



## **Bakalářská práce**

# **Use of classical fairy tales themes in contemporary Young Adult literature and analysis of such in The Lunar Chronicles by Marissa Meyer**

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## Zadání bakalářské práce

# Use of classical fairy tales themes in contemporary Young Adult literature and analysis of such in The Lunar Chronicles by Marissa Meyer

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## Zásady pro vypracování:

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá tematikou klasických pohádek a zkoumá způsob, jakým je tato tematika zpracovávána anglicky píšícími autory literatury pro mládež v současné době. Teoretická část práce vyzdvihuje důležitost klasických pohádek z hlediska psychologického dopadu na čtenáře, který je v této části diskutován. Dále tato část předkládá nástin, jakým způsobem s tématy charakteristickými pro klasické pohádky pracují současní anglicky píšící autoři literatury pro mládež. Jmenovitě rozebírá způsob, jakým autoři literatury pro mládež tak činí za účelem reflektování a adekvátního zpracování palčivých problémů současnosti, které mají dopad na zamýšlenou cílovou skupinu čtenářů. Praktická část práce nabízí přehled o tom, jak s tematikou klasických pohádek v jednotlivých dílech populární série Měsíční kroniky nakládá spisovatelka Marissa Meyerová. Komparační metodou jsou analyzovány pohádkové postavy a jejich osudy v příbězích Meyerové v porovnání s jejich klasickými předlohami. Daná analýza také řeší, jakým způsobem autorka skrze upravené příběhy diskutuje problémy současné společnosti. S ohledem na přehled významu klasických pohádek pro psychologický rozvoj čtenáře v teoretické části si práce klade za cíl vyzdvihnout přínos, který reflexe takových problémů má nejen pro mladé čtenáře, ale všeobecně pro celou společnost.

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## **Anotace**

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá tematikou pohádek a jakým způsobem je prezentována v retellinžích pohádek anglicky píšících autorů literatury pro mládež (young adult). Cílem práce je předložit přehledovou práci ukazující na pozitivní vliv pohádek na dětskou psychiku a způsob, jakým je tento pozitivní vliv přenesen pomocí retellingů do literatury pro starší čtenáře, primárně adolescenty. V teoretické části jsou rozebrány klasické pohádky, jejich význam a vliv na psychiku dítěte. Je provedeno porovnání žánru klasické pohádky se žánrem retellingů pro mládež ve stylových a tematických aspektech. Jsou představena témata a motivy jednotlivých klasických pohádek a je zkoumáno, zda a v jaké podobě se objevují v převyprávěných verzích těchto pohádek v retellinžích literatury pro mládež.

Praktická část prezentuje zkoumané aspekty teoretické práce na příkladu úspěšné sci-fi série Měsíční kroniky od autorky Marissy Meyer, která se skládá ze čtyř pohádkových retellingů, s důrazem na první knihu Cinder. Komparační metodou je ukázáno, jaká pohádková témata a poselství autorka Marissa Meyer ve svých dílech použila, jak s nimi pracuje a jaký přínos mají pro čtenáře jejích knih.

**Klíčová slova:** Klasická pohádka, Retelling, Literatura pro mládež, Psychologie, Marissa Meyer

## **Abstrakt**

This bachelor's thesis deals with the themes of classic fairy tales and how they are presented in retellings by English-speaking authors of young adult literature. The thesis aims to provide an overview demonstrating the positive influence of fairy tales on children's psyche and how this positive influence is transferred through retellings into literature for older readers, primarily targeting adolescents. The theoretical part examines classical fairy tales, what they are, and what impact they have on a child's psyche. The genre of classical fairy tales is compared with the genre of retellings for young adults regarding writing style and themes. The topics and motifs of individual classical fairy tales are introduced, and whether and in what form they appear in retold versions of these fairy tales in retellings of literature for young adults is explored.

The practical part presents the examined aspects of the theoretical work on the example of the successful sci-fi series "The Lunar Chronicles" by author Marissa Meyer, consisting of four fairy tale retellings, focusing primarily on the first book, "Cinder." Using a comparative method, it is shown what fairy tale themes and messages Meyer used in her books, how she works with them, and what benefits they have for the readers of her novels.

**Key words:** Classic fairy tale, Retelling, Young adult literature, Psychology, Marissa Meyer

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# 1 Introduction

Young adult fiction is a genre of literature that has been popular among readers of various age groups for many years. In the Czech Republic, for example, it is gaining more and more popularity. Young adult literature currently seems exceptionally trendy among teenagers, especially girls, in the Czech Republic. Such is suggested by, for instance, the annual festival of young adult literature called the Humbookfest, which is organised under the auspices of Albatros Media a.s. The organisers claim, this festival is Central Europe's largest festival of young adult literature. At Humbookfest, authors of young adult literature, editors, translators and bloggers from the Czech Republic and abroad perform in talks and workshops. Among the foreign authors who have attended the festival are, for example, Chinese-American fantasy writer R.F. Kuang, world-known Christopher Paolini, Canadian fantasy writer Sebastien de Castell, or Australian sci-fi writer Jay Kristoff.

In the past ten years, there has been a significant surge in the popularity of revisiting fairytales in a form of fairy tale retellings, leading them to be recognized as a distinct sub-category. The technique of infusing a touch of fantasy or science fiction into famous fairytales has yielded remarkable outcomes for various writers, such as Marissa Meyer, the New York Times-bestselling author of *The Lunar Chronicles*. In this series, Meyer puts a dystopian sci-fy spin on classic fairy tales. Meyer, as well as other authors of young adult fairy tale retellings may choose to write about a classic fairy tale with a modern twist for several reasons. Firstly, it is perhaps easier to build a story on an existing foundation than to invent something from scratch. However, even that can be a complicated matter. Being able to grow up a character in a way that appeals to a teenage audience is no effortless task. To make the plot so that the readers recognize their fairy tale, but still surprises and keeps them entertained.

Secondly, humans are creatures endowed with a greater or lesser degree of sentimentality (Rorty 1998). They have an emotional relationship, primarily positive, with the things we grew up with and adored (TV series, movies, fashion, written stories, etc.). When an author takes a story/character with which readers already have a close positive relationship and promises to make it even better, to give it new adventures with more elaborate or slightly darker plots, people will likely want to try reading their work. They want to relive their favourite character's story, especially when the story is adapted to keep them excited, even as adults.

And lastly, fairy tales are full of important messages and themes that are always relevant. If an author wants to convey an idea or moral to his reader through his work, fairy tales give him the ideal bridge to achieve this.

The aim of this thesis is to present an overview study that examines how and which themes and messages in classic fairy tales are adopted and executed in retellings by contemporary English-writing authors of young adult literature. The thesis also focuses on how adopting and developing fairy tale themes into young adult books may benefit adolescent readers and expand their minds.

The theoretical part of the thesis presents an overview of how classic fairy tales contribute to the development of children's minds, it also discusses their impact on children's psyche, and why it is beneficial for them to be told to or read by children. It explores whether fairy tales, in their adapted form as retellings for older readers, have a similar impact on young adults. The thesis documents the commonalities and differences between fairy tales and retellings for young adults. Lastly, the theoretical part provides an overview of the themes found in classic fairy tales. The goal is to find which themes retelling authors adopt, how they are developed and expanded upon, and how it may benefit young adult readers, showing said on specific examples of English-writing authors and their works. Since the focus of the thesis is on contemporary authors, the majority of the discussed were published after 2010.

The practical part of the thesis analyses how the author Marissa Meyer, known predominantly for the discussed popular *Lunar Chronicles* series, deals with the themes of classic fairy tales. Using Meyer's work as a specific example, the practical part seeks to demonstrate how the concepts discussed in the theoretical part of the thesis might be used. The comparative method is employed to document the themes in the fairy tales that Meyer used as inspiration for her works, as well as their utilization in *The Lunar Chronicles* series, with a primary focus on the first book, *Cinder*, whose themes and messages continue and resonate throughout the subsequent volumes. Furthermore, moral related to contemporary issues, added by the author herself, are also discussed, demonstrating how fairy tale stories can serve as a bridge to essential and relevant topics in today's society.

## 2 Theoretical part

### 2.1 Definitions of fundamental concepts

This chapter will discuss three fundamental concepts, which are the core of this thesis and which the work will further address. The essence of the chapter is to explain these concepts so that they are further clear to the readers and to provide an insight into what the thesis deals with.

#### 2.1.1 A classic fairy tale

A fairy tale is a genre of folk literature, a prose narrative genre with a fictional plot and a protagonist who represents goodness, wisdom, honesty, hard work, cleverness and strength and other positive human qualities and ideals. The hero goes through difficult trials, in which he always wins, and in the end, he is rewarded. Fairy tales are divided into fantastic, magical, legendary, novelistic and artificial (Karpatský 1982, p. 398).

The existence of classic fairy tales has persisted in society for centuries and millennia and are passed down in various forms for generations. They are based on folk artistic creativity and folklore and reflect the human experience (Černoušek 2019, p. 11). Fairy tales have never disappeared despite the centuries of their existence and predictions about their end by some of their critics. It's known that one reason for such persistence is that they discuss issues not conditioned by a specific era—for example, the issues that can arise in a relationship between children and their parents or siblings, which exist in today's society, the same as in medieval times. Thus, children and adults have been able to identify with fairy tale heroes for centuries (Černoušek 2019, p. 11). One instance of an always relevant problem of somebody in every society is the need to deal with the loss of a loved one. That is reflected at the beginning of many classic fairy tales by the death of one of the main protagonist's parents. Such stories are always relevant. The human individual could experience this loss in the 18th century as well as today.

Psychologist Marie-Luise Von Franz, who studied fairy tales and their impact on children's psyche, believes that fairy tales are the universal language of humanity. People of all cultures and races understand the stories of classic fairy tales. Their messages are clear and straightforward to understand. These are precisely the kinds of stories a developing child's mind needs. In the simplicity of their plots, the child will best understand the difference between good and evil (Von Franz 1996, p. 24).

Fairy tales have undergone countless transformations on their journey throughout time. Every human era adapted fairy tales for its best interests. For example, fairy tales went from pagan stories to tales full of Christian messages and values. Initially dark stories for adults became a tool to entertain and educate children on moral principles (Zipes 2006, p. 41).

### **2.1.2 Retelling**

A retelling is a story where the author takes some existing tale and creates a new version of it that preserves the core of the original or some of its aspects. One of most common retellings are of fairy tales or myths. A retelling can focus on a story of a side character from the original and make him/her the main hero/ine, or it can depict a story about the origin of the villain. For example, the novel *Stepsister* (2019) by Jennifer Donnelly can be mentioned, which portrays the story of Cinderella's stepsister, or *Sea Witch* (2018) by Sarah Henning that focuses on how the Sea Witch from Hans Christian Anderson's classic tale *The Little Mermaid* becomes the villainess readers know from the original.

