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## **Diplomová práce**

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Using contemporary feminist retellings of classic fairy tales in ELT

Čestné prohlášení

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## **Abstract**

This diploma thesis examines the potential benefits of the usage of contemporary feminist retellings of classic fairy tales in ELT with particular emphasis on the role that literature as such can play in the development of critical-thinking abilities of learners. These retellings together with a variety of selected RWCT methods were utilised for creating five lesson plans which were used in the research conducted for the practical part of this thesis with the aim of finding out whether the feminist retellings of classic fairy tales can help develop learners' awareness of gender stereotyping. According to the research results, the usage of contemporary feminist retellings of classic fairy tales in ELT seems to have the potential to help develop learners' awareness of gender stereotyping, particularly in combination with the RWCT methods.

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## Introduction

“I’m writing the books I needed to read when I was younger.”

Louise O’Neill (2018)

The aim of my diploma thesis is to examine the potential benefits of the usage of contemporary feminist retellings of classic fairy tales in ELT with particular emphasis on the role that literature as such can play in the development of critical-thinking abilities of learners. I am deeply convinced that one of the most important functions of education is “to create caring citizens of the world, to build empathy, [and] to deepen understanding of diversity, social justice, and equity” (Swartz, 2020, p. 10). Jarkovská (2013, p. 166) believes that education should also enable the emancipation of learners, particularly when it comes to the limitations that traditional gender roles may pose to them, and I share this belief.

Undoubtedly, addressing the topic of gender in the ELT classroom is a challenging task, especially when it comes to the issue of gender-based violence. However, when looking at the statistics concerning domestic and sexualized violence, the need to address this issue at schools becomes apparent – e.g. the report of the World Health Organization (WHO) which reveals that globally, one in three women have been subjected to this type of violence (WHO, 2021). Given the cross-curricular nature of gender equality issues (Smetáčková, 2008, p. 15) and the fact that “[s]ome children’s literature not only offers an alternative way of looking at the world but gives voice to people whose perspectives are rarely heard or, if heard, are not valued” (Swartz, 2020, p. 12), contemporary feminist retellings of classic fairy tales seem to be an ideal tool for discussing the topic of gender with ELT learners.

The theoretical part of this thesis consists of four chapters. The first and the second chapter deal with the fairy tale genre, with the second chapter focusing in particular on the feminist approach to the literary fairy tale. The third chapter focuses on the analysis of three feminist revisionist fairy tale books by three acclaimed authors of children’s and Young Adult (YA) literature – Neil Gaiman’s fairy tale *The Sleeper and the Spindle* (2014), Louise O’Neill’s novel *The Surface Breaks* (2018) and Deirdre Sullivan’s fairy tale collection *Tangleweed and Brine* (2018). This analysis employs the concepts of postmodern and poststructuralist literary and cultural theory described in the second chapter. The fourth chapter interconnects the cross-disciplinary approach to fairy tales with the RWCT Programme, thus demonstrating the

potential of the role that literature as such can play in the development of critical thinking abilities of learners.

The practical part of this thesis consists of three chapters. The fifth chapter describes the methodology employed in designing and conducting the research. The research consisted of two stages and involved the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data. The sixth chapter describes the process of creating five lesson plans with the usage of selected retellings analysed in the third chapter and a variety of selected RWCT methods. These lesson plans were then used during five lessons of English with a group of ten 9th graders at a lower secondary school with extended language teaching with the aim of finding out whether the feminist retellings of classic fairy tales can help develop learners' awareness of gender stereotyping. After the realisation of the lessons, the learners were asked to fill in a reflective questionnaire. The seventh chapter presents the research results and their implications.



## Theoretical part

### 1. Definition of the fairy tale genre

In the following chapter, the meaning and scope of the term ‘fairy tale’ is explored and the genre of fairy tale is defined with regard to its generic characteristics.

