing at the window, and looking into the garden, she saw a bed filled with the finest rampion; and it looked so fresh and green that she began to wish for some; and at length she longed for it greatly. This went on for days, and as she knew she could not get the rampion, she pined away, and grew pale and miserable. Then the man was uneasy, and asked, "What is the matter, dear wife?"

"Oh," answered she, "I shall die unless I can have some of that rampion to eat that grows in the garden at the back of our house." The man, who loved her very much, thought to himself, "Rather than lose my wife I will get some rampion, cost what it will." So in the twilight he climbed over the wall into the witch's garden, plucked hastily a handful of rampion and brought it to his wife. She made a salad of it at once, and ate of it to her heart's content. But she liked it so much, and it tasted so good, that the next day she longed for it thrice as much as she had done before; if she was to

have any rest the man must climb over the wall once more. So he went in the twilight again; and as he was climbing back, he saw, all at once, the witch standing before him, and was terribly frightened, as she cried, with angry eyes, "How dare you climb over into my garden like a thief, and steal my rampion! it shall be the worse for you!"

"Oh," answered he, "be merciful rather than just, I have only done it through necessity; for my wife saw your rampion out of the window, and became possessed with so great a longing that she would have died if she could not have had some to eat." Then the witch said, "If it is all as you say you may have as much rampion as you like, on one condition - the child that will come into the world must be given to me. It shall go well with the child, and I will care for it like a mother."

In his distress of mind the man promised everything; and when the time came when the child was born the witch appeared, and, giving the child the name of Rapunzel (which is the same as rampion), she took it away with her.

Rapunzel was the most beautiful child in the world. When she was twelve years old the witch shut her up in a tower in the midst of a wood, and it had neither steps nor door, only a small window above. When the witch wished to be let in, she would stand below and would cry, "Rapunzel, Rapunzel! Let down your hair!"

Rapunzel had beautiful long hair that shone like gold. When she heard the voice of the witch she would undo the fastening of the upper window, unbind the plaits of her hair, and let it down twenty ells below, and the witch would climb up by it.

After they had lived thus a few years it happened that as the King's son was riding through the wood, he came to the tower; and as he drew near he heard a voice singing so sweetly that he stood still and listened. It was Rapunzel in her loneliness trying to pass away the time with sweet songs. The King's son wished to go in to her, and sought to find a door in the tower, but there was none. So he rode home, but the song had entered into his heart, and every day he went into the wood and listened to it. Once, as he was standing there under a tree, he saw the witch come up, and listened while she called out, "O Rapunzel, Rapunzel! Let down your hair."

Then he saw how Rapunzel let down her long tresses, and how the witch climbed up by it and went in to her, and he said to himself, "Since that is the ladder I will climb it, and seek my fortune." And the next day, as soon as it began to grow dusk, he went to the tower and cried, "O Rapunzel, Rapunzel! Let down your hair."

And she let down her hair, and the King's son climbed up by it. Rapunzel was greatly terrified when she saw that a man had come in to her, for she had never seen one before; but the King's son began speaking so kindly to her, and told how her singing had entered into his heart, so that he could have no peace until he had seen her herself. Then Rapunzel forgot her terror, and when he asked her to take him for her husband, and she saw that he was young and beautiful, she thought to herself, "I certainly like him much better than old mother Gothel," and she put her hand into his hand.

She said: "I would willingly go with thee, but I do not know how I shall get out. When thou comest, bring each time a silken rope, and I will make a ladder, and when it is quite ready I will get down by it out of the tower, and

thou shalt take me away on thy horse." They agreed that he should come to her every evening, as the old woman came in the day-time.

So the witch knew nothing of all this until once Rapunzel said to her unwittingly, "Mother Gothel, how is it that you climb up here so slowly, and the King's son is with me in a moment?"

"O wicked child," cried the witch, "what is this I hear! I thought I had hidden thee from all the world, and thou hast betrayed me!" In her anger she seized Rapunzel by her beautiful hair, struck her several times with her left hand, and then grasping a pair of shears in her right - snip, snap - the beautiful locks lay on the ground. And she was so hard-hearted that she took Rapunzel and put her in a waste and desert place, where she lived in great woe and misery.

The same day on which she took Rapunzel away she went back to the tower in the evening and made fast the severed locks of hair to the window-hasp, and the King's son came and cried, "Rapunzel, Rapunzel! Let down your hair."

Then she let the hair down, and the King's son climbed up, but instead of his dearest Rapunzel he found the witch looking at him with wicked glittering eyes.

"Aha!" cried she, mocking him, "you came for your darling, but the sweet bird sits no longer in the nest, and sings no more; the cat has got her, and will scratch out your eyes as well! Rapunzel is lost to you; you will see her no more." The King's son was beside himself with grief, and in his agony he sprang from the tower: he escaped with life, but the thorns on which he fell put out his eyes. Then he wandered blind through the wood, eating nothing but roots and berries, and doing nothing but lament and weep for the loss of his dearest wife.