A retelling can present a modernization of the original story as it can transfer the original to a more contemporary setting. *These Violent Delights* (2020) by Chloe Gong gives us the story of Romeo and Juliet set in 1926 Shanghai. Instead of two hostile families, readers experience a war between two gangs with a magical twist. Moreover, a retelling can also completely change genre of the original. An example of such reworking is Marissa Meyer's *The Lunar Chronicles*, a series part of which this thesis examines further on, which turned classic fairy tales into sci-fi works for young adults, or as the author herself calls them on her website in the section of FAQ, space opera. In this series the readers can find Cress (character based on Rapunzel) orbiting the earth in a satellite, Cinder (Cinderella) who has a cybernetic leg, or Winter (Snow White) that lives on the moon.

### **2.1.3 Young adult literature**

Young adult literature is literature aimed at readers of adolescent age. The target group of readers is mainly that between 12 and 18 years of age (Peterson 2018), but a number of people who read young adult literature are also new adults or older than the specified age group. A survey in 2012 by Bowker Market Research showed that 55% of people buying books from the young adult category are adults from 18 and up, and that 28% of buyers are actually even readers between 30 to 44. When asked, 78% of questioned stated that they purchase books for their reading and not for someone else (Publishers Weekly 2012). Thus, despite the fact that the young adult category is originally intended for readers under the age of 18, the actual age of the

readers varies from young adolescents to the New adult group, which grew up on literature for young adults and continues to read it, up to older adults over the age of 30.

Among the features of young adult literature are main protagonists who fall into the same age category as the targeted readers. The age of the heroes and heroines in these books is thus mostly around 16 and 17. Another significant characteristic of YA books is their themes which copy the themes that intertwine with the adolescence of each individual. Stories in young adult fiction focus on the struggles a person faces while growing up. Common themes are love, friendships, relationships with family members, searching for identity, and a place in society and the world (Wells 2003, p. 7).

Young adult literature consists of diverse genres and can be written in different styles. Most common genres are fantasy, romance, contemporary fiction or dystopian (WH Smith 2016). Numerous young adult novels have been made into movies or TV series. The most known adaptations of children's or young adult fiction today are Harry Potter, Twilight, and Hunger Games films. Amongst the recent adaptations of young adult fiction can also be named The Shadow and Bone series, or the franchise To All the Boys, as well as the upcoming film *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snake*, which is the prequel to the Hunger Games trilogy.

## **2.2 Psychological impact of fairy tales**

In order to be able to discuss the benefits when the authors of young literature take on fairy-tale themes, the positive contribution of fairy tales to children's psyche must first be mentioned. Bruno Bettelheim, an Austrian-American psychologist and psychoanalyst dealing mainly with the issue of child psychology, in his book *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (1976) states the following:

“...what experiences in child’s life are most suited to promote his ability to find meaning in his life, to endow life in general with more meaning [...] second in importance is our cultural heritage [...] In all these and many other respects of entire “children’s literature”- with rare exceptions- nothing can be as enriching and satisfying to child and adult alike as the folk fairy tale.” (2010, pp. 10-11)

As an educator and therapist of severely disturbed children, Bettelheim started searching for ways to allow them to gain knowledge and experiences to help them find a life's meaning. Besides the impact of family or other caregivers on the child, he concluded that classic fairy tales are the best way to stimulate a child's imagination, clarify emotions, develop the intellect, take their difficulties seriously and offer solutions to their anxieties. Fairy tales encourage the

child to believe in a better future because their heroes can overcome all problems in the end (Bettelheim 2010, p. 11).

Fairy tales also have an informative function for children. They inform them that hardships and tests await them in real life same as it is for the fairytale heroes. No task is accomplished without the effort they must make to complete it successfully. Efforts in fairy tales end in success, which is accepted by the child who identifies with the protagonist in the fairy tale. The stories inform about the possibility of loss and pain. They inform that life is not always ideal, but in the end, everything can improve, and every loss and evil in a person's life can be overcome (Bettelheim, 2010, p. 16). For example, the loss of a loved one is a motif that appears in most classic fairy tales, many of which begin with the loss of one of the parents. Children who have gone through a similar loss can relate to the main character, who experiences this loss. In similar manner, children experiencing other hardships such as mistreatment by parents or step-parents can relate to fairy tale heroes who experience the same. Furthermore, together with the fairy-tale character, a child experiences a story in which the hero achieves happiness despite the tragic beginning (Bettelheim, 2010, p. 15). For example, Hansel and Gretel become rich and find their way back home to a loving father, Snow White finds love and deliverance in the form of dwarf friends and then a prince, Cinderella's wish comes true, and the list goes on. Such fairy tales give children hope for a better future, comfort and relaxation.

Other researches have recognized that classic fairy tales might have several meanings for children. Czech psychologist and pedagogue Michal Černoušek, in his book *Děti a svět pohádek* (1990), discusses various benefits that fairy tales have on children's psyche, in many respects coinciding with Bettelheim. One of them is stimulating the imagination and curiosity of children. Consequently, children's intelligence and cognitive functions develop further through these characteristics (Černoušek 2019, p. 17). Fairy tales help to develop children's imagination, which gives rise to creativity, thanks to which humanity invents technology, works of art, scientific discoveries, innovative solutions to complex problems and advances. Fairy tales also have the opposite function. They allow child's imaginations to be lived out so they no longer burden their minds. If, for example, children have a rival relationship with a sibling who does not agree with them about something and thus feel frustrated about it, they can externalize these rival tendencies in the relevant fairy tale, such as Cinderella (Černoušek 2019, p. 20).

Another function of fairy tales is foreclosure. Fairy tales can provide an escape from reality. They are exciting and often amusing. Therefore, children like to read and listen to them. Indeed, they attract children's minds with their magical motifs and character's supernatural

abilities. For proper mental development, children need not only to receive information and develop their minds at school through learning but also to have entertainment in the form of games or stories. Reading fairy tales and playing games, which are the main activities of a preschool child and remain an essential activity also of a child of younger school age, are a practical way for the development of mental and physical skills. They help children learn certain skills or relax, and can also have a psychotherapeutic effect (Langmeier, Krejčířová, 2006, p. 98).

Fairy tales help the proper development of emotional experience and moral feelings. Children think in concrete images. Abstract thinking is still complex for them to understand (Vágnerová 2000, pp. 102–103). If we wanted to explain the difference between good and evil to a child only in abstract terms, s/he would not understand it. That is where the fairy tales come into play. The child can acquire an essential awareness of morals and values through classic fairy tales. These fairy tales depict good and evil deeds in images comprehensible to a child's mind (Černoušek 2019, p. 22). In fairy tales, it is clear which behaviour is to be considered wrong and which is noble. If a person commits an evil deed, just like the negative characters from classic stories, punishment follows. Classic fairy tales, in particular, depict punishments quite dire, but quite often, it is the villains' own actions that backfire. An example is the witch who wanted to bake Hansel and Gretel, but in the end, she herself is baked alive in the oven (Černoušek 2019, p. 33).

Swiss Jungian psychologist Marie-Louise von Franz, who studied, among other things, analytical psychology and archetypal psychology in fairy tales, in her book *The Interpretation of Fairy Tales* (1996), analyse fairy tale heroes as black-and-white characters, that bring order to the chaos of emotions and anxiety that children can experience. The characters are noticeably legible, predictable, and straightforward. Evil is depicted by characters that are evil at first glance - devils, witches or dragons. Conversely, goodness is represented by princesses, princes or magical godmothers. Characters are easily comparable in their apparent differences. One sister is ugly and mean, and the other is beautiful and kind. One brother is foolish, and the other is smart (Marie-Luise Von Franz 1996, p. 24). Therefore, if classic fairy tales are written to reflect the child's mind and how it functions by the clear polarization of good and evil, concreteness and animism, through them, parents can find a way to understand their children. It could be said that fairy tales are a bridge to understanding children's thinking (Černoušek 2019, p. 10).

Fairy tales contain instructions for solving problems. They are not instructions for specific situations but rather an inspiration for a problem-solving approach. Hansel and Gretel show us the importance of cooperation between siblings and creative solutions to problem situations. In other stories, the main character gets help from a magical figure by, for example, sharing a piece of bread with an old man on their journey. Such stories teach children to act ethically and show them that they can get help with solving a problem from someone whom they have been treating kindly.

This leads to ethical and moral ideals that children take from classic fairy tales. The child imagines himself in the main characters of fairy tales and sees in them his ideal self. Therefore, fairy tales usually present positive characters who are hardworking, honest and determined. Quite often, however, the ideal is portrayed as a goal of striving and not a gift with which a person is born. A contradictory positive character can be the one who starts the story with a negative trait, such as laziness (for example, the lazy Honza, Heinz, Jack, Ivan). However, throughout the story, he usually gets rid of this characteristic and performs heroic deeds. Accordingly, children see that it is okay not to be perfect and to be able to behave well all the time. However, it is also suitable to work on yourself and try to be closer to the ideals of fairy tales.

### **2.2.1 Fairytales today**

Fairy tales tell little about the peculiarities and conditions of modern society because they arose long before it. Instead, we can learn from them about general human problems and their solutions. Fairy tales, for a child growing up in modern society, however, can be more beneficial in certain aspects than for a child growing up before the industrial revolution. Children no longer live in extended families in tight-knit communities that provide them with a sense of security. They live in big cities surrounded by the unknown. It is very beneficial to show children fairy-tale heroes who go into the world independently and find their path and place in society. At the beginning of their stories, the heroes may feel lonely. However, along the way, they will establish relationships with other characters or elements that will help them on their journey, and eventually, the heroes will reach their happy endings. These stories give children hope and help them deal with fear and uncertainty (Zipes 2006, p. 79).

Nowadays, many parents try to protect their children from dreadful aspects of life and, therefore, from fairy tale's dark sections. However, if we present children with only pleasant pictures and ideas, we do not develop their minds and understanding comprehensively. Many of today's children's stories do not mention ageing, death, and human existence limitations.



Nevertheless, children often struggle with these conceptions, they are aware of them and are unsure how to deal with these issues internally, and classic fairy tales show them that they are not alone (Černoušek 2019, p. 21). The fight against adversity is inevitable in life. Everyone has to deal with some problems and pains. Fairy tales manifest that there are problems, but we can overcome these obstacles if we do not avoid the struggle but face it. As well as a fairy tale hero, a child can manage to end up as a winner of its story (Bettelheim, 2010, p. 19).