As Zipes (2012, p. 2) remarks, it is not possible to trace fairy tales’ origin and their evolution to an exact time and place in history, even though it is well-known “that humans began telling tales as soon as they developed the capacity of speech”. However, what fairy tales have in common with many ancient, religious or patriotic narratives is the way they reflect the human disposition and necessity to transform and adapt not only the world to our needs, but also to transform and adapt ourselves to the world. This element of conflict with the world and with other people is the reason why fairy tales have always focused on “finding magical instruments, extraordinary technologies, or powerful people and animals” (Zipes, 2012, p. 2). With their help, protagonists can transform themselves as well as their environment, which then results in them “living in peace and contentment” (Zipes, 2012, p. 2).

As Haase (2008, p. 322) points out, the term ‘fairy tale’ lacks a definition that would be “universally accepted or universally satisfying”. For some scholars it represents a denotation of a particular narrative form with characteristics which are easy to identify, and others interpret it not as a singular genre but as an umbrella term for a variety of other narrative forms (Haase, 2008, p. 322).

The term ‘fairy tale’ was not used until the year 1697, when Marie-Catherine d’Aulnoy coined it. It comes from the French name of her collection of tales – *contes des fées*, which translates literally as “tales about fairies” (Zipes, 2012, p. 22). Until then, the literary fairy tale was simply called “a *conte*, *cunto*, *cuento*, *skazka*, story, *Märchen*”, etc. since it was not acknowledged to be a genre (Zipes, 2012, p. 23). Nevertheless, the term *contes des fées* is relevant mainly from the historical perspective (see section 2.1.2) and therefore it does not reflect how the fairy tale genre has evolved and what its contemporary definition should be (Haase, 2008, p. 322). The term ‘fairy tale’ is also frequently viewed as deficient and non-inclusive due to the fact that fairy characters do not appear in all fairy tales (Haase, 2008, p. 322).

In order to define the meaning and scope of the term ‘fairy tale’, there have also been attempts of fairy tale scholars to avoid the term ‘fairy tale’ and substitute it with the German word *Märchen* as its “superior alternative” (Haase, 2008, p. 322). As a consequence, the term ‘märchen’ is internationally recognised by scholars and often used to refer to various narrative forms, namely those in the seventh edition of the foundational collection of fairy tales *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (*Children’s and Household Tales*, 1857) by the Brothers Grimm (Haase, 2008, p. 322).

In terms of the medium of narration, folklorists usually distinguish between the term ‘folk tale’ (*Volksmärchen* in German), which is used for tales that originated in oral tradition, and ‘fairy tale’ (*Kunstmärchen* in German), which is used to refer to literary tales. The term *Buchmärchen* (book tale) is sometimes used to refer to oral tales that have been transcribed and then published as literary tales (Haase, 2008, pp. 322-323). Tatar (1987, p. 33) observes the terminological dilemma and ambiguity concerning the classification of the Grimms’ collection, which stems from that division – some scholars describe the collection as folk tales due to the oral roots of the tales, some describe the stories as fairy tales, and others use the term *Buchmärchen* to emphasise the fact that the tales contain folkloric as well as literary elements.

According to Zipes (2012, p. 2), it is important to consider the fact that fairy tales “were never given titles, nor did they exist in the forms in which they are told, printed, painted, recorded, performed, filmed, and manufactured today”. Due to the numerous cultural influences, there is also a huge diversity of the tale types and it is therefore difficult to precisely define folk tales and fairy tales because “they are inextricably dependent on one another” and they rather “form one immense and complex genre” (Zipes, 2012, p. 3). Zipes (2012, p. 3) therefore refuses the “print versus oral” dichotomy and he uses ‘fairy tale’ as a universal term to describe “the symbiotic relationship of oral and literary currents”.