So he wandered several years in misery until at last he came to the desert place where Rapunzel lived with her twin-children that she had borne, a boy and a girl. At first he heard a voice that he thought he knew, and when he reached the place from which it seemed to come Rapunzel knew him, and fell on his neck and wept. And when her tears touched his eyes they became clear again, and he could see with them as well as ever. Then he took her to his kingdom, where he was received with great joy, and there they lived long and happily.

## **Chapter II**

### **Disney- Americanizing the tailored tail**

Walt Disney began his empire in the 1920s, becoming, eventually, one of the most influential men of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Watts: 84, Zipes 2011: 22). For the most part, Disney's success relies on the conversion of fairy tales into fairy-tale cartoon movies, most of which were adapted from the collection by the Brothers Grimm. It is also important to notice how cartoons stand in American society: by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was very common to see comic illustrations in newspapers or magazines. By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and thanks to technological development, these images were set in motion and the cartoons we know nowadays were created. As a consequence of the widespread use and ownership of televisions and the growing tendency of watching movies, cartoons had their place guaranteed. Eventually, as soon as the early 30's, Disney was the dominant producer of fairy-tale cartoons (Zipes 2011: 27) and it was in that decade when the first fairy-tale cartoon movie by Walt Disney Animation Studios was released. It is easy to think that the success of this company is linked to America's hegemony during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, for it is easier to transmit ideas and to be known when you are part of the group in power, as in this case. Consequently, Disney fairy-tale cartoon movies were catapulted into mass culture consumption products (Zipes 2002: 59-60).

One of the differences between Disney and the Brothers Grimm is that they lived in different eras and were influenced by different morals. As a consequence, what Disney wanted to transmit was different from what the Grimms wanted to transmit: the Grimm's collection of fairy tales was considered a manual for children; the fairy tales described some crude and serious problems and, eventually, children would learn

lessons from them. However, it is true that not all stories in the collection by the Brothers Grimm follow this pattern but at least we agree that there was some variety. The message transmitted by Disney is different since its only aim is to entertain children and it tends to follow one single structure for all movies, as Zipes (2011: 24) comments about *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Beauty and the Beast* (although it is possible to extend this schema to all Disney movies):

Each film [*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, and *Beauty and the Beast*] is framed by a prince on a quest for the proper mate, essentially a young virginal woman, a trophy princess, who will serve his vested interests, and the quest ends with a marriage in a splendid castle, in which the prince and princess will be attended by admiring if not obsequious servants. The manner in which the prince attains his goal depends on the collaboration of the underlings, the dwarfs and enchanted objects, and the ingenuity and valor of this sympathetic prince. Songs are strewed along the plot as flowers to enliven and brighten the action, just as comic gags are used to divert us from the serious nature of the business at hand—ruthless competition for power. They will eventually reside in a palace, a utopian realm, that few people are privileged to inhabit, unless you are one of the chosen servants. The goal is not only a reconciliation of conflict and the defeat of evil, but also acclamation of those who deserve to rule by those who deserve to serve.

We can summarize Disney's plot or schema in the following way: the tale is usually introduced by the image of a book where the story is written, and this is sometimes accompanied by a voice-over. There is usually an evil woman who wants to kill a young princess about whom we only know that she is beautiful. This princess does nothing but wait for her prince to save her. When the princess and the prince meet, they fall in love instantly. Eventually, the prince defeats the evil woman and princess and prince live happily ever after in a castle. There is a possibility of a slight different version in which there is no princess but a normal woman who, thanks to her beauty, is chosen and saved by the prince and they eventually live in the castle.

One of the issues that Disney movies generate is that they transformed fairy tales into a tool to reinforce the spectacle of society; as Zipes (2011: 23) puts it:

They [Disney movies] impose a vision of life, the better life, on viewers that delude audiences into believing that power can and should be entrusted only to those members of elite groups fit to administer society. All the major, animated feature-length Disney fairy-tale films [...] follow conventional principles of technical and aesthetic organization to celebrate stereotypical gender and power relations and to foster a world view of harmony. The

images, words, music and movement lead to a totalizing spectacle that basically glorifies how technology can be used to aestheticize social and political relations according to the dominant mode of production and ruling groups that entertain a public spectatorship through diversion and are entertained themselves by a monologue of self-praise.

What is transmitted in most of Disney movies is male empowerment over female characters; they are a perfect example of a patriarchal society in which a woman is not able to do anything on her own and must wait for the man to arrive in order to start living. They also convey the idea that a happy ending is linked to getting married, having a stereotypical family (man-woman) and being wealthy, since the fairy-tales tend to end with a wedding and the protagonists living in a castle. If you are a woman, what Disney movies tell you is to wait for your prince Charming, and when he arrives, you better get ready to serve him faithfully at home. If you are a man, you have to work hard and go rescue your future bride-servant. And, for both genders, Disney movies create the illusion that the “happily ever after” is perfectly possible for everyone, and it will come when you find (or are found by) your lover.