Today's society wants children to believe that people are all inherently good. The problem is that children realize that they themselves do not always behave well and according to the rules. However, if we only present them with perfect models from fairy tales, where the main characters are morally perfect, as it is in some modern fairy tales, children will feel that they are someone unnatural. It is better to show children that being naughty is part of life, but that evil deeds will be punished. The villain at the end of the fairy tale is always punished (Bettelheim, 2010, p. 14).

Present-day fairytales have taken a different form how our ancestors knew them. Originally oral and subsequently written stories are now being transformed into digital form. This way of depicting fairytale heroes is imprinted on society and leaves behind an indelible mark (Zipes 2006, p. 79). For instance, few people today think of Snow White as anything other than how the Walt Disney studio depicted her. On the one hand, the digitization of fairy tales enables their presentation and preservation in the new technological era of humanity. However, visual processing of a story, which the child does not have to imagine because s/he already sees it adapted by someone else, deprives the child of the opportunity to develop his imagination to a certain extent. The child does not have to try to imagine what the fairytale characters or their world look like; it only takes over the form what someone else gives him (Černoušek 2019, pp. 35-38).

### **2.3 Comparison of genre elements in classic fairy tales and young adult retellings**

Young adult literature is similar to children's literature in several aspects. It is an intermediate stage between children's literature and literature intended for adult readers. With young adult literature, an adolescent can smoothly move from children's stories to slightly more serious themes and more complex plots that are more suited to his current stage of psychological development. At the same time, young adult literature can be more attractive to teenagers in terms of its themes and writing style than literature for adults (Kitchener 2017). Likewise,

young adult retellings share common elements with classic fairy tales but are transformed to make the stories more suitable for adolescents.

Furthermore, this part of the thesis outlines how contemporary authors of young adult literature work with the main characteristics of classic fairy tales they use as a template for their novels. The following subsections present common elements of fairy tales and young adult literature that contemporary authors share and build on and how they differ. In addition, the following subsections add further information about the retelling genre and its influence on young adult readers.

### **2.3.1 Common elements**

In *The Oxford Companion to fairy tales* (2015), many distinguished professors of literature, authors and historians have put together a study of the history of classic fairy tales from their oral transmission to the first written versions to the present day. At the same time, they tried to define the indefinable classic fairy tales, as the book itself states, and to find their common elements. Certain elements determining a classic fairy tale also coincide with how the authors of today's retellings of young adult literature proceed in writing their books. Those elements that a fairy tale story should have are: the inclusion of fantasy elements including some supernatural challenges, the story being fictional, being told for the entertainment of the reader, and having a moral message. Another element defining a fairy tale, according to *The Oxford Companion to fairy tales*, is a happy ending. This aspect would also correspond with how most young adult retellings are written but is not included in this study due to its contradictory aspect. Classic Fairy tales were told and written in various interpretations, not ending happily in each. For instance, Little red riding hood ends happily in the version of Brothers Grimm but has a dark and deterrent ending in Charles Perrault's version.

The first aspect readers would find in retellings for young adults corresponding with classic fairy tales is the inclusion of fantasy elements. Although the retelling often changes the original environment in which the story of the fairy tale takes place, it does not lose its original magical core. The stories of the retellings often take place in supernatural worlds with magical systems and creatures. Even if the story is set in the real world, it does not lack certain magical elements. In the retelling of Beauty and the Beast *Beastly* (2009), by American author Alex Flin, set in present-day New York, a lot was changed from the original version, but the magical curse remains. Today's young adult retellings fulfil the element of magic. However, there are few exceptions. As example, *Paper Princess* (2016), by Canadian author Elle Kennedy and Korean-American author Jen Frederick, is a really loose adaptation of Cinderella set in the

modern world. The reader will not find any fantasy elements in this book, despite it being a retelling of a classic fairy tale.

Secondly, young adult retellings and classic fairy tales are both fictional. Neither tells about the life of a real person or event. Even when the story is set in the real world, its characters and plot are fictional. Following this comes another aspect - being told for the reader's entertainment. Fairy tale retellings and classic fairy tales not following any historical or authentic event are also not trying to educate about history or significant figures. It is not even a travelogue or any other non-fiction genre of literature. The primary function of retellings is entertainment, additionally with some moral or another message, most often copying the one in the source material.

In the same way, as classic fairy tales, young adult literature has a formative aspect for teenagers. One of the most important aspects is the possibility for the readers to identify with characters and develop a positive self-concept. Young adult literature often presents a variety of characters that readers can see as role models or identify with, characters who think similarly or go through similar difficulties as the reader (Kokesh, Sternadori 2015, p. 155). Consequently, young adult literature can help young people better understand their feelings and experiences and contribute to forming their personalities. Furthermore, reading young adult literature focusing on different characters, their adventures, and their emotional experiences can help adolescent people develop empathy. Readers can empathize with characters' situations and emotions, allowing them to better understand and sympathize with real-life people (Coste 2010, pp. 95-107).

Additionally, Young adult literature, particularly genres such as retelling, fantasy, and science fiction, can stimulate the imagination and creativity of young readers and even older ones. Stories and various worlds in retellings can inspire new ideas, expand imaginations, and encourage creative thinking. Likewise, classic fairy tales evoke children's creativity and imagination (Akinchina 2021).

Finally, the common aspect that will be further discussed in this thesis are the themes that appear in the stories of classic fairy tales and which are transferred to retellings by the authors of young adult literature. The themes such as the possessiveness in the form of an overprotecting mother in Rapunzel, or dysfunctional parents and cooperation with peers in Hansel and Gretel, are not lost on the way to retellings. On the contrary, they tend to be more elaborate, and authors of young adult retellings devote more time to them in their stories. As an illustration, in the retelling of the story of Hansel and Gretel *Sweetly* (2011) by the American

author Jackson Pearce, the author focuses on describing the loss of a close family member and additionally survivor syndrome in much more depth with detailed illustrations of the character's feelings. Most retelling authors take the fairy tale's essential themes and expand on them in the language closer to one of the young adults (Barber, Mather 2014).

### **2.3.2 Differences**

Authors of fairy tale retellings in children's literature create their stories by taking the original classic fairy tale's primary storyline and transforming it into a complex story, the core of which is the original tale. Still, it is no longer a black-and-white presentation of the original fairy tale problem. On the contrary, in the retelling, it is common that the original message of the original is changed and replaced by another. The story about Snow White by the American author Soman Chainani in his book *Beasts and Beauty: Dangerous Tales* (2021) can be used as an example. In his work he retells classical fairy tales, choosing themes more suitable to modern society and what is currently being dealt with in the world. The classic themes of Snow White as a mother's jealousy of a teenage stepdaughter or the narcissistic personality of the Evil Queen are overshadowed by more modern topics. Chainani's Black-Skinned Snow White is a story of racial hatred and women emancipation with a strong female character who outwits a witch without the help of a prince and become a strong queen.

As mentioned in previous chapters, classic fairy tales contain lessons, archetypes, and representations of good and evil in the purest and most understandable form. They must be written in this style so that they are adequate for the understanding of younger children. Young adult literature works with an older audience, so it can afford to have less clear moral boundaries in the stories. In fairy tales, good and evil are clear; on the contrary, young adult novels usually represent complex characters, whether it is a positive or negative person. The antagonistic character often gets their own backstory by the author – an explanation of the character's origin, a tale presenting why the person became a villain. Marissa Meyer's books parts of which will be further discussed in the second part of this thesis, dedicated one additional novel *Fairest* (2015) to the Villain of her *The Lunar Chronicles* book series. Just as young adults have chaotic feelings and are searching for who they are (Jedlička 2017, p. 192), also do characters from young adult books. They are complex and have developed personalities. They are often disturbed by some trauma and are searching for themselves. What is right and evil is usually hidden to create tension. Children want to identify with the good and winning side that they like. On the contrary, a teenage person is more likely to identify with a misunderstood outsider (Jedlička 2017, p. 188).

Young adult literature presents more complicated worlds than fairy tale worlds. While most classic fairy tales take place in an undefined location and time, such as an indefinite forest or castle, in a land far, far away, once upon a time, a long time ago or ever after, the setting of young adult retellings tends to be much more elaborate. Young adult book worlds are often described in detail. They have entire magic systems or added creatures if they fall into the fantasy genre. For instance, the retelling of Beauty and the Beast *A Court of Thorns and Roses* (2015), by the American author Sara J. Mass, presents a complex world that cannot be found in any fairy tale version of Beauty and the Beast. Many authors of retellings provide a precise timeline of the world in which they set their stories, with events that affect the development of the characters. American author A. G. Howard in her book *Splintered* (2013), a retelling of the story of Alice in Wonderland, describes precisely what time and society the main character is in. It also maps the main character's family history, which complements the meaning of her journey. In the book *The School for Good and Evil* (2013), Sonnan Chainani describes entire generations of the development of schools in which the stories of the main characters and retold characters from classic fairy tales take place.

Contemporary authors of young adult literature and retellings are experimenting with new ways of writing a story, which reflect more the life of today's youth and which we would not find in classic fairy tales. These include, for example, communication between two characters in the form of SMS correspondence. We can notice it, for instance, in the retelling of Alice in Wonderland, *Alice in Zombieland* (2012) by the American author Gena Showalter.

Another contradiction that the reader may notice when reading contemporary novels, not only within the framework of young adult literature, is the point of view of the narration. The er-form is typical in classic fairy tales and a significant part of children's literature. We read with the help of an omniscient narrator who guides the person through the story. In literature for young adults and adults, on the other hand, we can frequently meet the ich-form and the story narrated by the main character or characters. When a reader can be present in the tale through the eyes of the character, they can identify with the person which the story is about more.

When comparing the modern retellings of classic fairy tales with their originals, the reader may notice another contrast. There are not so many anthropomorphic animals or magical anthropomorphic objects in the stories as are in fairy tales, where it is frequent (Djumaeva 2023, p. 4). In only a few versions of the young adult retellings, a person would be able to find the main character accompanied by talking horses or hard-working turtle-doves, even the evil wolf

from *The Red Riding Hood* is usually a human or someone who can turn into an animal form (*For the Wolf* by Hannah Whitten, *Red Wolf* by Rachel Vincent, *Scarlet* by Marissa Meyer and more). Animism and attributing human qualities to inanimate things is part of children's fantasy and natural to child thinking (Černoušek 2019, p. 10). Young adults already have a different level of understanding, and these elements recede into the background. In the same way, we see a decrease in talking animal helpers and enemies in young adult literature. Although, there are also exceptions. One such is the robot Iko, who accompanies the Cinderella character in *The Lunar Chronicles* by Marissa Meyer. The robot has human characteristics and feelings that are unusual for a machine. Iko was so popular among readers that she got her own story in the form of a two-part graphic novel.