The diversity of the fairy tale genre is also reflected in the definitions of its purpose and functions. As Haase (2008, p. 324) notes, they largely depend on the “social, cultural and historical contexts of a given fairy tale’s production and reception, as well as its target audience”. According to Zipes (2015, xix-xx), fairy tales can be attributed a certain role in the process of human socialization since they can serve the purpose of both conserving and challenging the ideologies and norms of a society. Other scholars, on the contrary, see the defining function of fairy tales in their entertainment value – according to Finnish folklorist

Satu Apo (cited in Haase, 2008, p. 324), fairy tales are “told as a means of passing the time, as entertainment”.

The setting or mode of reality in which fairy tales take place is by the majority of scholars perceived to be the most important category in terms of defining the fairy tale genre (Haase, 2008, p. 324). As Tatar states (1987, p. 33), there are two traditional uses of the term ‘folk tale’ – firstly, it is a reference to “oral narratives that circulate among the folk” (as has been described in previous paragraphs) and secondly, it describes “oral narratives that take place among the folk”, i.e. “in a realistic setting with naturalistic details”. On the contrary, the term ‘fairy tale’ has been used to refer to oral as well as literary tales and “is above all reserved for narratives set in a fictional world where preternatural events and supernatural interventions are taken wholly for granted” (Tatar, 1987, p. 33).

This defining element of “magical reality” (Haase, 2008, p. 324), together with the episodic structure which is built upon motifs, indefinite setting and characters, and “protagonists [that] overcome obstacles to advance to rewards and a new level of existence” (Haase, 2008, p. 323), i.e. the traditional happy ending in the form of the protagonist getting married or achieving wealth or power, is a characteristic that fairy tales share with another type of tale described by folklorists as the ‘magic’ or ‘wonder tale’ (*Zaubermärchen* in German) (Haase, 2008, p. 323). Haase (2008, p. 324) also notes that replacing the term ‘fairy tale’ with the term ‘wonder tale’ altogether would probably clarify the ambiguities in the definitions of the genre, though this is not likely to happen due to the history and widespread usage of the term.

As it has been demonstrated in this chapter, it is possible to determine some generic characteristics of the fairy tale genre, though it can perhaps be most accurately characterised by what Zipes (2012, p. 22) refers to as the “volatil[ity] and fluid[ity]” of the genre.

## **2. Approaches to the literary fairy tale**

This chapter describes the key concepts of postmodern and poststructuralist literary and cultural theory. Drawing on these concepts, it also provides an overview of feminist critique of classic fairy tales, namely those written by Charles Perrault, the Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen.

The literary fairy tale has been discussed and analysed by scholars using a wide range of conceptual approaches and methodologies. These approaches reflect to a certain extent “the critical, cultural and historical contexts in which they have been formulated” (McCallum, 2015, p. 18).

In the field of humanities and social sciences, the 20th century gave rise to two influential sequential movements – modernism and postmodernism (Matonoha, 2017, p. 106). As Morris (1993, p. 136) notes, these movements were both concerned with questioning the existing assumptions about “the two most central aspects of our reality: the way we perceive the human individual and language”. This questioning is also reflected in the conceptual approaches to the literary fairy tale that emerged in the 20th century – they aim to analyse the tales in terms of their form and language, and also in terms of their relationship with society and audiences (McCallum, 2015, p. 18).

There are six conceptual approaches to the literary fairy tale that emerged during the 20th century: folkloricist approach (its aim is to collect all known versions of a particular tale and to reconstruct the original version by identifying its basic story components), structuralist approach (it focuses on identifying and classifying the fixed structural elements and functions that constitute each tale), literary approach (it is focused on conducting stylistic analyses of fairy tales), psychoanalytic approach (it is concerned with psychoanalytic symbolism in fairy tales), historicist and sociological approach (its aim is to explore how fairy tales reflect the historical and social contexts in which they were created), and feminist approach (its aim is to reveal how gender differences and inequalities are reflected and reproduced in fairy tales with respect to their socio-historical contexts) (McCallum, 2015, pp. 18-22).

With regard to the aim of this thesis, the feminist approach and its key concepts are discussed in greater detail in the following subchapter.