Recently, Disney’s fairy-tale cartoon movie hegemony has been compromised by imitations and ironic movies by strong competitors like in *Shrek* (2001), *Shrek 2* (2004), *Shrek the Third* (2007), *Shrek Forever After* (2010) and *Happily N’Ever After* (2007), among others. In these movies what has been usually conveyed and represented in the typical Disney movies is subverted, usually by irony or using humorous techniques, creating thus new critical stories about the portrayal of certain characters. In *Shrek*, for example, Lord Farquaad, who is supposed to rescue the princess Fiona, is a vain, unpleasant and arrogant man who makes a deal with Shrek, an ogre, so the latter is the one who rescues the princess; it is the ogre who ends up with the princess. The princess, who is strong enough to defend herself and fight, decides to be an ogre and not a human being, showing that beauty is a matter of perception and physical appearance is not as important as it is typically conveyed; and prince Charming is portrayed as a spoiled, capricious, egoist and narcissist man. This counter-discourse seems to be more suitable for the concerns of our current society, which started thanks to the feminist movement during the 60’s. Therefore, nowadays much more attention is paid to gender and its depictions.

It might be due to these critiques or simply because the Disney Company finally considered that the schema from the 1930’s was obsolete in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, that Disney

movies changed their discourse: *The Princess and the Frog* (2009) portrays a black girl as princess for the first time, in *Tangled* (2010) there is a rewriting of “Rapunzel” with more empowerment for the female protagonist, in *Brave* (2012) we see a girl who is perfectly able to defend herself and, finally, in *Frozen* (2014) a Disney character is specifically told that she cannot marry someone she has just met and the heroine is Anna, a girl who rescues her sister.

*Tangled* begins with a male voice over saying

This is the story of how I died. But don't worry, this is actually a fun story and the truth is it isn't even mine. This is the story of a girl named Rapunzel, and it starts with the sun. Now, once upon a time, a single drop of sunlight fell from the heavens. And from this small drop of sun grew a magic, golden flower. It had the ability to heal the sick and injured.

Right afterwards we are introduced to the "old woman", Gothel. We are described how the prosperous kingdom is ruled by a beloved King and Queen who are about to have a baby but, during the pregnancy, the Queen gets sick. In order to cure her, everyone starts looking for a magical flower, which has been kept in secret for centuries by Gothel. She had been using for years the power of the flower in order to be young forever. By a matter of luck the royal guards find the flower and give it to the queen as an infusion. The princess, Rapunzel, was healthily born with golden hair. As soon as Gothel knows about it, she breaks into Rapunzel's bedroom and discovers that the power of the flower is still there, in Rapunzel's hair, but when the hair is cut, it turns dark and loses its power, so Gothel kidnaps Rapunzel and hides her in a tower, deep in the forest.

Years go by and Rapunzel grows up believing that Gothel is her mother and that everyone outside her tower wants to cut her hair and use its magic. During those years all Rapunzel sees from the tower are some mysterious lights floating every year on her birthday. In the tower, Rapunzel has the company of a chameleon called Pascal. Her only human visitor is Gothel, who uses Rapunzel as her tool for eternal youth. In order to do so, Rapunzel sits down and sings while Gothel brushes Rapunzel's hair and the magic is absorbed by Gothel's body.

On the day of her 18th birthday, Rapunzel plans to ask Gothel permission in order to go and see the mysterious floating lights but Gothel strongly prohibits it and reminds Rapunzel how dangerous the outside world is for her. That same day, a burglar called Flynn Ryder steals the crown with the help of the Stabington Brothers. In their runaway Flynn betrays them and, while he was trying to escape from both the royal

guards (especially from a horse called Maximus) and the two men, Flynn finds the tower, climbs it and hides inside. Since Rapunzel grew up believing that everyone wanted her hair, she attacks Flynn with a frying pan leaving him unconscious, hides the crown he had in his satchel and puts him in her closet in order to show Gothel how she has been perfectly capable of handling things on her own and protect herself. During Gothel's next visit, Rapunzel is not able to tell anything about what had happened because Gothel gets very angry and does not want to hear anything related to Rapunzel going out of the tower. As a consequence, Rapunzel tells Gothel that she wants some paint from a far place for her birthday, so she has time to go and see the floating lights with the help of the man who is in her closet, what she made him promise to do if he wants the crown back.

