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**Perrault's "Sleeping Beauty": Themes and  
Motifs in An Everlasting Fairy Tale**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This analysis explores the different themes and motifs of the fairy tale by Charles Perrault entitled *The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood*. To do so, a dichotomy of these two concepts is proposed, based on the elements that have been found in the story throughout its reading. Among these are aspects such as the figure of the woman as the most important, others such as religion, death... are also developed. Even, characteristic symbols of this tale such as the spinning wheel. Finally, a conclusion is reached which states that all these elements are always related to the figure of the princess. Moreover, all the themes and motifs can be extrapolated to real life.

## **KEYWORDS**

Fairy tale, Sleeping Beauty, princess, theme, motif, morale

## **RESUMEN**

En este análisis se indaga en los diferentes temas y *motifs* que el cuento de hadas del autor Charles Perrault titulado *La Bella Durmiente del Bosque* desarrolla. Para ello, se propone una dicotomía de estos dos conceptos, basada en los elementos que se han ido encontrando en dicha historia a lo largo de su lectura. De entre estos se encuentran aspectos tales como la figura de la mujer como lo más importante, y se van desarrollando otros como la religión, la muerte... e incluso símbolos característicos de este cuento como el huso de la rueca. Finalmente, se desarrolla una conclusión que constata que todos estos elementos están siempre relacionados con la figura de la princesa. Además, se constata también que todos los temas y *motifs*, se pueden extrapolar a la vida real.

## **PALABRAS CLAVE**

Cuento de hadas, Bella Durmiente, princesa, tema, *motif*, moraleja

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Although the term “fairy tale” has been used on so many occasions, many people do not know what a fairy tale really is, why it is talked about, or where it comes from. They simply think that fairy tales are those with happy endings, but they are not all like that.

When I first heard about fairy tales, I was reading Walt Disney’s *Sleeping Beauty* when I was 5 years old. Obviously, at first, I was not aware, but over the years, as I reread the story, I realised that, at least from my point of view, this is a story that hides the stigma that the essence of life is to fall in love, get married, have children and die, in that order. If you do not follow that route or rule, you will not be happy in life. Even if there is any hardship, with love it goes away. Today, everyone knows that this is far from true, and that the mantra “*and they all lived happily ever after*” is only true in fairy tales.

It is for this reason, and because the degree I am following (English Studies) has literary analysis as one of its main activities, that I have given it a twist and delved into the intricacies of this story to bring out the interpretation of the not-so-happy reality hidden in this “fairy” tale.

For this purpose, I have chosen *The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood*, a version written by the author Charles Perrault in 1697. After reading it, an exhaustive analysis of its themes and motifs has been carried out in order to explain all the meanings it conceals and which distance fairy tales, or at least this one, from the happy ending for which they are erroneously characterised.

This text has been worked on by separating the aforementioned themes from the motifs. From both, we have drawn explanations of issues such as the education of women, the lack of parental love, religion, death, marriage, superstitions, etc. to help the reader to get a different vision of the tale beyond what we know from being a folk tale. It is worth noting here the author Bruno Bettelheim, an author who will be mentioned in BA paper. He wrote *The Uses of Enchantment. The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* in 1994. This title, translated into Spanish, appears as *Psicoanálisis de los Cuentos de Hadas*, which literally means *Psychoanalysis of Fairy Tales*, which makes a lot of sense, because in this BA paper, more than an analysis of this fairy tale, a psychoanalysis has been done. This is because in order to extract all the important aspects of this work, it cannot be done by skim reading the story, it needs an exhaustive reading and analysis. This has been done

by extracting each element separately in order to be able to understand the subject under analysis as a whole.

## 2. THE FAIRY TALE AS A LITERARY GENRE

*The years go by, and I've told the story so many times that I'm not sure anymore whether I actually remember it or whether I just remember the words I tell it with.* (Borges, 1975).

For as long as literature has existed, as far as fairy tales are concerned, a distinction must be made between folk or traditional fairy tales and literary fairy tales. The former, whose author is unknown, is transmitted orally. This means that there are several versions of them. Literary tales, on the other hand, are the work of a specific author and are directly transmitted by means of writing. Knowing this, we automatically know that *Sleeping Beauty* belongs to the traditional fairy tale.

As the term *traditional* suggests, we can say that this is a tradition, because the practice of collecting anonymous tales was already seen, among others, in England with Chaucer in *The Canterbury Tales* in the 14th century. For a tale to belong to this group, it has to fulfil several characteristics such as pertaining to a cultural context of which it is a product. (Ballesteros et al., 2013). This is due to the fact that this literature is in turn called literature of the people, as it is a tradition that was followed because of that, in those years, they belonged to illiterate peoples where they did not know how to read or write (Villa, 2005) or even because a writing system as such had not yet been established. Through these, knowledge was transmitted, or, in other words, orality was used to educate others, but also for entertainment. This lasted until the invention of writing, when all these stories were written down. This is where the so-called scribes came into focus.

Then, the existence of these tales is not by chance, as they belong to folklore. Folklore has a social function in which each group possesses characteristics that differentiate it and connect it with the rest of the communities. These elements can be autochthonous or come from other times and places but are firmly rooted in the soul of each people. In this way, we establish that any cultural habit can become folkloric

regardless of its origin. Folklore phenomena as a whole are thus defined as collectivised “popular” cultural expressions (typical of traditional folk culture). Among these expressions are the various aspects of the life of a people; customs, clothing, food, beliefs... In the same way, literary folklore comprises these expressions through prose and verse which are transmitted from generation to generation in countless versions and variants and whose functionality should not change with the passing of time. (Chicote, 1990). Folklore is related in one way or another to children’s stories and to transpersonification in which folklore establishes characters such as Perrault’s ogres as a representation of evil. (Hogstad, 2011).