## 2.1 Feminist approach

In order to understand the focus of feminist critique of classic fairy tales, it is necessary to clarify the underlying principles of postmodernism and poststructuralism which both represent its theoretical framework.

### 2.1.1 Postmodernism and poststructuralism

It should be noted that the concepts of postmodernism and poststructuralism largely overlap each other and sometimes are even used interchangeably. It is, however, possible to treat them separately and describe postmodernism as “primarily a theory of society, culture and history”, and poststructuralism as “primarily a theory of knowledge and language” (Pilcher and Whelehan, 2004, p. 109).

Zábrodská (2009, p. 21) uses the term “*post*” theories as an umbrella term which refers to theories in social sciences that are concerned with critically assessing the formerly established conceptions of social reality. They examine how these conceptions constitute the reality and why they are no longer seen as valid and functional – “post” theories therefore open up new ways of not only constituting, but also understanding social reality (Zábrodská, 2009, p. 21).

Postmodernism represents a critical response to the ideas of homogeneity promoted by modernism. Modernists disregarded the presence of social privilege and discrimination and therefore they believed in objective and universal interpretations of social reality. Postmodernism, on the contrary, stresses the plurality of meanings, perspectives, values and identities, together with cultural distinctions and differences (Matonoha, 2017, p. 106). A crucial postmodern concept related to the plurality of identities and distribution of power within a society is intersectionality – it shows how the intersection of different gender, sexual or ethnic identities and social and economic positions of individuals contributes to their discrimination or privilege (Matonoha, 2017, pp. 109-110).

As for poststructuralism, it draws on the ideas and concepts defined by structuralism and also critically assesses them. Most importantly, it represents a shift from seeing a literary text as a static and homogeneous system to perceiving it as a discourse which contributes to the construction of social reality (Matonoha, 2017, pp. 19-20). Poststructuralism also criticises and refuses the concept of binary oppositions established by structuralism. Poststructuralists argue

that binary oppositions, such as reason/emotion, culture/nature, objectivity/subjectivity or male/female, represent invariable polarities, which makes it impossible to perceive these elements as sometimes being fluid or rather occurring on a spectrum (Pilcher and Whelehan, 2004, p. 24). Moreover, these pairs of elements are perceived as hierarchies with one element being the dominant one associated with high status and the other being the subordinate one with a low status – feminist critique points to this tendency to associate the first elements in the examples listed above with masculinity and the second elements with femininity (Pilcher and Whelehan, 2004, p. 25). As Raia Prokhovnik (cited in Pilcher and Whelehan, 2004, p. 25) points out, if language is perceived and used this way, it serves as a tool that helps to preserve the existing social structures and inequalities.

Poststructuralism also played a crucial role in forming the concepts of constructivism and gender (Matonoha, 2017, p. 20). According to the main principle of constructivism, social values and individual and collective identities (such as gender, sexual or ethnic identities) are not determined biologically, but they are seen as constructs produced by the interaction of culture, discourse and ideology (Matonoha, 2017, p. 242). Jarkovská (2007, p. 11) contrasts this principle with the concept of biological essentialism which believes that there is a biologically given ‘essence’ of masculinity and femininity which determines and explains social differences between men and women. Nevertheless, as Jarkovská (2007, p. 18) further writes, this premise is rather disputable since it is often not possible to biologically define whether an individual is a man or a woman – biological sex is derived from an individual’s genitals, genes and hormones, which may not indicate one consistent category, e.g. a woman that is physically female but genetically male. This non-binary notion of biological sex can serve as another illustration of the above-mentioned counter-arguments regarding the system of binary oppositions.

The distinction between biological sex and a socially performed role or identity is reflected in the concept of gender. It can be defined as a set of socially constructed characteristics and expectations which are imposed on men and women. Biological differences therefore do not result in social differences and inequalities between men and women – these are acquired and reproduced through the process of socialization (Smetáčková and Vlková, 2005, p. 10). The constructivist nature of gender also explains why these stereotyping expectations vary according to different historical periods and cultures (Smetáčková and Vlková, 2005, p. 10).