The trip to the floating lights turns into a quest: they have to hide from the royal guards, the horse Maximus, and Flynn's two ex-companions. When Gothel discovers that Rapunzel ran away, she plans to ruin her trip by using Flynn's mates. During this trip we see how Rapunzel and Flynn save each other, sometimes with the extra help of men they meet in the Snuggly Duckling Inn - they seemed to be rude and dangerous at first sight but ended up being nice and friendly. They also open up and get to know each other: Flynn tells Rapunzel his life story and his real name (Eugene Fitzherbert), and Rapunzel tells him everything about her hair. It is after this, and while Flynn is away in the forest looking for fire wood, that Gothel appears and tries to convince Rapunzel to go back to the tower, which Rapunzel rejects. As Gothel knows that there are some feelings between Rapunzel and Flynn, she challenges Rapunzel to give the crown back to Flynn and see what happens, and leaves. Thanks to Rapunzel, Maximus stops chasing Flynn and lets them get to the city; it is there where Rapunzel sees a painting of the missing princess, the Queen and the King. Rapunzel and Flynn finally see the floating lights and after that, Rapunzel gives the crown back to him. He sees his two mates and leaves Rapunzel alone after telling her that he will be back soon. While Rapunzel is waiting, Flynn tries to give the crown back to his ex-companions but they want more; Gothel had told them about Rapunzel's hair and also that Flynn intended to keep it for himself. Flynn is tied to a boat and the two men go after Rapunzel. When they are trying to capture her, Gothel appears, hits them and saves Rapunzel at the same time that Rapunzel sees how Flynn is going away in a boat with the crown in his hand, and Rapunzel decides to go back to the tower with Gothel. Flynn's boat reaches the castle

and he is put in a cell by the guards, but Maximus sees everything and feels that there is something wrong.

When Flynn is in his way to be hung, he sees his mates, who tell him that Gothel had planned everything. When they are about to hang Flynn, the men that Rapunzel and Flynn met in the Snuggly Duckling Inn help him escape, and Maximus takes Flynn to the tower. Meanwhile, Rapunzel discovers that she is the missing princess and confronts Gothel. When Flynn arrives at the tower, Rapunzel had been chained by Gothel and Gothel stabs Flynn with a piece of glass. Rapunzel refuses to leave unless she is allowed to cure Flynn's mortal injury; if Gothel allows Rapunzel to do so, Rapunzel promises never to try to run away from Gothel. Gothel lets her do so but when Rapunzel is close enough to Flynn, he cuts her hair. As a consequence, Gothel's body, which has been fed on the power of the flower, vanishes while she falls through the tower. After this, Rapunzel believes that Flynn is going to die and her tears fall upon him, saving him. Finally, Rapunzel goes to her parents and there is a big celebration, Flynn starts using his real name and changes his way of life. At the end of the movie, we are told by their own voices that, after some years, they eventually got married and lived "happily ever after".

## **Chapter III**

### **Analysis and comparison of both tale and movie**

In order to compare and analyze the Grimms' "Rapunzel" and Disney's *Tangled*, I will focus on the main characters by order of appearance in the movie.

#### Gothel

In both stories Gothel is introduced as a dangerous, powerful woman but nothing else is told about her life. In the movie we see how she is selfishly interested in preserving the flower in order to be young forever. As a consequence, the stereotypical idea of the importance of youth for women is introduced from the beginning of the tale. In this story, Gothel's reason for kidnapping Rapunzel relies solely on keeping the power Rapunzel has absorbed from the flower. We can easily appreciate this when, for example, Gothel refers to Rapunzel as "my flower", addressing thus the magical properties instead of Rapunzel *per se*. We can connect that obsession with the behavior of a great number of people nowadays that undergo surgery in order to look younger. Since fairy tales are focused on young beautiful girls, women grow up believing that they are only worthy for their youth and beauty, so they try to keep young and beautiful as possible. On the contrary, in the Grimms' fairy tale, Gothel receives Rapunzel after Rapunzel's father makes a deal with Gothel. In this story Gothel has mother-like feelings towards Rapunzel, since she says that she "will care for it like a mother".

It seems typical in fairy tales to represent an "old" woman who wants something for herself as the hatred and evil character in the story. This portrayal has been linked to the patriarchal society fairy tales, as happens in *Cinderella*, *Snow White and the Seven*

*Dwarfs* or *The Little Mermaid*, while on the other hand, if any man aspires to power, he is associated with heroism and greatness. The reason for this association can be found in the relation of desire and assertion of sexuality. As Fisher and Silber point out (128):

To desire, according to Benjamin [Jessica], is to assert one's sexuality and felt passion. Desire in this sense is a kind of truth-telling forbidden to women, because such assertiveness of the self challenges that feminine ideal that insists on a woman's inhibition of her impulses.