### **3. THE SLEEPING BEAUTY IN THE WOOD**

*Sleeping Beauty*’s fairy tale, belonging to the category of traditional fairy tales, has several versions which, throughout history, have ensured that the tale has survived to the present day, albeit with some modifications. From a chronological point of view, the first version, entitled *Briar Rose* dates from the 14th century and appears in the *Catalan Frayre de Joy e Sor de Placer*. Then, in the 16th century there is *Troylus and Zellandine*, and it can be found in the French *Perceforest*. (Zipes, 2000). *Sole, Moon and Talia*, the next version, was written by the author Giambattista Basile in 1634 and can be found in a book of stories called *Pentameron*. The next version is the one written by the author Perrault, the version under analysis in the present work. This version, exactly entitled “*The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood*”, is found in Charles Perrault’s first collection of fairy tales called *Les Contes de ma mère l’Oye*, translated into English as *The Tales of Mother Goose*, in English, published in 1697. Finally, we have the version by the Brothers Grimm entitled *The Sleeping Beauty*. The plot of this version is what brought the story to the one we nowadays know, because is the first one in which the prince kisses the princess to wake her up from her deep sleep. It was published in 1812. After this version, we have what would be the most famous version known nowadays, *The Sleeping Beauty* produced by Walt Disney, but technically it is not a written version that comes after that of the Brothers Grimm, because Disney first adapted the tale into a film under the same title in the year 1959, and then the written tale was published based on the film.

As with the titles, the plot and themes are something that also evolves and varies in all these versions. In *Sun, Moon and Talia*, the plot is completely uncensored, explicitly

dealing with themes of rape and violence. In Perrault's version, what stands out most is the change of title, but also that the theme of rape disappears, although the theme of violence is still present in the prince's mother's desire to eat her grandchildren and daughter-in-law. In the plot of the Grimm Brothers', any violent episode is completely erased, but there are still some differences, such as the existence of a toad that makes the Queen's wish to become a mother come true, or the difference in the number of fairies present from one version to another, among others. Respecting the Disney version, taking into account that it is a version entirely for children, any scene or character that may be unpleasant or may cause fear in children, or that may prevent the story from ending happily, is also eliminated (Osuna, 2015).

Given that Charles Perrault was French, the original version of this fairy tale is in French. That is why the version that has been used and analysed in this work is one translated into English by Christopher Betts, and collected in a recompilation of tales published in 2009 called *The Complete Fairy Tales by Charles Perrault*.

#### **4. THEMES AND MOTIFS IN PERRAULT'S SLEEPING BEAUTY**

We know that fairy tales are romantic and emotional and revolve around the need for a happy ending (Cooper, 1983), but this does not detract from the fact that the plot deviates from the canon of a happy ending with a marriage and the catchphrase "*and they lived happily ever after*". The version that we are analysing of this fairy tale contains many violent or cruel passages. In this case, when the princess marries the prince, the prince's mother is a cannibal who wishes to devour her daughter-in-law and grandchildren (Van Coillie, 2010).

If we pay attention to literary theory, we can see that the sort of things mentioned in the previous paragraph do not only appear in this fairy tale we are analysing, but are common to all of them. This allows all these elements to be dichotomised into two groups in order to establish the literary characteristics of this genre. On the one hand, there are the themes, and on the other hand, there are the motifs. (Van Coillie, 2010). But it is worth noting that the boundary between the two concepts is said to be flexible, as a motif could also be any narrative element (Aarne and Thompson, 1928). A theme, in one hand, is a broad and basic concept (love), while a motif, on the other hand, is an element that is recurrent and with a specific meaning present in all fairy tales (a kiss). (Gorp et al., 2007).

In terms of the themes, in this story, we can distinguish women's education, the desire to have a male heir, the lack of parental love, Sex, Religion and Fate vs. Free Will. Regarding the motifs, we have the Spinning wheel, mythological creatures, gold and gemstones and the morale.

## **4.1 THEMES**

### **4.1.1 Women's Education**

According to the Inter-American Journal of Education and Pedagogy Research in its article *Modernity, education and gender. The unfinished project* (2016), the Modern Age, the era in which this story came to light, represented a period of great technical processes dedicated to improving the quality of life of citizens. These progressive ideals had a more masculine gaze and rejected half of the population, women. Teachers progressively acquired importance and social relevance as an instrument of change and progress. This remained unchanged for women, who continued to be subordinate to men. Not only women, but also girls. In this century, the only civil status contemplated for them was the convent or marriage (de León, 1992). They had to be totally subordinate to men, and they had to accompany them at all times. Their proper and exclusive sphere was the domestic sphere. The role of women was one of physical, psychological, economic, social and cultural dependence on men. They were trained first to be good wives and then to be mothers. For them, education should not be very extensive and deep, but it should be correct in order to please men. That is why, when it came to granting the princess the wishes, the good fairies offered her gifts that would highlight the education she had received, or, in other words, they would be things that would please the future husband she would have, such as the first wish: to be the most beautiful of all women. This leads us to think that the role of women in this type of stories, and specifically in this one, is passive and subordinate. Again, the fairies do not ask her to be strong or energetic, qualities associated with men, but to develop good, traditional feminine characteristics, such as beauty, which are valued by society (Van Coillie, 2010).