## **2.4 Fairy Tale Themes in YA Retellings**

The previous chapters of the thesis analysed the influence of classic fairy tales and their themes on children's readers. Themes appearing in fairy tales have an essential impact on children's psyche and can help them overcome their real-life troubles. In the same way, these fairy tale themes translated into books for older audiences can influence the mindset of young adults and help them deal with a reality in which they feel lost.

Young adult authors take a fairy tale motif, something that a teenager is very familiar with, something they identified with as a child, that gave them a sense of wholeness and helped them understand the world around them. They adapt that motif for older readers and add other themes to it. And just as it did for children before, the newly created retelling helps teenagers understand the world and themselves, using something that already worked in their childhood. The original developer of the child's personality evolves and becomes more complex on the pages of novels but occupies the same role (Ivey, Johnston 2013, p. 263).

Countless themes in various classic fairy tales help develop a child's mind or overcome or understand a difficult period. Each fairy tale can offer something different to the reader or listener. This chapter will focus only on specific examples of the most famous fairy tales of the Western world. With each classic fairy tale, retellings by English-writing authors will be introduced, in which the writers transferred original themes from the given fairy tale into their works. What themes the retelling author used and how will be further examined. The aim is that the books further compared are contemporary, so most of the studied novels were released after 2010.

The themes appearing in classic fairy tales presented in this chapter are taken from the works of the American psychoanalyst, professor of psychology and director of the Orthogenic School for Children with Emotional Problems Bruno Bettelheim (*The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, 1976), from the Czech psychologist and pedagogue Michal Černoušek (*Děti a svět pohádek*, 1990), the American psychologist and psychotherapist Dave S Wallace (*Story meanings: An analysis of Rapunzel*, 2018 ), and the British pedagogue Oliver Tearle (*A Summary and Analysis of the Rapunzel Fairy Tale*, 2017).

#### **2.4.1 Hansel and Gretel**

In the story of Hansel and Gretel appear themes such as poverty, childhood anxiety associated with dysfunctional parents, the trauma of abandonment, temptation, critical thinking, cooperation with peers, love of siblings, independence, children's natural urges like hunger, material excess vs lack, the dual aspect of mother and home.

The fairy tale about Hansel and Gretel is one of the less adapted fairy tales by authors of retellings for young adults. Fairy tales such as Cinderella or Snow White are much more prevalent in this regard. For example, on the world's largest site for readers and book recommendations - Goodreads, if an interested party searches for retellings of Hansel and Gretel, they will get a list of 20 books. If they enter retellings of Cinderella or Beauty and the Beast in the search, they will get over 300 various novels. And some of the young adult stories of Hansel and Gretel even adopt elements from these more popular fairy tales.

The first retelling to be mentioned is *Hansel and Gretel* (2013) by bestselling American author Jenni James also working as a screenwriter, adapting her books to film. This book is a model example of mixing themes from different fairy tales. The story is mainly about Hansel and Gretel and the relationship between the siblings and their narrative. Still, a significant role plays also the witch, and she is not the traditional gingerbread house hag known from the original. In this Hansel and Gretel, the witch is in the form of an evil stepmother that the king and father of Hansel and Gretel marry-making it a tale closer to the Snow White and adapting some of its themes too, such as the rivalry between mother and teenage daughter. Readers get an engaging story depicting how the tale of Snow White could have looked if the main character had a caring brother who tried to protect her from the evil stepmother. Thanks to such a twist, the theme of cooperation with peers and sibling solidarity could be even more highlighted in the story. However, this had somewhat walled off because Jenni James eventually turns the siblings, step-siblings in the book, into lovers. Despite James's *Hansel and Gretel* being a young adult romance, other original Hansel and Gretel themes can be found. The cottage in the woods

made of candy representing urges like hunger and oral fixation is not missing from the story; it's even given another meaning. The cottage candy in this novel makes you forget everything except for the fact that you want more candy, representing not only gluttony but a wish to ignore the poor conditions in life. Many teenagers feel lost and misunderstood. They believe that the world is not an ideal place to live in (Jedlička 2017, p. 188), and the idea of such a gingerbread house can be attractive to teenagers and some adults, not because of the sweets like when they were children but for the forgetting of unwanted memories. Nevertheless, by overcoming the gingerbread house, defeating the evil witch and gaining their happy ending, Hansel and Gretel in the novel are showing a promise of a more satisfactory future.

Some retellings of the fairy tale about Hansel and Gretel push back the original fairy tale messages at the expense of an elevated romantic line. This phenomenon happens a lot with classic fairy tales retold into young adult novels; however, in Hansel and Gretel mainly, it changes a big part of the story since there is no romance in the original, unlike in other classic fairy tales.

The preceding brings us to the second retelling of Hansel and Gretel discussed in this chapter, *The Hansel and Gretel Curse* (2019), by Australian-American author Margo Ryerkerk. Ryerkerk's novel loses the character of Hansel right at the beginning of the story, dividing the two siblings and making it impossible for them to have a shared adventure. Instead, the book presents the theme of the strong female protagonist Gretel, who sets out to rescue Hansel from the clutches of an evil witch afflicting the kingdom. On the way, Gretel meets the queen's general, Stefan, who fills the place of her companion and becomes her love interest. There still is a theme of sibling love, but not so much cooperation. Another aspect that this particular adaptation has changed compared to most classic fairy tales is the role of the stepmother. In the book, Hansel and Gretel's stepmother plays a loving figure that replaced the children's biological parents. Aspect of the dual mother, good biological one and evil stepmother, is erased. In most contemporary young adult retellings, the strong theme of family, especially the mother-child relationship, is often overshadowed or replaced with different themes. For instance, *The Hansel and Gretel Curse* emphasises strong female heroin that can overcome magical obstacles, find the truth about her life and destiny, and rescue her brother and because the plot is set in a place close to medieval Germany, and the heroine pursues unthinkable for her in the society a considerable theme is also women's emancipation.



### 2.4.2 Little Red Riding Hood

The story Little Red Riding Hood presents themes such as curiosity, aspects of the male personality in the opposites of the wolf and the hunter, seduction and temptation when the wolf tempts the little girl on the road. There is depicted love and care for loved ones because the story also focuses on the relationship between Little Red Riding Hood and her grandmother, whom Little Red Riding Hood visits. The tale points out the dangers of travel, a warning of risks and the need to be careful when travelling. Moreover, there is an explicit punishment for disobedience. Her parent warns Little Red Riding Hood to stick to a designated path, but she decides to take a different route. This decision puts her in danger, and she is punished by the evil wolf.

Young adult retellings of the fairy tale The Little Red Riding Hood can be divided into two groups. In the first, significantly narrower group, there would be books where the wolf or wolves are still the villains and must be defeated, and in the second, much broader group, which includes the majority of contemporary young adult novels based on the motifs of this fairy tale, the character of the wolf becomes the love interest of the main female character who personifies the girl Red riding hood (Beckett 2013, p. 326).

Experts such as Bettelheim, Černoušek and others agree that the wolf in the classic fairy tale represents the predatory male element seducing the young girl, Little Red Riding Hood. Therefore, we already see in the original fairy tale that the wolf is supposed to be a man interested in the main heroine. However, the purpose of the original fairy tale is to warn young girls against temptation and seductive men, which disappear on the way to retelling with a wolf and Little Red Riding Hood as a couple. On the other hand, this version of the young adult retellings of Little Red Riding Hood presents a message and romance very similar to the story of Beauty and the Beast. The heroine manages to win the heart of a wolf and loves him despite his werewolf curse, ferocity, appearance or origin.

In the group of books in which the main character is in love with a character representing a wolf, we can include, for example, the books *Crimson Bound* (2015) by the American New York times bestselling author Rosamund Hodge, *For the Wolf* (2021) by the American New your times bestselling author Hannah F. Whitten, *Wolves and Daggers* (2018) by New York Times and USA Today best-selling historical fantasy author Melanie Karsak, *Scarlet Moon* (2004) by the New York Times Bestselling author Debbie Viguié and many others including Marissa Mayer's *Scarlet* (2013).

Intriguing novels that more personify the message of the original classic fairy tale are novels where we see Little Red Riding Hood fighting the wolf instead of ending up falling in love with him. The book *Sisters Red* (2010), by American author Jackson Pearce, illustrates this case. There is not just one bad wolf in the novel, but countless wolves hiding in human society, and one can come across them almost anywhere. They are predators in the form of men who choose a victim among pretty girls, turn into wolves and eat their hearts. So, the message of *Sisters Red* is almost no different from the original fairy tale. On the contrary, it is even more legible in it. The theme that the book and the fairy tale deal with is solely modernized. Other important topics are also added. Firstly, empowering women through two strong heroines fighting evil wolves and protecting the city they live in-additionally, love and cooperation between siblings, for the story is about sisters fighting evil forces with and for each other.

### **2.4.3 Snow White**

In all its forms, Snow White is a tale about a parent-child relationship, particularly the rivalry between mother and teenage daughter and the problem with an overly passive or absent father. Snow White is a story about jealousy, vanity, narcissism and integration into the world of work and responsibilities.

There are different retellings of the Snow White fairy tale with different themes and messages. The young adult novel *Shattered Snow* (2019), by the American author Rachel Huffmire, is about time travel where the evil queen comes from the future to meet the historical figure of Margareth von Waldeck from the 16th century personifying Snow White. We can read a retelling of Snow White from the pen of the American New York Times bestselling author and member of American Christian Fiction Writers Melanie Dickerson, who, in her book *The Fairest Beauty* (2015), focuses on religious themes of purity and piety. Nevertheless, if we look at almost any Retelling of Snow White, we notice that, although very different, they preserve one of the main themes of the original classic fairy tale - vanity (Austin 2022, p. 144).

Whether the retelling focuses on the Snow White story or the book's main character is the evil queen, which is also not unusual, the theme of looks and jealousy is always strongly present. Adolescents in prepubescent and pubertal age begin to worry about their appearance. They start to notice things about their body that they didn't see before. Eating disorders also begin to appear at this age (Le Grange, Lock 2011, p. 7). With adolescence may come self-image issues, and beauty begins to play an essential role in a young lady's life (Simmons, F. Rosenberg, M. Rosenberg 1973, p. 553). Now more than in childhood, the themes of the Snow

White fairy tale are crucial to young adults, and some retellings can convey these themes to teenagers better than the classic fairy tale.

Two of the young adult retelling novels that demonstrate commentary on society's obsession with beauty standards and perfection are, for instance, *Fairest* (2008) by American author Gail Carson Levine and *The Fairest of Them All* (2013) by American author Carolyn Turgeon.