In the patriarchal system in which fairy tales are constructed, society aims at creating a strong division between men and women and instructs people in the belief that women are second class, weaker human beings. In these societies women are forbidden to show any kind of impulse that would give them agency or act upon it, and in case they do so, they will be linked with evil (Lieberman: 391-393). In the Grimm's version it is simple to understand why there is that tendency of female representation, since at their time society was even more patriarchally rooted. In Disney's case, since there has been a rewriting of the story, one could have expected something more from the character of Gothel. Even though it is true that Disney added some needed features to the character of Rapunzel, which will be analyzed later on, Gothel's character has not been developed. In this case, an evil character in Disney's story cannot seek power, control or domination; she has been reduced to the stereotypical female obsession of being young forever, something that seems not feasible for male characters, for it has never happened. In case it happened, I believe that in a most probable outcome the character would be understood as mockery and not actually taken into account. It has happened before that if the evil character is female, her evilness is not usually related to the pursuit of power: in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the Evil Queen wants to be the fairest of all; in *Sleeping Beauty*, Maleficent only seeks revenge because she was not invited to the christening of Aurora. There is one exception to this, Ursula, from the movie *The Little Mermaid*, who wants Triton's power.

Another important issue is what Gothel does in order to keep Rapunzel separated from the outside world: in the tale, Rapunzel is taken to a tower when she is 12 years old, maybe because that is the moment in which she turned into a woman. But when Rapunzel is in the tower, she never asks Gothel to free her, so the only thing Gothel has to do is to simply leave her in the tower. In the movie, Gothel takes Rapunzel to the tower shortly after she is born. Due to this, Rapunzel grows up believing that Gothel is

her actual mother and that she will be in danger if she ever dares to go out of the tower. But Rapunzel does ask for permission to go out and when she does so, Gothel tells Rapunzel constantly how violent and heartless the outside world is, and how she, Gothel, is the only one who loves her. The best example for this is the song entitled “Mother Knows Best”, in which Gothel sings lines like

You want to go outside? Why, Rapunzel...!  
Look at you, as fragile as a flower  
Still a little sapling, just a sprout  
You know why we stay up in this tower  
Listen to your mother  
It's a scary world out there  
Mother knows best  
One way or another  
Something will go wrong, I swear  
Ruffians, thugs  
Poison ivy, quicksand  
Cannibals and snakes  
The plague

Apart from the constant cruel depiction of the outside world, it is necessary to add Gothel’s psychological attacks and her constant undermining of Rapunzel by remarking how weak and fragile she is, among other aspects. For example, in the same song, when Gothel says

On your own, you won't survive  
Sloppy, underdressed  
Immature, clumsy  
Please, they'll eat you up alive  
Gullible, naïve  
Positively grubby  
Ditzy and a bit, well, hmm vague  
Plus, I believe  
Getting kind of chubby  
I'm just saying 'cause I love you

And when they both are facing a mirror, Gothel says “Look in that mirror. I see a strong, confident, beautiful young lady. Oh look, you're here too”. It is possible to appreciate that, apart from youth, beauty is very important; in fairy tales, women lack agency and are only taken into account according to their level of beauty. At the same time, this beauty is associated with success: the pretty girls are the ones chosen by the

prince and the ones who live happily ever after in the castle. This affects girls negatively, since they may think that the only way they can triumph is by being more beautiful than the rest, as Lieberman (385) points out:

It is a psychological truth that as children, and as women, girls fear homeliness (even attractive girls are frequently convinced that they are plain), and this fear is a major source of anxiety, diffidence, and convictions of inadequacy and inferiority among women. It is probably also a source of envy and discord among them.

In the book, Gothel remains powerful until the end of the tale: Gothel is the one who cuts Rapunzel's hair and abandons her in the desert, and she also takes revenge on the prince for what he did by telling him that he will never see Rapunzel again. In his desperation, the prince jumps from the window and the thorns on which he fell left him blind. On the contrary, Gothel's agency and power is eliminated in the movie since it is not her who cuts Rapunzel's hair but Flynn, and she is eventually defeated. By the end of the tale we still do not know anything about the reason why Gothel is the way she is and there is no proof of possible redemption for her; in the tale we are told nothing about the rest of her life or about her death but in the movie we see how she disappears forever.

### Rapunzel's parents / the Queen and King

Another change in the movie is the social rise of Rapunzel's parents: they are not normal people but the King and Queen of the kingdom of Corona. In the Grimms' story, everything starts due to the craving of Rapunzel's mother and the subsequent deal her father makes. What may seem a typical plot, similar to some extent to Eve and Adam's myth, is changed for another typical fairy tale plot: Rapunzel's mother gets sick when she is about to have a baby. It is necessary to acknowledge that at least Disney did not follow the pattern of the dead mother, since it seems that good "old" women (particularly mothers) tend to die in fairy tales, as in *Cinderella*, *The Little Mermaid*, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* or *Beauty and the Beast*, among others. In the movie, both parents remain alive but they say nothing throughout the entire movie. This can be understood as a symbol of the disempowerment they have suffered by Gothel, for their daughter has been taken away from them and they are not able to find her.