*“[...] she was fully dressed and her clothes were magnificent, but he took good care not to tell her that she was dressed like Grandmother in the old*



*days, with a starched high collar; it did not make her any the less beautiful". (89)<sup>1</sup>*

This quote shows that what matters most is the princess's appearance. After having been asleep for a hundred years due to a spell that prevented her from dying, no one cares whether she is in full health or not. As a general rule, in medical terms, when a person wakes up from a coma, they would need rehabilitation. That is not something that seems to matter in the story as long as she is beautiful. It could be said that this upbringing deprives women from freedom. From childhood she is educated to follow this path, and nothing else. Anything outside this norm was against the established principles of the time. Referring to the fairy tale, the princess wakes up and marries and has two children, in that order. But at no point is she asked if that is what she wants. This is because there was no room for something different.

Moving to modern times, it could be said that, if a boy or a girl reads this story today, they might learn that following a path that someone else sets for you is fine if it is what you want. But, if the decision is not to follow such a rule, it is not wrong and it is one hundred percent lawful.

Returning to the discrimination that women faced at this time, this can be seen again if we go back to the point in the story where the prince and princess had two children.

*"The first was a girl, and was named Dawn; and the second, who was a boy, was called Day, since he looked even more beautiful than his sister". (93).*

Through this quote it can be seen that almost imperceptibly the male child, although born later, is being placed above the female child. On the one hand, and according to the Collins dictionary definitions, the literal definition of *dawn* would be "*is the time of day when light first appears in the sky, just before the sun rises*", while the literal definition of *day* would be "*the period of light between sunrise and sunset, as distinguished from the night*". If we take these two definitions literally, we can see that there could be no day without dawn. This is just a covert way of stating that even though Dawn was born first,

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations in this work are taken from *The Complete Fairy Tales by Charles Perrault*, published in 2009 by Oxford University Press.

and the Prince and the Princess were very happy with it, they were waiting for a boy to come into the world. This leads us directly into the next theme we are going to analyse.

#### **4.1.2 The desire to have a male heir**

As we know, traditionally, in royal families a male figure was needed to occupy the throne when the royal figure who was reigning at the time abdicated or died. Once again, it can be seen how men were above women, even if they were babies.

As mentioned in the previous section, offspring, preferably male, were necessary in fairy tales for the royal line to continue. Knowing all this, if we start reading the story again, we will better understand the meaning of the three lines with which Perrault begins the narrative.

*“ONCE upon a time there lived a king and a queen who where ever so unhappy, because they had no children; so unhappy I can’t tell you”.* (83)

It is evident that the king is upset because he needs an heir so that his lineage does not disappear. In the same way, the queen, taking into account the royal education she must have received, is apathetic because she has assumed that she needs to be a mother to fulfil herself as a woman, but above all to give that child to her husband. The fact that neither of them were fulfilling these commitments made them fail separately but also made them fail as a whole as a royal marriage.

#### **4.1.3 Lack of Parental Love**

In this version of the story, it is after a hundred years have passed that the prince appears for the first time in the plot. It is then that we realise that the prince's mother is not of human nature. She belongs to a lineage of ogres.

*“[...] she herself had ogreish tendencies, and that when she saw small children going by she found it almost impossible to prevent herself from jumping on them[...]”.* (93)

As it can be seen from this quote, the prince's ogre mother had a devotion to eating children. But the reader realises that the only children in danger of being eaten by an ogre in this case, are the children of the prince and princess, and that the danger they are in is from their own grandmother, an ogress. It is here that the lack of parental love comes to the fore. You can tell that the ogress has little affection for her son, because she wants to eat his children, who are also her grandchildren. No matter how much the grandmother's nature comes from the ogres, love for a child always overrides it. In this case it does not, to the point of wanting to devour the children, ignoring the fact that they are the most important thing to her son, besides the princess.

Following the trail of the lack of parental love, it could be said that it is not something governed by social status. As seen in the previous paragraph, it could not be said that the ogress loves her son because she wants to eat her son's children. But, neither could this be said to be so because of her status as an ogress. But neither could she be said to be so because she was an ogress. For the princess's parents, feeling very sad when their daughter was first condemned to die and then when she fell into a deep sleep, fled from the castle. They were not ogres, in fact, quite the opposite, and yet they abandoned their daughter to her fate. Normally, when a child is ill, the parents are with the child, for they are all they have in life. In this case they are not, and once again the lack of parental love comes to the fore.

*"Then the King and Queen, after having kissed their daughter without awakening her, left the castle". (87)*

#### **4.1.4 Sex**

Reading this tale in more detail, one may come to the conclusion that the central plot, in which the princess sleeps for a hundred years, symbolises the desire of parents to delay the maturation of a daughter, or, in other words, the delay of the onset of puberty. Puberty is metaphorized by the curse that the ancient fairy puts on the princess. The king wants to prevent this by banning all spinning wheels in the kingdom, but it is inevitable. It is thought that the moment when the princess pricks herself with the spindle of the spinning wheel signifies the onset of menstruation, which turns her into a woman (Bettelheim, 1994). But just as the princess reaches that crucial moment in her development - when she reaches reproductive maturity - she falls into a deep sleep that

will last for a hundred years. It is only after all this time has passed that the princess will have her first sexual experience. This could symbolise that waiting a long time for the first sexual intercourse is worth it. We can see this at the beginning of the story, when the kings, after much waiting, manage to conceive the princess.