In *Fairest*, readers get to know Snow White as they may have never seen her – ugly - at least by the standards of the society described in the book. The main character is a sixteen-year-old girl experiencing feelings of distrust in herself and her beauty. She does not have the qualities considered beautiful in society and thus sees herself as inferior. In the course of the story, another talent of hers develops, which is her art of singing and composing, which replaces her beauty. She can find her place in the world and even finds love.

*The Fairest of Them All* describes the transition from carefree childhood to adulthood in a judgmental society uniquely and freshly. Carolyn Turgeon focuses on the character of the evil queen, who in the novel becomes the character of Rapunzel from another classic fairy tale. Rapunzel is a young girl growing up with only her witch stepmother in the forest until a prince falls in love with her and brings her to his castle. Here, the character goes through changes caused by excessive expectations of the environment and condemnation from the people around her at court. Rapunzel tries to be good enough for those around her, so she focuses on her beauty until she becomes obsessed with it. The book thus slowly reaches the beginning of the Snow White fairy tale and presents an outline of the origins of the narcissistic queen and, how she became such a person, and showing why it is not healthy to cling to external beauty.

The themes elaborated by the classic fairy tale about Snow White and adopted by the authors who wrote their books based on it are essential for young adult audiences. Through a reworked fairy tale they knew as children, teenagers can again empathize with the main character, which experiences similar or the same feelings and find some meaning in it. To see how they can live better if they can change their mindset regarding their body, as in *Fairest*, or to see where their obsession with beauty can take them, just as in *The Fairest of Them All*.

#### **2.4.4 Cinderella**

The Cinderella story is a typical example of sibling rivalry and the anxiety and fear that come with it, primarily caused by a parent's preference for one child over another. The importance of spiritual wealth over material wealth is depicted in sisters craving money,

jewellery, and dresses and the prince over Cinderella's pure soul and her achieving her happy ending and them not. In addition, The Cinderella focuses on self-worth, grieving the loss of a loved one, diligence, patience, modesty, gaining autonomy, rising from dire circumstances to a better future, the problem of cleanliness and tidiness, and last but not least, changes in the perception of the mother person during the girl's adolescence.

There are a lot of retellings of the fairy tale Cinderella. The themes in different Cinderella books vary, and each author adds their own message to the classic story. Some have changed the original fairy tale almost beyond recognition and used it only as a bridge to another story. Kalynn Bayron, the New York Times and Indie bestselling author of the young adult fantasy novel *Cinderella Is Dead* (2021) said in an interview for Room magazine:

"We need stories that reflect us in all our complexity and nuance. "Cinderella" is such an instantly recognizable tale. It was the perfect vehicle to deconstruct concepts of patriarchy, heteronormativity, and misogyny."

Her book is about a world where the Cinderella tale plays a significant role. Still, the plot is not about Cinderella but about a young girl years later suffering the consequences of misusing the story to oppress women.

Newer young adult books, if the protagonist is a woman, increasingly highlight a strong, independent heroine, fighting with her own strength against adverse fate (Brendler 2014, p. 2). Young adult retellings are no exception, especially those reworking Cinderella. Readers can encounter a wide variety of novels where Cinderella becomes a strong heroine with more depth.

The central theme of the original classic fairy tale, sibling rivalry, ceases to be the most crucial point of the newly developed Cinderella stories. Instead, young adults can read books like *Ella Enchanted* (1997) by American author Gail Carson Levine. This novel has won numerous awards, including a Newbery Honor. Cinderella is not portrayed here as a modest, obedient maiden but rather as a feisty rebel who wants to take fate into her own hands. We can discover the same heroine in *Just Ella* (2001) by the American author Margaret Peterson Haddix. After getting to the ball on her own without any magical help, Cinderella finds that the royal life is not for her and wants to write her own story. The third example is the book *Stepsister* (2020) by American author Jennifer Donnelly. Here, instead of Cinderella, the leading character is the ugly stepsister, looking for her worth in a world that values only beauty. Retellings not only give the characters depth, backstory and explain their actions and feelings that we encounter in the classic fairy tale but also add strength and independence to them.

When the adolescent girls were interviewed in the study *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: A Qualitative Study of How Young Adult Fiction Affects Identity Construction*, they all said that they strongly identified with the characters in young adult novels, felt their emotions with them in described book situations and create emotional ties to them, whether it was contemporary novels or sci-fi, fantasy retellings. They can also take on certain behaviours of the book characters (Kokesh, Sternadori 2015).

In conclusion, this shows us how vital the portrayal of the hero is in stories for teenage audiences. Heroines who can follow their dreams, like in *Just Ella*, fight for their ideals, like in *Cinderella is Dead*, or defy society's beauty standards and find their worth, like the stepsister in Donnelly's *Stepsister*, show young girls role models, that they can look up to and follow.

#### **2.4.5 Beauty and the Beast**

This classic tale about a girl falling in love with an ugly beast presents readers with themes like vanity vs humility, the importance of a good heart over looks, transformation and learning.

The story and plot of the classic tale Beauty and the Beast open up the most prominent possibility for writing a retelling in the romance novel genre. Love and acceptance of a partner for his inner beauty are, after all, the most important themes of the story. Today's authors for young adults use this and create stories where readers can fulfil their romantic fairy tale ideas. Stories not so distinct from the original represents, for instance, the novel *Beauty: A Retelling of the Story of Beauty and the Beast* by an American author Robin McKinley (1978). In the book, the main character goes through a very similar fate to her original heroine, with the only difference being that the author gave her a loving, healthy family, and thanks to growing up in such an environment, the girl gained her kindness. These stories most clearly convey the original message for the older generation of readers.

Nonetheless, today's authors are aware that the fairy tale Beauty and the Beast can appear problematic in the aspect that a young girl falls in love with her captor. Thus, the main message is not delivered healthily and is overshadowed by the problem of Stockholm syndrome (Nandi 2021, p. 4). Some authors are therefore changing the end of the story, like in the retelling of the American New York Times and internationally bestselling author Sara J. Maas *A Court of Thorns and Roses* (2015), where the character of Beauty realizes the toxic behaviour of the Beast and manages to leave him, other authors at least make the heroine sufficiently assertive, following the trend of providing empowered female heroines (Coste 2020, p. 95). In the novel *Hunted* (2017) by American New York Times bestselling author Meagan Spooner or the book

*Cruel Beauty* (2014) by American author Rosamund Hodge, the characters of Beauty are both on a mission to kill the Beast. Not one of them willingly sacrifices her life for their father as it was in the original fairy tale. No, those heroines have worlds to save, strength to prove, and injustices to correct.

#### **2.4.6 Rapunzel**

The last fairy tale that this chapter will compare with retellings is Rapunzel. Rapunzel is a story about lust, desires and their consequences – Parents lost their child over a lettuce which the mother craved, the prince lost his eyes and Rapunzel her hair. But there is also repentance – Rapunzel’s tears restore the prince’s sight. A huge theme is possessiveness, presented by a witch as a devouring mother. Lastly, the Rapunzel readers can learn about the hope of finding what is most needed in the least likely place – the blind prince finds Rapunzel in the wilderness.

Adolescence is a period of identity search and gradual detachment from parents. Relationships with peers become more and more significant for young adults. Adolescents wish to grow up. However, adults do not always take this process of adolescents gaining independence well. Some parents may experience the so-called empty nest syndrome. Most often, displeasure with the independence of teenagers can appear in parents who have no other interests apart from children or acquaintances outside the family. A parent may feel unnecessary and meaningless due to the upcoming departure of their children (Jedlička 2017, p. 195).

Not all young adult retellings of Rapunzel take over all the themes it offers from the original fairy tale, but a large part of them retain the theme of possessiveness in the form of an overprotecting mother. This topic is current for many young adults who need a book character going through a similar frustration with their parent's behaviour to which they could relate and relieve their own frustration. It adds further value to the book if it manages to explain the behaviour of the mother, who tries so hard to prevent Rapunzel's character from becoming independent.

Donna Jo Napoli, an American writer of children's and young adult fiction and professor of Linguistics, wrote a novel, *Zel* (1996). In this book, Napoli tries to show the story of Rapunzel and its characters in more depth. She writes about a mother who longs for a child so much that she sells her own soul in order to have one. Chapters written from the mother's point of view present the reader with the feelings and fears experienced by a mother with empty nest syndrome, afraid of losing the most valuable thing she has and for which she sacrificed so much. The mother gradually resorts to more drastic measures to keep her daughter close, and when

the young girl falls in love, she locks her in a tower. The story gives readers what was missing in the original fairy tale: the witch's motives and her inner self.

In the same way, we get the opportunity to look into the mind of the character of Rapunzel. Rapunzel begins as a carefree, sweet, enthusiastic girl who loves her mother but longs for more freedom. When her mother locks her in a tower, the girl gradually loses her mind. She starts talking to the animals around the building, babbling to herself, self-harming and is keeping secrets from her mother, who she no longer trusts. In the end, the story ends well. The witch dies, Rapunzel manages to leave, starts a new life and becomes a mother herself.

Donna Jo Napoli, in her novel, demonstrates what the effects are if a parent is too strict and controlling of a child and prevents his/her emancipation by going to extremes. On the other hand, it also helps the young reader to understand the feelings of a parent who does not want to give up his child. This book is classified for a young adult audience, but its theme and form are also suitable for parents and older readers.

## 3 Practical part

### 3.1 Marissa Meyer

Marissa Meyer was born on February 19th 1984, in Tacoma, Washington (Library of Congress Authorities, n.d.). In 2007 she graduated from Pacific Lutheran University with Bachelor in Creative Writing and Children's Literature. After that, she received a Masters's degree in Publishing at Pace University in New York. Before writing her first novel, *Cinder*, Meyer worked as a book editor in Seattle and later became a freelance typesetter and proofreader. Meyer married Jesse Taylor in 2011 and, in 2015, adopted their twin daughters, Sloane and Delaney. She and her family now live in Tacoma, Washington (Meyer webpage, n.d.).

Marissa Meyer published her first book *Cinder* which started the series *The Lunar Chronicles* consisting of four books, on January 3rd, 2012. This series was published by the company Macmillan Publishers through their division Feiwel & Friends. Thenceforth, Meyer added other supplementary books from the same literary universe to the series. A prequel to the series *Fairest* (2015), a collection of short stories called *Stars Above* (2016), comics *Wires and Nerve volume 1 and 2: Gone Rogue* (2018, 2022) and an interactive ebook *Cinder's Adventure: Get Me to the Wedding!* (2022). Under Feiwel & Friends, Meyer was able to publish another of her retellings - *Heartless* - released in 2016. This novel is set in the world of the book *Alice of Wonderland* and tells a story about the origin of the Queen of Hearts (Jill Grinberg Literary Management LLC, n.d.).