## The prince/ Flynn Ryder (Eugene Fitzherbert)

This character also suffers a transformation in the movie: instead of being an elegant prince who found the tower because he heard Rapunzel singing, he is a runaway thief who found the tower while he was trying to escape from the royal guards and his ex companions. However, he is not the first thief who appears in a Disney movie, as happens for example in *Aladdin*. It is possible to establish some similarities since both Flynn and Aladdin are thieves who eventually rise in society due to their relationship with a princess. In the movie, Flynn is also the voice over that tells the tale. One of the explanations of his “death” (in the introduction of the tale he, jokingly, says “This is the story of how I died”) can be found in the evolution his character undergoes: at the beginning, Flynn is in a group of thieves along with the Stabington Brothers. As a consequence, he should be considered an evil character, since he does not seem to steal for necessity but for his love for material objects and money. It is possible to appreciate this in the song “I’ve Got a Dream” when Flynn sings

I have dreams, like you –no, really  
Just much less touchy-feely  
They mainly happen somewhere warm and sunny  
On an island that I own  
Tanned and rested and alone  
Surrounded by enormous piles of money.

It is nevertheless true that it is possible to differentiate between Flynn and the Stabington Brothers: the Stabington Brothers seem to be pure evil since they have the stereotyped appearance of scary, big, brawny and serious men who are willing to use physical violence to get what they want. On the other hand, in spite of Flynn’s selfishness and his betrayal of the Stabington Brothers, Flynn is depicted as a funny, cheerful, non-violent and handsome man and it is easy not to think of him as an evil character. One of his characteristics is his concern for the way in which his nose is drawn in the wanted posters. This worry can be understood not only as a gag but as a proof of how society has evolved; concern for appearance has been typically portrayed as something very woman-like but in this movie we are shown how men worry about their appearance too. Nowadays men are also judged for their appearance and they want to look as good as possible. This was not conceivable before, for men were the ones in

power and had the right to choose the woman they wanted. With this change we are told that men must also compete against each other, meaning, thus, that women also have the power to choose.

An important difference between the tale and the movie happens when Flynn and Rapunzel meet: in the tale it seems that Rapunzel and the prince fall instantly in love –the prince even proposes to Rapunzel the same day they meet, and she says yes–, while in the movie love at first sight does not happen and we are told that “after years and years” Rapunzel eventually said yes. This change in the movie is also significant if we compare it with older Disney movies, in which the tendency seems to follow the plot established in the fairy tale “Rapunzel”: in all Disney movies love happens at first sight. Therefore, the well-established pattern in these movies is broken. Maybe it is thanks to this that we were able to watch a female character say, for the first time in a Disney movie “You cannot marry someone you have just met”, as Elsa says to her sister Anna in *Frozen* (2014). Another difference in the relationship of the protagonists is the complete elimination of any sexual relation between them. We have previously seen how the Brothers Grimm had rewritten the story in order to create a suitable version of this relationship. Consequently, they introduced the petition of marriage, and the sexual relation between them is subtly introduced at the end when we are told about the two children that are with Rapunzel. In the movie the only gesture related to their relationship is a kiss, and we are told about the wedding at the very end of the movie. This strict romance is typical of movies created by Disney, since it is a Studio addressed to children and, if more content were added, it is quite probable that parents complain about it or stop relying on the “safety” of Disney products.

In parallel with Rapunzel and Flynn growing friendship, we are shown Flynn’s inner personality. When Flynn tells Rapunzel about his past, the audience feels sorry for him or even identifies with him. It is due to this that redemption for Flynn is possible, since we understand why he behaves the way he does and why he steals. It is the contrary of what happens with Gothel. Flynn is given the chance to explain his personality, and his way of acting changes after the trip: even though he does not achieve his aim of giving the crown back to the Stabington Brothers, he intends to do it so he can have a chance with Rapunzel. It is due to the events that happen after this failure and his detention, that Flynn is finally consolidated as a hero in the movie and the change from Flynn to Eugene is produced (although I will refer to him as Flynn in order to avoid misunderstandings): when Flynn is stabbed by Gothel and Rapunzel

offers the magic of her hair to save him, he sacrifices his life for Rapunzel's freedom by cutting her hair. This change in his personality can be observed too when he says to Rapunzel "You were my new dream". Flynn's character evolved from a thief who did not care about people and betrayed his mates to a man who is willing to die for someone he truly loves. He comes alive again after Rapunzel's tear falls upon him, as a reward for his honor and courage and as a proof of the power of love.