As is well known, successions in royal families are passed on hereditarily on the basis of primogeniture. As Bruno Bettelheim notes in *The Uses of Enchantment. The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (1994), in the case of *Sleeping Beauty*, the princess's father -the King at the beginning of the story-, and the prince who awakens the Princess, both separated in time by a hundred years, have nothing to do with each other. This is made clear in writing in the quotation: "*A hundred years later, the son of the king then ruling, who was not of the same family as the sleeping Princess [...]*" (87), because it is intended to remove any thought that might lead the reader to think of incest. The author did this because incest is considered a taboo because a law called *The Universal Prohibition of Incest*, which, as its name suggests, forbade it. This prohibition meant that human beings went from having a nature of not being able to repress their sexual desires, to rationality (Sierra, 1995). In other words, man went from being considered an animal, to being considered enlightened. Knowing, then, that we are talking about real families, any thought related to incest had to be eradicated, because due to their real condition, there is no other option for them to be illiterate.

#### **4.1.5 Religion**

After reading this story carefully, the reader realises that it deals with themes that are, one way or another, related to religion; themes like death, baptism and marriage. Even so, there are aspects that make this fairy tale difficult to pigeonhole just into a religious theme, as we already know that one of its main themes is magic. It has always been known that religion and magic are totally opposed, we must not forget, as general knowledge, the time of the Inquisition, a time of Holy wars and witches burning, among other things. But even so, this story touches on both aspects in the most normalised way possible because both magic and religion arise and function in moments of an emotional nature: life's crises, death, unfortunate love or unfulfilled hatred. Both magic and religion present solutions to such situations and impasses, offering not an empirical way out of them, but rites and faith in the domain of the supernatural. Both are strictly based on

mythological tradition and both exist in the atmosphere of the miraculous. Moreover, they are surrounded by taboos, superstitions and ceremonies that differentiate their actions. (Malinowski, 1994).

#### 4.1.5.1 Death

Fairy tales, like prehistoric mirrors, also reflect the religion of our distant ancestors, and we can clearly see in them the belief in immortality, which is veiled by the total absence of a dividing line between the world of the dead and the land of the living (Carus, 1900). Then, in this story, if we pay attention to the wicked fairy's request to the princess, we can observe this. She will die if she pricks herself with the spindle of a spinning wheel, something that would normally bleed a little and there would be no problem. In the same way, the good fairy transforms death into a deep sleep. This is where we see how death is defied because in fairy tales there is no such thing as a definitive death. Man may die, but he can be brought back to life. (Van Coillie, 2010), (Cooper, 1983).

According to Caroline Fay in her article *Sleeping Beauty Must Die: The Plots of Perrault's "La belle au bois dormant"* (2008), it is Perrault who, on the basis of death, follows two different plots in his version of this fairy tale. On one hand, there is the one related to the story of the princess, of course, and on the other hand there is the one related to cannibalism. At first, these two lines have nothing in common apart from the fact that both are featured by the Sleeping Beauty, but on further reading, we realise that they are actually connected by death.

Judging by the ending of each argument, it can be concluded that for the author human death is a taboo, as he never lets it take place despite the number of times it is alluded to. This is no coincidence, for as Phillippe Ariés analyses in his book *Western Attitudes Toward Death from the Middle Ages to the Present* (1975), the different ways in which death was conceived from the Middle Ages to the present day give us clues as to why the avoidance of talking about death is so common.

In the Middle Ages, death was part of people's daily lives because of the scarcity of medicines; deaths were commonplace, but this was de-dramatised because of the Christian belief in the resurrection and the existence of another life. It was in the Renaissance that the fear of death, or the fear that death was a bad thing, began to be

verbalised or taken into account. A literature began to develop to combat and exorcise these fears called *ars bene moriendi* (the art of dying well). These were manuals of self-meditation that contained advice and procedures on how to face death and die well. It was during Romanticism that the individualised fear was transferred to the loss of loved ones and so ostentatious cemetery designs of this era began to be seen, as it was a way of showing that someone would remain there forever. The last stage is the present one, in which death cannot be mentioned except through metaphors. A very recurrent one is the one told to children when their grandfather dies; they do not see him because he is resting or on a journey.

This rejection of death can be seen and verified in various examples throughout *The Sleeping Beauty*:

- For the author, death is never the first option, there is always some other reason.

*“But as everyone was sitting down to table, they saw an aged fairy come in, who had not been invited, because for more than fifty years she had never left the tower she lived in, so that she was believed to be dead, or under a spell”*. (83).

Here, we see how the aged fairy could be dead or under a spell, there is always the possibility to be alive.

Another example where death has no place is when the aged fairy says that the princess will prick herself on a spinning wheel spindle and die. At once, the younger fairy reverses it by saying:

*“[...] Your daughter will not die [...], the Princess will prick her hand on a spindle, but instead of dying, she will fall into a deep sleep”*. (84)

Once again, death is alluded to, but this time it is immediately exchanged for a spell.