### **2.1.2 Feminist critique of classic fairy tales**

In order to provide an overview of feminist critique of classic (or canonical) fairy tales, it is first necessary to define the umbrella term ‘literary canon’. In general terms, literary canon refers to a body of literary works which are considered to be important, exemplary and timeless due to the fact that they contribute to fostering cultural values and ideals of a particular society (Müller, 2017, p. 303). From the socio-historical perspective, however, it can be more accurately defined as an institutional and ideological construct – it conveys the information about what literary works the institutions and social groups in power in a particular culture and society consider to be culturally significant (Müller, 2017, p. 303). As Müller (2017, pp. 308-309) further observes, it is necessary to take into consideration the fact that cultural values and ideals are historically specific and therefore variable – literary canons, on the contrary, represent ideologically driven selections of literary works which originated in particular historical periods, and thus are inherently unable to comprehensively reflect contemporary culture and society.

Taking into account the constructivist nature of literary canons, it is inevitable for the feminist critique of classic fairy tales to encompass not only the exploration of the tales’ content, but also the process of their canonization and institutionalization, together with the reasons behind the dominance of male authors in the fairy tale tradition (Haase, 2004, p. 2).

The modern literary fairy tale was institutionalized as a genre in Europe in the 1690s by the French writers Charles Perrault, Marie-Catherine d’Aulnoy, Catherine Bernard and many others. These writers were however significantly influenced by the literary fairy tales of the Italian writers Giovanni Francesco Straparola and Giambattista Basile (Zipes, 2006, p. 13). As Zipes (2006, p. 27) claims, their fairy tales provided an example for the French writers “by focusing on violent conflicts that demanded some kind of self-restraint and resolution in accordance with the civilizing process of their times”. The Italian and French writers were particularly interested in the civilizing process due to the fact that the rise of the city-state in Italy and later the rise of the nation-state in France reinforced the power of hegemonic groups by bringing about changes in the civilizing process which required individuals to inculcate specific social norms and forms of self-restraint, including the adaptation to gender roles (Zipes, 2006, p. 20). This interest in the civilizing process is the reason why fairy tales have always been concerned with exploring gender roles, together with social classes and the distribution of power within a society (Zipes, 2006, p. 21).

The purpose of the type of fairy tales that Charles Perrault and Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy and other *conteuses* (i.e. French female fairy tale writers) were writing was to support the civilizing process which affects not only adults, but also children (Zipes, 2006, p. 3). The French fairy tale writers began publishing their tales at the point in history when childhood had already been recognized as a separate phase in human life and was also perceived to be crucial in terms of the formation of an individual's character, so children's education and socialization was considered particularly important (Zipes, 2006, p. 37). French society at that time denounced and punished social non-conformism and deviation (e.g. witches, werewolves, or Jews and gypsies – those were all regarded as the associates of the devil), so there was significant pressure put on children to conform to the socio-religious standards (Zipes, 2006, p. 38).

The fairy tales written by the *conteuses* differed in a couple of aspects from those published by Perrault. While Perrault associated his simple and direct narratives with the folk culture and oral tradition and he perpetuated the figure of a female *teller* that tells the tales to children, the *conteuses* identified themselves as *writers* of sophisticated, complex and long stories for adults (Harries, 2003, pp. 31-32). They included folkloric motifs (e.g. the story of Cinderella or Hansel and Gretel), together with motifs and figures from Greek mythology in their tales, and they also often dealt with the theme of metamorphosis (Harries, 2003, p. 39). The most important constituent of their tales were the fairies – good and evil ones too. As Andrew Lang (cited in Rowe, 1989, pp. 62-63) points out, fairies have their origin in the ancient goddesses Moirai and Hathor that helped women in labour and made prophecies regarding the children's future. The French term *fées* and the English term *faerie* are both derivatives from the Latin words *Fatum* which means 'fate' or 'what has been spoken', and *Fata* which are the Fates who make prophecies (Rowe, 1989, p. 62). In their tales, the fairies are the ones who have power over human lives and the *conteuses* also assigned to them the roles of midwives, godmothers and protectors, so it is the pagan fairies that the princesses and queens call on to help, not the patriarchal Christian God or church (Zipes, 2012, p. 28).