Meyer's later work is more diverse, and from young adult science fiction retellings, she moved to the dystopian superhero trilogy *Renegades*. The first book, *Renegades*, was released in 2017, followed by *Archenemies* in 2018 and *Supernova* in 2019. After that, Marissa Meyer released a romantic comedy book with a touch of fantasy elements, *Instant Karma*, in 2020. Meyer is nowadays working on another novel from the Instant Karma world *With a Little Luck*, and its expected release date is February 13th, 2024 (Jill Grinberg Literary Management LLC, n.d.).

Meyer's most recently published duology *Gilded* (2021) and *Cursed* (2022) is yet again a fairytale retelling. This time Meyer takes inspiration for her work in the story of Rumpelstiltskin (Eddy, 2021) a German fairytale collected by the Brothers Grimm and incorporated in the 1812 edition of *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (Children's and Household Tales).



Meyer's books won multiple awards. Amongst the awards where Meyers's work ended up as a winner in her category are - the 2013 YALSA's award for Best Fiction for Young Adults (Cinder), the 2014 Charlotte Award -- High School/Grades 9-12 (Cinder), the 2015 Grand Canyon Reader Award -- Teen (Scarlet). *The Lunar Chronicles* earned a spot as the #1 New York Times- and USA Today-Bestselling series, and Meyer gained the label of New York Times bestselling author.

The rights to *The Lunar Chronicles* series were purchased by Locksmith Animation in 2022 (Hass, 2022). Another of Meyer's books, *Instant Karma*, was optioned in February 2021 by television HBO Max (Lexy Perez, 2021). According to this, we can expect her books to be adapted into movies or other screen forms.

### **3.1.1 'Journey' towards the books**

In her interview for Mast Media, Marissa Meyer describes how her love for fairytales started when she was only five while watching the Disney movie *The little mermaid* and has grown ever since. This fondness for fairy tales was one of the reasons why she decided to attend Pacific Lutheran University, where she was drawn to a literature class on fairy tales and fantasy (Reierson, 2014). Not only was Meyer watching and reading fairy tale stories, but she was also attending science fiction conventions and Renaissance fairs. Meyer dressed up and cosplayed as her favourite fantasy or sci-fi characters as a little girl and even in her teenage years (La Bella, 2015, p. 12).

As stated before, Meyers's fondness for children and fantasy tales started when she was of a very young age thanks to watching Disney movies. After that, she was introduced to more classical fairy tale authors like Hans Christian Andersen or the Brothers Grimm. The surprise by the differences between these older and darker stories and newly retold tales by companies like Disney, started her fascination for retellings. That led Meyer to read authors like Gail Carson Levine (*Ella Enchanted*, 1997, HarperTrophy) or Shanon Hale (*The Goose Girl*, 2003, Bloomsbury Press) in her teenage years, which then influenced her own writing (Laura La Bella, 2015, p. 12).

Meyer's devotion to tales of all kinds changed into a passion for creating her own stories. Her first experience with writing comes from her fanfictions which she started writing in high school. One of Meyers's favourite fairy tale shows was the Japanese anime series *Sailor Moon* during her youth. And so, she chose to write her fanfiction based on this story. Meyer wrote under the pseudonym name of Alicia Blade on the page fanfiction.net. Under this pen name, Meyer wrote her first novelette, *The Phantom of Linkshire Manor*, published in the anthology

Bound in Skin—a collection of gothic romance stories published in 2007 in CatsCurious Press (Meyer, n.d.). As Meyer stated in an interview for The News-Tribune in 2012, writing fan fiction not only helped her improve her writing skills but also allowed her to learn to take criticism and gain her first fan base (Craig Sailor, 2012).

Meyer's inspiration for her first book *Cinder* came through two events. First was a National Novel Writing Month writing contest she attended in 2008. The event host presented various prompts, and contestants had to choose two of them. Writers then worked on a story that had to include both selected prompts. Meyer's chosen prompts were: Set the story in the future, include a fairytale character. She ultimately decided to compete with a story about a sci-fi retelling of "Puss in Boots" (Meyer webpage, n.d.). Those two prompts, remarkably fitting for the story of *The Lunar Chronicles*, inspired Meyer to eventually write a book about a fairytale character in a futuristic setting which became *Cinder* and its sequels. According to her own words, when she revisited her old campus at Pacific Lutheran University in 2014, the second inspiration for writing Meyer's famous sci-fi series was a dream she had in 2008. In this vision, Meyer saw Cinderella running from the ball, the same as in the classical story, but instead of a glass or golden shoe, her whole foot fell off (Reierson, 2014). This image then made its way into the *Cinder*, where the character of Cinderella is a cyborg with a removable robotic foot.

Meyer wrote her first 150 000 words of the first draft of *The Lunar Chronicles* only in one month during a challenge from an organization called NaNoWriMo (National Novel Writing Month). With its support, Meyer wrote the first draft of her first book *Cinder* in two weeks. With NaNoWriMo, she also wrote some of her later works, *Scarlet*, *Cress*, *Fairest*, *Heartless*, and *Renegades* (Barbara Clements, 2014).

In Meyer's own words, she was between rare lucky writers with the fast submission process for her first book. It took her merely two months since she started to seek agents for her book on August 16, 2010, until receiving three offers and signing a cooperation with an agent Jill Grinberg (Meyer, n.d.). Grinberg himself stated that it was Meyer's ability to catch his attention and introduce her ideas ideally, so he was immediately invested, thanks to which he wanted to sign a deal with her (Jill Grinberg, 2021). Meyer could thank for this ability to correctly present a book to her experience of working as a book editor in a book publishing process. On October 29, Meyer sent her manuscript on submission and received the first offer in just three days. On November 11, 2010, Meyer accepted the publishing company Macmillan Publisher's Feiwel & Friends offer (Meyer webpage, n.d.).

## 3.2 The Lunar Chronicles

The following chapters discuss in detail the first book in *The Lunar Chronicles* series, *Cinder*, and its main protagonist of the same name. Cinder is a character that appears in all subsequent books and ties the stories of all the other characters together. Specific themes from *Cinder*, which will be mentioned, run through all the books. Subsequently, the other books will also be summarized on a smaller scale.

## 3.3 Cinder

### 3.3.1 Plot

In the first book *Cinder*, Meyer introduces the 16-year-old mechanic Cinder, personifying Cinderella from the classic fairy tale. When she was little, Cinder suffered an accident that almost costs her life, and because of this, her limbs had to be replaced with a robotic metal hand and leg and a control panel was operated into her brain and spine that helps her function. These modifications made Cinder a cyborg. In the world where Cinder lives, cyborgs are considered lower citizens who are merely their legal representatives' property. So, the book's protagonist finds herself in a position where she is despised not only by her adoptive family, as in the original version of the Cinderella story, but by the whole society.

One day, the prince of the Eastern Commonwealth (the country where Cinder lives) appears in the stall where she works, hoping that she can fix his android. Cinder has no idea that the android is hiding crucial political information, even concerning herself.

Since the *Cinder* book is the first in the series, ample space is devoted to describing the world in which the story is set. The reader learns about the fourth world war, which almost destroyed humanity and caused the states to collide into larger communities after its peaceful resolution. Cinder is living in the Eastern Commonwealth representing present-day Asia, in the city of New Beijing. The second important factor is the deadly disease Letumosis, which spreads throughout the planet, is highly contagious, and no cure has yet been developed for it. Another vital fact is the existence of Lunars, once people who founded a colony on the moon, which later became independent from the Earth, and whose inhabitants acquired supernatural abilities to manipulate the human mind due to the influence of the lunar environment.

Cinder has to deal with the fact that the only family member who had a positive relationship with her - her half-sister Peony - was infected with the incurable Letumosis. Her life turns even worse when her legal representative and stepmother, Adri, signs her up as a volunteer for a program testing a cure for Letumosis, which no one has ever survived. However,

since she is a mere cyborg, she has no choice. In the laboratory, Cinder meets Dr Erland, who discovers that she is immune to the infection and is subsequently caused by her lunar origin, which Cinder had no idea about since she does not remember anything before her accident that turned her into a cyborg.

The second point of view through which the story is told is that of Prince Kai. After his father died on Letumosis, he is preparing to become emperor of the Eastern Commonwealth. He has to deal with the political intrigues of the moon queen Leavana, the book's main villain. It is becoming increasingly clear that Leavana is preparing for a war with Earth and wants to use the prince for her plans to take over the world. His only hope is to find the moon princess Selene, who was supposed to have died in a fire at the age of three, but there are theories that she may still be alive. Selene is the only one who could overthrow Queen Leavana because she would have a stronger bloodline claim to the moon throne.

Cinder and prince's relationship grows, but simultaneously, she plans to escape from her abusive family to Europe, leaving everything, including Kai, behind. Cinder learns more about her past and Queen Leavana's plans and gives up her dreams of running away to save the prince. The book ends with a royal ball to which Cinder arrives in an old orange car representing the pumpkin that became a carriage in the Perrault's fairy tale. Cinder confronts Leavana at the ball and reveals to the prince that she herself is a Lunar and a cyborg, something she has successfully kept from him until now. She is eventually taken into prison, from which she plans to escape.

### **3.3.2 Fairy tale Cinderella themes in Cinder**

#### **3.3.2.1 Sibling rivalry and parent's preference for one child over another**

Although the theme of sibling rivalry and parent's preference for one child over another, taken from a classic fairy tale, is no longer emphasized as much as in the classic Cinderella, it is nevertheless noticeable in the book. The treatment of Cinderella by most of the family members is no better than it was in the original. On the contrary, one could say that it is even worse. Cinderella is not seen as a person but as an inferior machine.

The relationship between Cinder and her stepmother could not be called familial. Adri never considered Cinder her daughter, not even as her stepdaughter, more like her servant. Cinder, on the other hand, never saw any mother figure in Adri. Their relationship is a little different, even from the fairy tale model. A strong theme of the book is prejudice, discrimination and partly slavery, which will be discussed later. Rather than being under the care of her stepmother, Cinder is her property. Cinder works as a mechanic, but she has to hand over all

the money she earns to her legal representative, Adri, who is entitled to it since Cinder is not human but a cyborg as is stated in the book itself: *Legally, Cinder belonged to Adri as much as the household android and so too did her money, her few possessions, even the new foot she'd just attached. Adri loved to remind her of that.* (Cinder 2012, p. 24).