When the princess finally pricks herself with the spindle, it is known that she falls into the deepest of dreams,

*“It was only that her eyes were closed; but you could tell that she was not dead because she could still be heard breathing gently”.* (86)

but once again, it is made clear in writing that she is not dead.

It was not only the princess who was affected by the deep sleep, even the castle's subjects and guards fell asleep.

*“Nothing was to be seen but the bodies of men and animals lying stretched out, who appeared to be dead. He could tell nonetheless, from the blotchy noses and flushed complexions of the Swiss guards, that they were only sleeping”.* (88)

Again, it is made clear that all of them are asleep, but not dead.

- The author does not conceive that the death of a good person can happen, no matter how close it is. This can be seen in the second plot, in which the prince, already king, goes to war, leaving the regency of the kingdom to his mother. His mother, belonging to the race of ogres, wanted to eat both her grandchildren and her daughter-in-law, the queen. To do so, she ordered the chief cook to kill and cook them, but he was unable to do so and replaced them with animals. When the ogress discovered the cook's trick, she ordered him, his wife, his grandchildren and his daughter-in-law to be thrown into a vat with a snake. In the end, it was not they but she herself who was devoured. We see how the death of a good person has no place no matter how much effort is put into it.

- The author, for the first time, alludes to a real death, about the people who once used to live in that castle. But once again, he is not entirely blunt about death, for he refers to the existence of spirits, which would mean that these spirits are clearly dead, but in one way or another they are still present.

*“Some said that it was an ancient castle where ghosts were seen to walk [...]”* (87)

In conclusion, it could be said that the fact that throughout the story the death of a good person has been avoided on so many occasions, is due to fear. And when the

occasion arises that someone is really dead, there is always something that makes the world of the living connected to the world of the dead. That is why death is considered a taboo, because it is feared as well as the unknown world that it brings.

#### **4.1.5.2 Baptism**

Among the religious elements that emerge throughout the story, it is worth devoting some attention to the sacrament of baptism. In fact, it could be said that the story manages to develop because the princess's baptism takes place.

*“They held a beautiful service for her to be christened [...]”*. (83)

In the field of baptism, the position of godfather or godmother is customary. In this case, the seven fairies were chosen as godmothers. It could be said, therefore, that the fact that the position of godmother exists in the story is another clear reference to religion. The function of the godmothers is to support and help the person to be baptised. The godfather or godmother is asked to guide their godchildren along a good path in life (González, 2016). In *The Sleeping Beauty*, each one of the seven good fairies grants a different grace to the princess during the ceremony in which she is christened.

*“[...] all the fairies they could find in the country were to come (there were seven of them), to be godmothers for the little Princess, which meant that each would bestow a gift on her, which was the custom for fairies in those days and then she would be as perfect as you would possibly imagine”*. (83)

The fact that the baptismal sacrament took place means that the princess has acquired the divine grace that will enable her to develop all the good qualities and gifts bestowed upon her. But the most remarkable thing is that it is also for the princess the beginning of the long journey that was imposed on her by the fact that she was born a woman.

#### **4.1.5.3 Marriage**



In the same way, this story also alludes to marriage, another of the sacred sacraments of the church. However, it is worth noting that in this story there are two types of marriages. The first type of marriage is the well-known one in which the prince marries the princess after she wakes up because the enchantment that kept her asleep has ended. This union can be considered because they profess their love for each other.

“[...] *the High Chaplain married them in the castle chapel [...]*”. (93)

Following this union, the reader realises that Perrault uses a sexual ambiguity. In the story, as long as man and woman did not take possession of each other through sexual intercourse, they still lacked something to be able to speak of a definitive marriage (Knöpke, 2005). In other words, sexual intercourse was necessary for a marriage to be consecrated and valid. In the story, it is understood that such intercourse happens, because two years later, they have already had two children.

“[...] *he lived in this way with the Princess for more than two whole years, and had two children with her [...]*”. (93)

Even so, given the nature of the story, Perrault uses double entendre and ambiguity to refer to this sexual union.

“*They slept little [...]*”. (93)

We do not know whether the author is referring to the fact that they literally slept little because the princess had been asleep for a hundred years and did not need it, or because she and the prince talked all night, or because they consummated their marriage at that very moment.

The second type of marriage that can be seen is the so-called *marriage of convenience*. There are many types of marriages of convenience, but in this case, it refers to a marriage that took place in the story only for money. This union is between the prince's parents, in which it should be remembered that she is an ogress. In contrast to the previous example, it is not a union in which love has any place. It is not even known that they came from different races. The only thing that mattered was money, and the King only married her because she had more money than he did.

*“[...] she came from a family of ogres, and the King had married her only because of her great wealth.” (93)*

#### **4.1.5.4 Superstitions**

*“They went to all the spas to drink the waters there, gave presents to all the saints, went on pilgrimages, and always said their prayers [...]”.* (83)

Through this quote, it can be seen the several superstitions that *The Sleeping Beauty* depicts. Water is a part of the ritualistic purification found in the major religions. That is why drinking spa water became crucial for patients (Routh et al., 1996). If we go back to the late 16th and 17th centuries, it is worth mentioning that the baths of Bath, among others, in England were said to be blessed by God and, if drunk with sobriety and reverence, could be used for healing purposes. Similarly, it can be said that there is a strong connection between water and the feminine because of the large number of rivers that apparently derive their names from Celtic goddesses. The river Marne, for example, is said to derive its name from matron. The antiquity of these names is uncertain, but together they suggest a persistent primordial connection between water, the source of life and fertility, expressed through the personification of rivers in terms of mother goddess figures. (Bradley, 2012). Visiting the spas was not a common practice, usually those who did it were members of royal families, as not everyone could afford to make pilgrimages to specific bathing spots just to drink their waters. Of course, in this case the King and the Queen resorted to this practice because having offspring was what they wanted most of all.