Apart from this protest against the church, they also used their fairy tales to criticise marriage economy and explore the "limitations of women's political and artistic power" (Harries, 2003, p. 44). Nevertheless, as Zipes (2006, p. 53) concludes, this subversion is rather ambivalent since all their tales contain moral lessons (in some cases similar to Perrault's) and they uphold the ideology that civility means "enduring the anguish of self-denial", i.e. if women want to avoid degradation and ostracism, they have to conform to patriarchal social standards.



Before exploring Perrault's ways of constructing gender in his tales, it is also important to comment on the way he reinforces the position of women in the literary economy as the *tellers* of fairy tales (Harries, 2003, p. 51). As Harries (2003, p. 49) writes, oral transmission of tales has been traditionally associated with female figures – grandmothers or nurses telling stories to children. This notion is represented by the generic 'Mother Goose' figure who is supposed to transmit morality and wisdom to children (Warner, 1995, p. 79). Before the early 18th century, however, Mother Goose (or Mother Stork or Mother Bunch) symbolized a stereotype of "a foolish, ignorant old woman" associated with dissemination of gossip and old wives' tales – it was Perrault who turned her into an honourable, moral figure in order to justify the fantastical content of his fairy tales (Warner, 1995, p. 79). At the same time, Perrault also distanced himself from this oral tradition when he wrote in a preface to one of his tales that "he was passing on 'an entirely made up story and an old wives' tale'" (Warner, 1995, p. 18). The very same claim was made by Straparola when he was investigated by the Inquisition for indecency due to the content of his tales – he defended himself by saying that he had only collected the stories that he had heard from female tale-tellers (Warner, 1995, p. 36).

This contradictory approach reflects the history of prejudices against women (Warner, 1995, xxiv). As Warner (1995, p. 14) observes, most likely the first reference to old wives' tales can be found in Plato's *Gorgias*, where he depreciated it as a kind of tale that nurses told to children in order to entertain and scare them. Warner (1995, p. 35) also writes that public meeting places for women, such as laundries or spinning rooms, represented a source of considerable patriarchal anxiety during Reformation and in Catholic Europe. They provided women with an opportunity to talk which they were denied in other places, so they were denigrated as sources of sinful prattle, gossip and secret liaisons (Warner, 1995, p. 35). Women were thus blamed for not living up to the Christian ideal of a silent and obedient woman which stemmed from Eve's sinful speech tempting Adam to eat the forbidden fruit (Warner, 1995, pp. 29-30). Old wives' tales are interwoven with this tradition of female tale-telling and gossip, and as Angela Carter (cited in Harries, 2003, p. 51) remarks, they represent "[...] a derisive label that allots the art of storytelling to women at the exact same time as it takes all value from it".

As Harries (2003, p. 51) notes, "women are and were not the only, or even the primary, storytellers in most oral cultures". However, this myth is what reinforces the notion about the appropriate place for women in the literary economy – they are the *tellers*, or spinners, of tales and therefore they are not thought to be the *writers* of tales (Harries, 2003, p. 51). This myth is also reflected in the frontispiece in Charles Perrault's *Mother Goose's Tales* (1697 edition),

which depicts an old spinning woman seated by the hearth, with a group of children listening to her telling the tales. This illustration also promoted and reflected the established connection between fairy tales and the “female realm of domesticity” (Rowe, 1989, p. 65).