Adri can do whatever she wants with Cinder, even send her to her death without her permission, which happens when she signs her up for plague testing. For Cinder to be freed from her stepmother, Adri would have to sign her release papers. So, it's hard to see Cinder as a story about the parent's preference for one child over another when the mother doesn't even see Cinder as a person. However, Cinder still feels jealous and feels that she should be entitled to the same treatment as her half-sisters, which is clear from her thoughts: *Irritation hardened in Cinder's gut. She might have pointed out that Pearl and Peony could have been given ready-made rather than custom dresses in order to budget for Cinder's as well. She might have pointed out that they would only wear their dresses one time too.* (Cinder 2012, p. 24). And so, at least partially, she shares the feelings of an overlooked and less cared-for child.

Cinder's relationship with her half-sisters Peony and Pearl is also distinctive from Cinderella's tale. While Pearl's sibling rivalry is undoubtedly recognizable, Peony treats Cinder kindly. However, even though Peony likes Cinder, she still does nothing to help her or stand up for her in front of the other family members. Pearl is a typical Cinderella stepsister. She insults Cinder (wire-head), doesn't want her to go to the royal ball with them because she's ashamed of her, and generally doesn't treat her well. The theme of sibling rivalry is there, but since Cinder, at least in the first book where it is shown, does not have a happy ending, the story cannot bring the reader who projects his own frustrations in it true satisfaction, as it is in the original fairy tale Cinderella.

In *The Lunar Chronicles*, we notice that none of the main characters has a functional family. In addition to Cinder, in other books, we learn about Scarlet (Red Riding Hood), who was raised by her grandmother, who disappeared. Cress (Rapunzel) also has no parents and lives on a satellite with only occasional visits from her supervisor. Winter (Snow White), whose parents are dead, must live with the evil queen that despises her. Thus, the reader has the opportunity to empathize with various heroines who have to deal with contempt of their closest. Heroines unwanted and abused. The helplessness the reader feels with them teaches him to empathize with peers from similar backgrounds. Or it helps people with comparable problems to find themselves in a story character who was able to find a way to happiness despite a dysfunctional family and a bad initial background.

### 3.3.2.2 Grieving the loss of a loved one

The classic Cinderella tale begins with the death of Cinderella's mother, and the grief over her loss carries with Cinderella throughout the rest of the story. In some versions of Cinderella, her mother is still present with her as a magical force, for example, in the form of a wish-granting tree that Cinderella watered with her tears over her loss, presenting Cinderella's feelings even more. The theme of losing a loved one, taken over from the original story, is even more apparent in the novel *Cinder*. However, the dead mother is replaced by other characters.

Surprisingly, the first person to deal with the loss of a family member is not Cinder but Prince Kai. At the beginning of the book, readers are introduced to a deadly disease that plagues the entire planet and which, unfortunately, also the emperor Eastern Commonwealth and Kai's father caught. In the chapters from Kai's point of view, the reader experiences the anxiety and fear that the prince has for his father's life and the future of his country. Afterwards, when his father finally succumbs to the disease, Kai is devastated, not only by his loss but by the responsibilities he must take on after him: *Kai squeezed his eyes shut and chafed them with his fingers. Even knowing that it was coming, that his father was sick with this incurable disease, it still made no sense. All that had just been lost, taken so quickly. Not just his father. Not just the emperor. His youth. His freedom. [...] He was too young, too stupid, too optimistic, too naive. He couldn't do this* (Cinder 2012, p. 139) After losing one or both parents, care for younger siblings or the household often falls to older children. Sometimes teenagers must grow up too soon, and the emotions that come with it are overwhelming. The death of a parent is the worst possible loss for a teenager if their relationship was healthy. Young adults deal with the passing of a parent for a long time, and they carry the psychological consequences into adulthood (Balk 2014, p. 145). Kai, who has to take responsibility for the entire empire after his father's death and has no time to mourn, represents these problems well. Young adults or even new adults who need it can find representation in his character.

Cinder goes through a similar process a little later with her sister Peony, who also got infected with Letumosis. In the case of Cinder, the added meaning is not taking responsibility but losing the only person who cared about the main character. Cinder also has to deal with guilt when she later discovers she may have infected Peony herself. Her stepmother and stepsister also blame Cinder for Peony's death, and their behaviour towards her aggravates. These factors have an essential role in Cinder's decision to flee the city.

The topic of death and the loss of a loved one has always been relevant for every age group, and it is even more relevant today, when humanity has also experienced a significant

pandemic and many people, including teenagers, have experienced the death of someone close to them.

### **3.3.2.3 The importance of spiritual wealth over material wealth**

Regarding the subject of wealth vs soul, *Cinder* copies her source. Cinder, like Cinderella, manages to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles through her efforts and because of who she truly is. The prince falls in love with an ordinary mechanic for her personality and willingness to help him, instead of her lazy sister in beautiful clothes or the powerful and attractive queen. It could be said that this theme permeates the entire series, as the main negative character is a woman obsessed with her beauty and power.

A strong theme of *The Lunar Chronicles* is love. In every formed couple, we see the importance of personality for the formation of a love feeling. The fairy tale themes in the books are intertwined with that of Beauty and the Beast, especially with Scarlet and the Wolf. Her love helps him change from a dangerous experiment into a loving and caring person. None of the main characters fell in love with their love interest based on wealth, prestige or looks, except for Cress, who nevertheless had to get to know her counterpart and change her mind throughout her story.

### **3.3.2.4 Self-worth and diligence**

Although at first glance, it may seem that the fairy tale of Cinderella is about a passive heroine waiting to be rescued from her dire circumstances, this is not quite the case. Cinderella's character has much more depth. Cinderella is the picture of a perfect person in most versions of her story. She is kind, hardworking and patient. As already discussed in the theoretical part of the thesis, this is because a clear polarization of good and evil characters is necessary for classic fairy tales. Cinderella represents apparent goodness and is, therefore, often depicted without a flaw. However, this does not mean she cannot be an example for today's children. Cinderella shows us the importance of knowing self-worth. Regardless of all the obstacles that her stepmother and sisters put in her way, Cinderella did not lose herself and believed in kindness. Despite the problematic background, Cinderella maintained her values and built moral principles. Until finally, she is rewarded for her diligence and goodwill with a happy ending (Bettelheim, 2010, p. 319).

The character of Cinder is the same in essential aspects of Cinderella's personality. She is willing and compassionate. We see it when, despite needing money, she fixes a tablet for free for a little girl or when she takes pity on a little boy and hands him a rare sample of the cure for Letumosis without thinking about the consequences. Regardless of the danger, she visits her

sick sister so she won't be alone in pain and gives up hope of escape and her freedom to help the prince. Cinder is definitely hardworking. Not only does she work as a mechanic to earn money for her family, but she also takes care of everything at their home, from fixing appliances to washing the hover (car).

On the one hand, maintaining the image of positive self-worth is easier for Cinder because she has a family member who is kind to her and also a friend in the form of a house android. However, on the other hand, she has to deal with the rejection of the society that despises her due to being a cyborg. Nonetheless, despite everything, Cinder never stops believing that she is not human and that her emotions are not artificial. The proof of this is the fact that Cinder is determined to leave the place where she is abused and go to Europe, where she believes she can live a dignified life.

Through the character of Cinder, who took over the main personality traits of the original Cinderella, the message of self-acceptance, staying true to oneself, hardwork, and kindness reaches a new generation of readers. Young adults can find a heroine in Cinder, who becomes their role model and shows them the importance of self-belief and everything else Cinder represents.

### **3.3.2.5 Gaining autonomy, rising from dire circumstances to a better future**

An essential theme of Cinderella, which also points to the correct development in adolescence, is the acquisition of autonomy. Cinderella wouldn't have become the prince's bride if she didn't become Cinderella first. Her step-sisters lived under the same roof but were unable to become independent from their parent and learn to take care of themselves, unlike Cinderella, who was forced to a significant development by her circumstances. For the evolution of the personality, working and making independent decisions is vital, which Cinderella's step-sisters cannot do.

It is revealed in the book that if it weren't for Cinder being a cyborg, she would be able to live alone and take care of herself. She is the only person who earns in her family and from whose money all the family members live. She takes care of the household and can fix everything herself. As she rightly once remarked to her step-sister, the family would have nothing to live on without her income: *"I know a cyborg who could volunteer for plague testing," said Pearl. "Why wait for the draft?" Cinder leveled a glare at Pearl, who was nearly six inches shorter than she was despite being a year older. "Good idea," she said. "And then you could get a job to pay for your pretty dress."* (Cinder 2012, p. 28). Like Cinderella, Cinder first had to experience the need to learn how to take care of herself before becoming a



functioning individual. In conclusion, Cinder is an example for young adults reaching a stage in their lives when they want and need to gradually become independent, take care of themselves and rely more on their skills rather than hoping their parents will solve everything for them.

### **3.3.3 Non-fairy tale topics added by the author**

Like many other authors of young adult retellings, Marissa Meyer also incorporated additional themes into her story unrelated to the original classic fairy tales. These themes are less timelessly universal and more relevant to today's society. They are discrimination, prejudice and racism.

Prejudice is seen in many examples throughout the series against cyborg citizens. One example is that humans without technical adjustments in their bodies loathe cyborgs and avoid contact with them as much as possible. The reader sees this clearly right in the book's first chapter, when Cinder is in her mechanical stall waiting for customers and a little boy runs up to her, whom her mother pulls away with those words: *“Sunto, come here! I told you not to play so close to—”* Sacha met Cinder's gaze, knotted her lips, then grabbed her son by the arm and spun away. [...] *“It's not like wires are contagious,”* Cinder muttered to her empty booth. (Cinder 2012, p. 5) Additionally, Cinder spends the entire book trying to hide her cyborg parts from Prince Kai because she doesn't believe he would ever want to talk to her or even touch her again if he knew about them. Moreover, her family makes it clear that they are ashamed of her and want to be seen with her in public as little as possible. All this is because her body is not 100% human.

Discrimination against cyborgs is extreme in the book series. Behaviour towards cyborgs resembles behaviour towards enslaved people. It is directly mentioned in the book that Cinder is her stepmother's property. She works for free, and all her earnings go to her owner, Adri. She is not allowed to leave her residence without her permission, or she is taken as a runaway cyborg and brought back by special forces, which happened when Cinder visited her sick sister in quarantine. Cinder cannot redeem herself from her condition in any way, and her only option for independence is either for her stepmother to sign release documents or escape.

Those practices towards cyborgs are possible because they have been dehumanized by society. Cyborgs, by many, are not seen as living beings with emotions, as was the case with people of colour in North America during the period of slavery (Tise 1990, p. 231). They are human, but they are also part robots. People like Adri believe that all the feelings Cinder experiences are artificially created by her system. There is a prejudice that cyborgs live on

borrowed time due to their ability to live and function only thanks to their technological alterations, thus owe their lives to society. Cinder can hide her cyborg identity better because she has only minimum visible robotic parts. But people who know she is part robot will still look at her as not equal or not even human.