When it comes to praying and giving gifts to the saints, Saint Philomena is worth mentioning. Legend has it that her parents had been unable to conceive a child until, after many prayers to the gods, they realised that they had no answer because they had been praying to the wrong gods. That is why they converted to Christianity and finally had a daughter whom they named Philomena, which means ‘lover of light’. (Vatican News, 2022). Knowing this, one might think that Philomena and Aurora are nemeses of each other, and that Aurora was not born until her parents began to make offerings to the gods as Philomena’s parents did. In fact, the name Aurora has a certain similarity in meaning to Philomena, as Aurora has to do with the light of day, just as Philomena is the lover of

light. Therefore, it can be thought that the King and Queen made their offerings to Saint Philomena, saint of fertility.

As is well known, this version of the fairy tale features seven fairy godmothers.

“[...] *all the fairies they could find in the country were to come (there were seven of them)*”. (83)

Through this quote it can be seen how superstitions also come down to almost imperceptible things, like numbers. The old credence in the order of numbers may have led to that belief in the power of numerical mysticism that has survived to this day, to the extent that people have a particular number as something that brings them luck. It can be seen that this number has many universalised meanings behind it. For example, in China, number seven is connected with human life. Because of its occult virtues, this number tends to bring all things into being. Even the Mayans believed in a Heaven divided into seven layers. In it, the woman occupied the third one and the man the fourth one, if united they produced a unit that added up to seven, a number that is endowed with the meaning of a new life (Schimmel, 1993). In *The Sleeping Beauty* we can see how the King and Queen chose seven fairies as godmothers. This is no coincidence, because after trying their best to become parents, the number seven would represent for them what they most wanted, a daughter.

#### **4.1.6 Fate vs. Free Will**

Besides being related to death, the spinning wheel is also challenging the role of fate versus the role of the free will. The princess is fated to prick herself with the spindle of a spinning wheel, her father tries his best to prevent it, but it ends up happening. Moreover, this does not only happen around the spinning wheel, but in general with the figure of the princess; not only is it imposed on her that she will die, but that it will be the son of a king who wakes her up after a hundred years. And it is not only the princess who weighs this, but also the kingdom. When the princess falls into a deep sleep, it is not only she who falls into a deep sleep due to the spell, but the whole kingdom as well. All at the

express wish of the fairies. It could be said, then, that the only ones who enjoy this free will are the fairies.

## **4.2 MOTIFS**

### **4.2.1 Spinning Wheel**

From all that is known from the analysis already done, the spinning wheel is always involved. This could lead to it being considered as symbol. As already noted in this work, it is known that the moment when the princess pricks herself with the spindle of the spinning wheel, means that it is the beginning of her menstruation. In other words, what turns her into a woman. This is related to the fact that, when a girl became a woman, the next step in her destiny, or in her path, was to get married and have children. Which leads us to think that the spinning wheel would also symbolise the male chauvinist yoke under which women are subjected.

### **4.2.2 Gold and gemstones**

*“[...] where a banquet was to be given in honour of the fairies. Each of them had her place laid magnificently at table with a solid gold case, which contained a knife, a fork, and a spoon made out of pure gold, and decorated with diamonds and rubies”. (83)*

That the King and Queen used gold as a precious metal as the main material for the fairy cases is no coincidence, because like the spinning wheel, it also has a hidden meaning. If we look at the word gold, we see that it comes from the Latin *Aurum*. So, we can say that its etymology seems to derive from *Aura* or *Aurora*, to warn that it is ‘a metal more radiant than the radiance of dawn’. (Gómez, 2008). In this version of the story, the name of the princess is not explicitly stated, but if we look at other versions, such as the Disney version, we see that the name of the princess is *Aurora*. In addition, the name of the first daughter of the prince and the princess is *Dawn*.

In addition to gold, the cases also contained precious stones such as rubies and diamonds. It is no coincidence that these two precious stones were chosen, for on the one

hand, the ruby is the precious stone of fertility as well as being a stone that maintains good health (Ametrano, 2005). In the same way, the diamond derives from the Greek “*adamas*” which means invincible (Mínguez, 1996). It could be said, then, that these choices are metaphors for what happens in the story. In honour of the Queen having overcome her fertility problems, the ruby was chosen. With respect to the diamond, as it signifies invincibility, it would be reflecting how the princess, despite the fact that the evil fairy wanted her to die, managed to avoid that end.