## Rapunzel

Most of the changes in the movie are centered upon Rapunzel's character. To begin with, the movie does not exhibit her name. This change is a market strategy: in current society we tend to differentiate between sexes since babies are born; girls dress in pink and boys dress in blue. We teach them this arbitrary relation and they subsequently learn to associate colors to gender identity. Along with the difference of colors, we teach them to differentiate in terms of content, which may create prejudices among children in relation to what they are supposed to like or watch. In case a child does not act according to the established norms, they can be socially rejected. If Disney aimed at gaining as much profit as possible, they had to change the title so it did not refer to a female character and, consequently, to a rejection of the movie by male viewers, in which case the numbers of spectators would be smaller.

Even though in the version by the Brothers Grimm the tale is entitled with her name, Rapunzel cannot be seen as the hero of her own story. Instead, she is the object of the story: her parents trade her, Gothel imprisons her in a tower, the prince finds her in the tower, Gothel cuts her hair and leaves her in a desert and the prince finds her again. Rapunzel does not question anyone's authority nor tries to escape or improve her situation. We know that Rapunzel is not very comfortable in her situation because when the prince climbs up the tower she thinks "I certainly like him much better than old mother Gothel", so she is willing to run away with the first man she sees. Rapunzel's silence can be understood as how girls should behave at the times of the Brothers Grimm. As Fisher and Silver (127) point out:

[...]for many girls on the cusp of woman-hood, self-silencing becomes the "right" way to behave: it is socially acceptable for girls to withhold negative feelings[...]. Honest reactions of anger or frustrating would betray a girl as

“mean” or “rude” or “selfish,” posing serious risks to her being loved or even tolerated.

Consequently, Rapunzel did not defend herself because she did not know that she had the right to do so, and she did not try to escape because she was supposed not to do so or, at least, not by her own means but with the help of a man. This is the example of how women were supposed to remain silent and not to complain about their lives. It is necessary to question Rapunzel’s intelligence, since she does not seem to distinguish between Gothel’s voice, someone with whom she has lived all her life, and the prince’s, someone she has never met or heard before. In addition, it is also Rapunzel who reveals to Gothel that the prince visits her in the tower. Rapunzel is depicted in terms of beauty, since she is described as “the most beautiful child on the world”. This tendency to focus on female beauty supports the idea that women are taken into account only according to their beauty.

One of Rapunzel’s most characteristic and common features is her long, gold-like hair. As Marina Warner (363) points out “Blondness and beauty have provided a conceptual rhyme in visual and literary imagery ever since the goddess of Love’s tresses were described as *xanthe*, golden, by Homer”. Therefore the association of blonde hair and beauty has been long established in our society and it has been assimilated so deeply that the symbol of blondeness as guarantee of goodness, purity, divinity and beauty is traceable up to the present day. In the tale, Rapunzel’s hair is used by Gothel and the prince as a way to climb the tower; in the movie, it also acquires magical properties and is the source of eternal youth and cure for diseases or injuries. If Rapunzel’s hair is cut, it loses its magic and turns dark. At this point it is necessary to understand what the meaning of the change of color is. Warner (368) explains that

Blondeness is an index of the virgins’ youth as well as innocence, for many children are fair in infancy and grow darker with age. [...] The tradition enfolds femininity, and its conventional link with youth and beauty, as well as with privacy, modesty and an interior life in both senses –indoor pursuits and affective experience. For blonde hair implies pale skin, which in turns entails lack of exposure, again on a doubled level, either to the rays of the sun in outdoor work, or the gaze of others.

Rapunzel’s age changed from twelve in the fairy tale by the Brothers Grimm, to eighteen in *Tangled*. Both ages mark a turning point in women’s life: the first one can be associated to Rapunzel’s first menstruation and her subsequent imprisonment due to her

entrance in womanhood, and the second one establishes the legal age at which a human being is considered adult in our society. In the movie, Rapunzel has never had any experience with the outside world; consequently, she remains pure and innocent up to this moment. Rapunzel's counterpart can be Flynn, who is darker than her, maybe as an indication of his freedom and outdoor life. At the end of the movie, when Flynn cuts Rapunzel's hair, it turns dark. This change can be understood in two ways: first, it symbolizes Rapunzel's definitive transition to womanhood and, secondly, it illustrates Rapunzel's loss of innocence and even "purity", since she has gone on an adventure, has met and loved Flynn and has discovered that she is the missing princess.