Racism is evident in the mindset of people from Earth towards the people living on the moon. The people on the planet believe that all the Lunars are cruel, savage, lying people who brainwash others, not caring who they hurt as long as it benefits them. Not even knowing that many Lunars live among them as functional individual of society. Even Cinder herself, as a victim of discrimination and prejudice, generalizes and condemns the entire Lunars race with statements like: “*Those savages.*” (Cinder 2012, p. 171), “*Sounds like something Lunars would do.*” (Cinder 2012, p. 172).

Themes such as racism, prejudice, and discrimination are essential, especially in American literature, as the USA has a relatively recent history of slavery and discrimination against minorities. The issue of intolerance was dealt with in the past century, both on the American continent and in Europe, during various totalitarian regimes. The murdering of cyborgs in the search for a cure for Letumosis, treating them as inferior beings, is reminiscent of Hitler's Germany and the extermination of disabled, handicapped, and unwanted German citizens under the Euthanasia Program (Benedict, Kuhla 1999, p. 247). Revisiting this recent history and highlighting its shortcomings is vital to prevent its repetition. By exposing teenagers to these themes, if they can empathize with characters in books such as Cinder, who experience oppression and prejudice, they can grow into tolerant individuals who can help advance society.

### **3.3.4 Anticipation of global problems**

While writing her novels Marissa Meyer successfully incorporated not only themes from the past and present but also managed to anticipate into her books the problems that humanity may face in the future. Her book Cinder was published in 2012 and yet convincingly captures the pre-war tension and the threat of war that the real world experienced in 2022 leading up to the conflict in Ukraine.

One of the book's main themes is a global pandemic similar to one that affected the entire world in 2020. The main characters struggle with the necessity of quarantine and the loss of loved ones, mirroring real-life experiences. Meyer admits in retrospect that the disease measures in her book were insufficient, which she reflected in her new short story *COVID-128* during a conversation between Kai and Cinder:

*“I’m embarrassed to think about how we handled Letumosis. Hardly any social distancing at all. Can you imagine—I even still held the annual ball!” “And none of the markets shut down. I was working at my mechanic booth like nothing had changed. I mean, I guess my shop was an essential business, but still.” “It would have been a lot better if we’d known to shut things down. Practice social distancing.”* (2020, p. 5)

Thanks to Meyer's foresight, *The Lunar Chronicles* book series is even more relevant to readers today than the year it was published.

### **3.4 Scarlet**

Scarlet is the second book in Marissa Meyer's series and follows the story of a girl from a farm in France who represents the fairy tale character of Little Red Riding Hood. Although set in a completely different environment, the core of Scarlet's story copies the fairy tale storyline. A young girl sets out on a journey to find her grandmother, meets a man representing a wolf who tempts her, and she takes him on her journey. In the end, the wolf betrays her and almost kills her. This is where the similarity with the fairy tale plot ends. Grandma doesn't get a happy ending but dies, and Little Red Riding Hood ends up falling in love with the wolf.

From this story, it can be concluded that the theme of seduction and temptation is present. It can be seen in the main protagonist, who trusts the stranger Wolf, but even more so in the Wolf himself, who is torn between duty and temptation. A wolf is a hybrid being that resembles a man but is also a wolf, and he was created and trained to wage war against humans and carry out the orders of the Lunars. Yet he is attracted to one human woman and does not want to fight her: *“I think I realized that I would rather die because I betrayed them, than live because I betrayed you.”* (Scarlet 2013, p. 442). The main character is punished for her trust and temptation by being betrayed and almost killed, but the story's message is not to stay away from seductive men as in the original. The wolf can change because of Scarlet, and the two declare their love for each other.

Another theme that Meyer took over from Little Red Riding Hood is love and care for loved ones. Scarlet's thoughts, feelings, and actions show how much she cares about her grandmother and risks her life to find and save her, even though she makes rushed decisions because of it. That resembles Little Red Riding Hood's care for her grandmother when she travels through the forest to bring her medicine.

An important message that Meyer focuses more on in Scarlet than the ones in the original fairy tale is acceptance. *“I just think we shouldn’t judge her, or anyone, without trying*

*to understand them first. That maybe we should get the full story before jumping to conclusions. Crazy notion, I know.*” (Scarlet 2013, p. 169). Here, Meyer reopens the topic of prejudice, only with a new group of beings, lunar wolf soldiers. Scarlet learns that they are not all mindless beasts and that behind their behaviour is the cruel training and trauma they carry from growing up on the moon. In this respect, the book thus continues the themes of *Cinder* and further develops them.

### **3.5 Cress**

The story of Cress begins where Rapunzel almost ends. Cress breaks free after years of being trapped in a satellite. Until now, she only had distorted ideas about the real world, and now she recognizes that everything is not as she dreamed it would be.

The author again returns to the topic of prejudices. The world is entirely different from how Cress knew it from the Internet, and the man she fell in love with on social networks is not at all as dreamy as she hoped. It points to the fact that the first impression is not always right and also to the dangers of social networks, where everything is not always as it seems, and people there can edit their photos and show solely what they want to be seen from their lives.

Cress slowly loses her illusions about a perfect world. Still, in her disappointment, she also finds it crucial to take her fate into her own hands and not rely on something to miraculously resolve itself like in the shows she liked to watch. *“Maybe there isn’t such a thing as fate. Maybe it’s just the opportunities we’re given, and what we do with them.”* (Cress 2014, p. 569).

### **3.6 Winter**

*Cinder*, *Scarlet*, and *Cress* were all books that focused mainly on one character, and all the characters from the previous books appeared in them, but more in the background. Winter, the longest of the entire quadrilogy, focuses on all the main characters from all the books. The newly added character Winter representing Snow White doesn't get as much space as the others in their stories. Winter's story is similar to the original fairy tale in that she lives in a palace with her stepmother, the evil Queen Levana, who envies her beauty. Levana sends a guard (hunter) to kill Snow White, but he cannot do so, and Snow White runs away. However, the reader will not get dwarves or princes. Snow White befriends the main characters of the previous novels and helps them overthrow her stepmother, the queen. She does not fall in love with the prince but with her guard, representing the hunter from the original fairy tale. Winter

is given a substitute for the poisoned apple by Levana and falls into a coma, this almost ending her role in the story. Furthermore, the book focuses more on the other characters.

The themes of the classic Snow White fairy tale have been present in Queen Levana since the first book *Cinder*. Levana represents a person with a narcissistic disorder same as an evil Queen in Snow White. Signs defining a person with the narcissistic disorder are a lack of empathy, a sense of self-importance, a need for admiration, envy of others or faith that others envy them, a belief in being unique and better than others, taking advantage of other people, arrogance and haughtiness (Ronningstam 2010, p 69). Queen Levana fulfils all the mentioned characteristics. She has no empathy for other beings and takes advantage of them. She doesn't mind killing and brainwashing people for her own benefit. She must look beautiful and can't stand it when someone reveals her proper form. Therefore, she forbids all mirrors and droids in her presence that would show her true self behind her magic. Levana is also jealous if someone is more beautiful than her. She even scarred her stepdaughter's face because of it. Queen Levana executes the same role in *The Lunar Chronicles* as she does in the original tale and other retellings discussed in the previous part of the thesis. Appearance is not the most essential characteristic of a person. It is unhealthy to cling to external beauty and be obsessed with it or hurt people around us for our benefit.

And finally, Winter concludes the topic of all four novels - prejudice and discrimination. Prince Kai repeals the laws that oppress cyborgs and declares Cinder, the country's official ambassador for Lunar matters. Earth makes a truce and establishes trade and friendly relations with the people of the moon. Wolf soldiers begin to integrate into normal society. So, everything turns for the better, and injustice is fought.

## Conclusion

As has been discussed in the theoretical part, fairy tales have many valuable effects on children's psyche. They can stimulate a child's imagination and intellect, clarify emotions, present characters who share the same difficulties, and offer solutions, or at least hope to overcome them. Fairy tales present moral ideals and ethical values of society in which they are passed on through generations. Each fairy tale presents different themes and problems a child may face or messages that would be good to follow. For example, Cinderella shows us how important it is to learn independence and not lose our moral values, or Snow White points out not to cling to external beauty over other valuable characteristics of a person. Those themes are relevant not only for children but also adolescents and even adults.

This thesis aimed to present an overview of which themes and messages from classic fairy tales get adopted and executed in retellings by contemporary English-writing authors of young adult literature, namely in selected works by Marissa Meyer. As was alluded to, young adult retellings tend to preserve at least one of the original fairy tale themes or messages. Even if the author did not originally intend to pass on any related message, by using the original classic fairy tale template, the original themes persisted. For young adults who are going through problems typical of their age group (such as finding their place in society, growing up, issues with parents and siblings, problems with self-concept and appearance, and more), fairy tales discussing those issues, might become relevant again. Retellings might help and bring answers to the problems of adolescence and help readers work through their frustrations by reading them. Adolescents admit that they identify with literary heroes when reading young adult books. Fairy tale characters in contemporary retellings, who experience and deal with problems that bother the readers themselves, help young adults to find the solution and understanding for their troubles and help them grow into better adults. Books where the author adds topics, other than that of the fairy tales, currently present in today's society, such as racism or female emancipation, are of additional value. Both mentioned topics are addressed, for example, in the work of Marissa Meyer.

The practical part of the thesis aimed to test assumptions presented in the theoretical part on selected works by popular American author Marissa Meyer. It tried to describe how Meyer deals with the themes of classic fairy tales in her *The Lunar Chronicles* series, with a primary focus on the first book, *Cinder*. Meyer developed more than one fairy-tale theme in her works. *Lunar Chronicles* deals with serious themes we could also find in most fairy tales, for instance, the death of a parent. Death and the loss of a loved one have always been relevant for

every age group. Reading about it and reliving it helps readers to realize they are not alone in their grieving and that grieving is natural, but the pain will ease, and there will be a brighter future.

In the practical part, it is claimed that Cinder, same as Cinderella, shows readers the importance of self-acceptance, staying true to oneself, hard work, kindness and gaining independence. Cinder might be considered a suitable role model for young adults reaching a stage in their lives when they want and need to start to take care of themselves and rely more on their own skills. Through Cinder, a reader can learn about the difficulties their peers and society face. Cinder is unwanted and abused at the beginning of her story. Living her life by reading her book teaches readers to empathize with others, as Cinderella taught children engaging in her fairy tale. Or it helps people with similar problems to find themselves in Cinder's character while also receiving the hope of finding happiness despite a problematic background as she does.

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