#### **4.2.3 Mythological creatures: fairies and ogres**

According to J.C Cooper in his book *Fairy Tales: Allegories of the Inner Life* (1983), also under Christian influence, fairies are attributed some association with angels and, in some tales, angels come to assume the role of fairies, but there is a static quality to them: they seem to lack moral or spiritual aspirations and show no change or progress in their character. In fairy tales they appear with a different naturalness and help those who are still in this world through supernatural aid. The supernatural in the fairy tale is the primary. The human in the fairy realm encounters supernatural forces that are always a manifestation of some power that is beyond the normal world and beyond the reach of his control. However, it is not the supernatural that distinguishes the fairy tale, but the introduction of forces outside the human race. The good fairies are there to help the afflicted who believe in them and invoke them. The bad fairies and ogres are always trying to create trouble and threaten the hero or heroine. They all use magic. In fact, there is no historical element in these stories, they unfold in a world of magic and fantasy. Humans, animals, birds, fish and insects all have the ability to transform, they can change their outward appearance without losing their true individual identity. Even the sun, moon, stars, waters and trees can be in a supernatural life. On the other hand, people and things can become inanimate for countless years and then regain their normal appearance and resume their life without having aged when the spell is broken.

In the same way, it could be said that the ogre is a motif that is also more than present in this story. As Mario Tomé Díez notes in *Charles Perrault and Michel Tournier: Configuration and survival of the symbol of the Ogre*. If we look at the etymology of the word *ogre*, we see that it comes from *orcus*, divinity of the underworld. It is given a diabolical and tenebrous dimension. This is why this creature becomes a symbol in which, in the traditional tale, it is endowed with terrifying power. After analysing this figure, we

can see that in this story, its main function is digestive, as it has a continuous desire to devour humans. In particular, children.

#### 4.2.4 The Morale

A fairy tale, like any other text, can be studied as a social practise that incorporates and transmits norms and values (Van Coillie, 2010). That is why you can find morals to learn something from. This is nothing new, as fables already existed in ancient Greece, in which moralities were used at the end of them. The author, Charles Perrault, in the same way, added one or two verses to each of his tales presenting a *moralité* (Van Coillie, 2010). Here, the author is merely making use of mimesis, a word originally referring to the physical act of miming or mimicking something (Potolsky, 2006), but, in this case a literary mimesis in which all the literary devices used in the past are rescued.

Having explained this, if we refer explicitly to the morale that *The Sleeping Beauty* presents at the end, it could be pointed out that nothing is lost by waiting to have sex, and that otherwise the beauty of waiting to have sex until marriage would become ordinary, something that would have no place in the good upbringing the princess would have received.

Knowing this, we should also pay attention to how, through possible hidden meanings, we can get to know some more moral values of this fairy tale.

The prince, although we know he is old enough for it, hides his marriage to the princess from his mother for fear of how she would react. Knowing that this story is mostly aimed at children, it could be said that a hidden moral is being introduced between its lines, which could be: one should not lie to one's parents.

Not leaving behind the hidden morals of this tale, it is worth highlighting how the author, behind the different ways of naming the characters, can denote one thing or another. In the case of Perrault's version, there are those with a positive connotation as opposed to those with a negative connotation.

In terms of those with a positive connotation we have the King and the Queen. These two characters are referred to in the same way throughout the story. They do not

vary. This may be because in the story they are the highest authority in the kingdom, they cannot be referred to in any other way, per protocol. This is telling the reader that they are both powerful characters, and putting them on the side of the good guys in the story.

Then there is the princess. Because she is the protagonist of the story, how the author refers to her varies slightly. In the first allusion to her, the author calls her *little Princess*, going from calling her just *Princess* to later referring to her as *sleeping Princess*. First of all, it is worth noting that the way Perrault refers to the princess throughout the story could mean that he is making a succession of the story itself. First, she is called *little* because she has just been born, then just *Princess* because she has grown up, and finally, *sleeping* because the destiny of the spell has been fulfilled. We see how the fact that she is referred to in these three ways is first affectionate, then neutral because like the King and Queen she must be called so by protocol and because she is also an authority in the kingdom, and finally *sleeping* so that the reader does not forget why she is so, and has compassion for her.

If we turn to the prince, we see that he is referred to in four different ways. The first, simply *Prince*, without any additives. It denotes the same as in the previous three cases, superiority and protocol. When he sets out on the adventure of finding out what is hidden in the abandoned castle, he refers to him as *young Prince*. This, because of the adventure he was about to undertake, is telling the reader that he is a young prince with enough energy and courage to face it and everything that is put in front of him. Also, you can see how he is referred to as *Your Highness*. This, as well as when he is called *Prince*, is denoting the protocol that is required of royalty. Therefore, he is being given power, something that automatically falls within the positive connotations, because like the King and Queen, if you have power, you are automatically good. Later, when the prince entered the silent castle, he is called *ardent Prince*. Ardent is an adjective related to courage and manliness. It is no coincidence that the author refers to him just at the moment when he is approaching the princess, because as a man of that time, he has to act as the alpha male in front of the woman. As a last example, he refers to the prince as *my prince*. He is called like that by the princess, this denotes that there is already a possession, a bond between them sentimentally, but also between royal houses.

With regard to fairies, we know very well when Perrault wants to refer to the good ones and when he does not. For this purpose, we find examples in which he addresses them as *fairy* or *good fairy*. Just as in the other examples, when *fairy* is used, it

is something neutral, the author in these cases only wants to refer to them. However, in the examples where *good fairy* is used, he is not only saying that these fairies are good, but he is also making it clear that there are bad fairies and that both need to be differentiated. There is no possibility of lumping them all together in the same group, even if they are fairies. We cannot forget that one of them tried to harm the princess.