In the movie, Rapunzel undergoes what can be understood as a revival of her character. She has been locked up in a tower for eighteen years but she is active; in the song "When Will My Life Begin?" she shows she is interested in reading, practicing sports, painting, cooking, candle making, and other interests for the outside world. Contrary to what has been commonly represented in older Disney movies, Rapunzel does not link the beginning of her adult life with finding love but with the achievement of her own freedom. Since she has been brought up believing that she would be in danger if she left the tower, it is sensible that she never tried to escape alone. She eventually has a chance to explore the outside world with Flynn and she makes good value of the opportunity. During the trip, Rapunzel helps Flynn to escape from his enemies and she also cures him. She is given the agency she lacked in the tale and she shows that she is resourceful, courageous, strong, adventurer and witty. Rapunzel is even willing to sacrifice her freedom in order to save Flynn's life, which consolidates her as a truly heroine and changes the pattern of typical fairy tales. The fact that Flynn eventually sacrifices himself by cutting Rapunzel's hair, takes the story to the traditional "man saves woman" discourse. A different resolution which would have drifted from that traditional discourse could have taken place when Rapunzel is back in the tower with Gothel and she discovers that she is the missing princess: Rapunzel could have cut her own hair, breaking thus the magical connection between her hair and Gothel, which would cause Gothel's death, or Rapunzel could have simply fought Gothel and win her freedom. Furthermore, since she is the missing princess, she could have asked for Flynn's pardon, being thus the truly heroine of the story.

The relationship between Rapunzel and Flynn evolves while they are traveling together and they get to know more about each other. As it has been previously commented, the recurrent pattern of love at first sight is broken and therefore the

importance of physical appearance is pushed into the background –even though both characters are created as physically attractive. When they meet, their interest on each other (from a physical perspective) is so trivial that when Flynn tries to seduce Rapunzel is merely in order to mislead her and run away with the crown, and his plan fails because Rapunzel seems utterly uninterested –Flynn even says that she broke his “smoulder” when his seduction move fails. Furthermore, it can be thought that, when Rapunzel is trying to know why Flynn is in her tower, the movie mocks the idea of predestined love that fairy tales seem to represent:

Rapunzel: Something brought you here, Flynn Ryder. Call it what you will:  
fate, destiny...  
Flynn: A horse...

Despite this flouting of love at first sight, Rapunzel and Flynn eventually fall in love by the end of their trip, which is a one day trip. We know they are in love because they become each other’s dream and they both are willing to sacrifice their lives for the freedom of the other and also because of their own voice-overs at the end of the movie, when they say that after years and years they eventually got married. Even though this relationship is not based on first sight attraction –their interest develops gradually based on their knowledge about each other–, it seems unlikely for someone to fall in love in just one day; it could even be said that it is unadvisable. Apparently movies, fairy tales or books desperately need their characters to be lovers or to fall in love, since that is the tendency in most the stories.

It seems a recurrent aspect in fairy tales that women do not interact with other female characters with whom they can create a link of friendship. When another female character appears, she is usually non-human, for example, a fairy. As a consequence, it is very difficult for girls to identify with those characters, since they do not belong to the world of human beings. Furthermore, in case the female protagonist’s mother is alive, she usually is be very far from her daughter, and when another female human character appears, she is usually evil. This lack of female companionship is added to the pressure of being the fairest of all, since women are to be chosen by men and only according to their beauty. Consequently, girls may develop jealousy, competitive personalities based on distrust towards their own sex, being thus unable to create bonds of friendship with other girls. In this case, Rapunzel is either with Gothel in the tower or with male company

## Conclusion

Fantasy is a tool used in order to understand our world. Through fantasy, we create stories in which we can express both our fears and dreams. These stories, such as fairy tale stories, are also a means of transmitting socio-cultural values, for they stand for the basis of the society in which they were created. There are similarities between the societies depicted in fairy tales by the Brothers Grimm and in fairy tale cartoon movies by Disney, for they part from patriarchal societies and both are strongly stratified by class and gender. In terms of class, the royal family is positioned at the top of the pyramid and happiness seems to be connected to this stratum, for the “happily ever after” endings implies the rise in the social strata of one of the characters and a royal wedding. In terms of gender, women depend entirely on men; they lack any kind of power over their own lives and the only possible virtue they can have is physical beauty. This evaluation of women relying solely on their appearance may create relationships of distrust, envy and competition among them, since being chosen by a man is the only possibility they have to improve their own lives. Rapunzel, in the fairy tale by the Brothers Grimm, does nothing in order to escape from the tower or to improve her own life till she is found by the prince, and her description is based only on her beauty. In the movie, she proves to be strong, intelligent and brave but she still needs the help of the male character.

As it has been explained, movies, fairy tales and other stories, are not only representations of society but also guidelines that children assimilate and that will determine their behavior, aspirations and self- image. Most of these fantastic discourses seem to be satisfied with the repetitive use of the damsel in discourse, even nowadays. Instead of creating female characters which are as capable, brave and resourceful as male characters, women are still pushed to the background. Most of the times, even if the movie or the fairy tale is named after a female character, it is not her who exhibits agency or power in the story, so she needs to be continually helped by a male character with whom she will eventually have a love relationship. In order to have a better

representation of our current society we need more characters with different personalities, voices, colors and tastes, and a real equivalence between female and male capabilities.

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