If we take into account the fairy who put the curse on the princess, the terms with a negative connotation should be highlighted. As explained in the previous paragraph, when referring to fairies, it is clear who are the good ones and who are the bad ones. In this case, terms are used that denote negative things. The reader, automatically creates a suspicion towards the fairy who was not invited to the christening. But it does so even before it was known that she was going to cast the evil spell, as soon as she arrived at the christening. This is putting the reader on background to make sure they know who is good and who is bad. Adjectives such as *old* and *aged* are used to refer to her.

Continuing with the negative connotations, it is worth mentioning the ogress. Here we see a big difference between her and the Queen, the princess's mother. In this tale, the ogress is also a queen, in fact, she is referred to on several occasions as *Queen* or *Queen Mother*, which gives her an important place in the story. Even so, having this condition, the author also refers to her as *wicked Queen* and *ogress*, thus making the reader completely forget that she is also a queen, as he is automatically highlighting her strange and different condition, something that includes her among the bad characters.

Having made and presented this profound distinction where it can be clearly seen who are the good and who are the bad. This could allow the reader to extrapolate and draw the conclusion that it does not matter the status of the person, their race or even their age. Everyone should receive the same respect.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

By way of closing this work, it can be confirmed that, thanks to the analysis of the fairy tale entitled *The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood*, written by Charles Perrault in 1634, the mere existence of fairy tales already dictates the clear possibility of giving them a different approach to what every reader is used to when this particular literary genre is mentioned to them.



If we first consider this tale in terms of themes, it could be said that the series of events that take place in the story are all due, in context, to the education that women of the time received. Mythological elements belonging to the folklore to which this tale belongs, such as the ogres, are added, but the trail that the story follows is mainly around the princess and her figure as a woman. It is known that women were not independent, and that their figure was subordinate and conditioned to please men. One could even say that the other themes and even the topics are a result of this. If the education of women had been different, today we would know the figure and the story of Sleeping Beauty in a much different way, but as we know, this tale belongs to folklore, so it is more than evident that it is following the tradition.

This can be explained primarily by looking at, as indicated, the education of women with puberty and sexual relations, and religion as part of a whole. Women were brought up under the yoke of religion, so it was a moral necessity to wait to have sex until marriage, because the “rule” said that not to wait was something ordinary and lacking of beauty. That is why it is necessary for the spell to happen, because the long sleep in which the princess falls into symbolises the passage from girl to woman, something that is necessary to contract marriage and therefore to have sexual relations (we must not forget that to consummate the marriage it was necessary to have sexual relations) to fulfil the path that a girl had to follow from birth until she conceived children. Not forgetting baptism, another religious element that has to be performed in order to follow this course to the end. It is verified that everything is done in order to fulfil the path to follow.

Focusing only on marriage for a moment, one could dichotomise this tale as something ancient or conventional, but also something modern in that it would be a departure from the traditional that the reader is used to seeing. We can see how there is the prince-princess marriage, quite characteristic of fairy tales, but also marriages between humans and non-humans, something that introduces us to moral values little by little, because if we do not take into account that the prince's father marries the ogress for money, he is also marrying her. A barrier against racism would be broken, because race does not matter. This sense of denunciation is also fuelled by the author’s way of referring to the characters. He makes the reader believe that he is being discriminatory, but it is nothing more than a way of making it seem unethical.

One thing the author does hide is the fear of death, it is present throughout the story, but is never realised except when the she-wolf is devoured. This makes us see that

religion is still present and that only the good are spared from things they do not deserve. A clear example is that the princess, condemned to die, manages to get rid of the spell. The existence of spells leads us to the existence of fairies in this story, which makes us see the connection between religion and magic, as fairies are creatures that were related to angels. Today, belief in fairies is something that is attributed to superstition, something that in a way is also present in this tale and therefore also closely linked to religion. In this story, people pray to the saints and drink the waters of sacred places in order to conceive a life. We see how in the end, the purpose goes back to the beginning, to complete the step of having children.

That there is so much insistence on this makes us come to the conclusion that what we are told that the life lived by fairy tale princesses is the best and the right thing to do, dictates that it is just that. Because no one is taking the princess's opinion into account. This is where the spinning wheel motif comes in. The King had all the spinning wheels destroyed so that the princess would not find one, but in the end the princess' fate was already sealed and could not be changed. This is a metaphor for the life of the princess, after her long sleep she would wake up, because she had to follow her destiny; to follow the path imposed on women, making them lack free will and choice. She is nothing but a heroine with the virtue of patience (Zipes, 2000). No one asked the princess if marrying and having children was her choice. So, the spinning wheel would be symbolising the male chauvinist yoke under which women are subjected to.

After analysing all the intricacies of this story and compiling it in this section, it can be seen firstly that the story clearly has a narrative character that follows its introduction, middle and end. But not only this, because secondly, it could be said that, as it is a story with hidden meanings, the reader must read it with an open mind in order to find them. Fairy tales are attributed to children, so perhaps if the book is read by a child, they will only notice the plot of the story. But, when the reader is older and has the capacity to think critically, he or she would be able to find meanings beyond the "*and they all lived happily ever after*" presented in this paper. This therefore would make it a story also intended for adults. In fact, Perrault is regarded as an author who transformed all folk tales with superstitions and magic into moralistic tales for adults rather than for children. It demonstrates modernism in literature. (Zipes, 2000). This story could be compared to Saint Exupéry's *The Little Prince*, since it is the book par excellence

dedicated to children and adults in Universal Literature, but in reality, it could be similar to all types of literature, since the essence of it is that it is an art free of interpretation.

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