According to Harries (2003, p. 21), the reasons behind the dominance of male authors in the fairy tale tradition cannot be justified by the frequent claims about low literacy among women and their consequent low literary production – this argument can only be applied to the literary production before the mid-seventeenth century. In spite of the fact that the *conteuses* were all highly literate aristocrats or middle-class women (Harries, 2003, p. 44) and they wrote the majority of the fairy tales which were published during the 1690s, they did not receive the same historic recognition as Perrault and their contribution to the fairy tale genre is widely unknown (Harries, 2003, pp. 21-22). When the *conteuses* started publishing the tales, their entry into the literary marketplace was seen as a threat to the stability of “the ‘natural’ economy of literature and the unchanging value of its monuments” because of generating allegedly undeserved revenue for this new type of literature (Harries, 2003, p. 25). Consequently, threatened writers (such as the abbé de Villiers) tried to discredit women writers and readers by disparaging women’s writing as a fad and claiming that women have “fickle and superficial taste” which distorts the literary economy (Harries, 2003, p. 26). These discouraging sociocultural as well as economic conditions helped to institutionalize the literary fairy tale as a literary form used for reflecting “the values and perspectives of patriarchy” (Haase, 2004, p. 19).

As it has already been described, when Charles Perrault was writing his fairy tales, his aim was to provide children with behavioral models which would be in accordance with the civilizing process of his time. The eight fairy tales from his 1697 collection *Stories or Tales from Past Times, with Morals* (or *Mother Goose’s Tales*) can be therefore divided into two gender-based groups – fairy tales providing role models for girls, i.e. “Cinderella”, “Sleeping Beauty”, “Bluebeard”, “The Fairies” and “Little Red Riding Hood”, and fairy tales providing role models for boys – “Puss in Boots”, “Ricky of the Tuft” and “Little Tom Thumb” (Zipes, 2006, p. 39).

In the fairy tales which are aimed at girls, Perrault constructs a role model of femininity which corresponds with the aristocratic ideal of a civilized woman – the most precious qualities of the heroines for which they are rewarded are beauty, grace, politeness, passivity, docility and self-control (Zipes, 2006, pp. 40-41). “Sleeping Beauty” and “Cinderella” both enchant the

prince with their beauty and manners and he marries them. The heroine in “Bluebeard” is beautiful and well-mannered too, but she is not able to control her sinful curiosity. In the tale “The Fairies”, a beautiful daughter is rewarded for her kindness by a fairy and she marries a prince, while her rude and arrogant older sister is punished and dies in the woods (Zipes, 2006, pp. 39-40). The behavioral imperative in “Little Red Riding Hood” is demonstrated in the moral at the end of the story, instructing “[p]retty, well-bred” girls to contain their desires (Perrault, 2017, p. 17) and beware of wolves “[f]ollowing young ladies [r]ight into their homes, into their chambers” (Perrault, 2017, p. 18).

In the fairy tales aimed at boys, Perrault emphasises an opposing set of masculine attributes – the most important virtues of a man are intelligence, ambition and courage (Zipes, 2006, p. 42). The cat in “Puss in Boots” uses his wit and intelligence to climb the social ladder. Despite being ugly, prince Ricky in “Ricky of the Tuft” eventually marries a beautiful princess because she falls in love with him due to his intelligence. “Little Tom Thumb” is described as the wisest of the brothers – he outwits the ogre and ogress and thanks to his shrewdness, he also gains a fortune (Zipes, 2006, pp. 41-42).

Bottigheimer (2004, pp. 38-39) argues that this concept of opposing gender roles and the emergence of the disempowered fairy tale heroine reflects the historical development regarding the economic and sexual independence of women during the 1500 – 1700 period. Bottigheimer (2004, pp. 43-44) writes that prior to 1500, women had opportunities to sustain themselves and to live relatively independent lives on their own – many women joined a convent or a beguinage, or practised a craft (such as brewing ale or making votive candles). During the 1500s, religious reformations in Europe brought about changes that significantly limited women’s social and personal lives. The beginning of the two-hundred-year-long period of witch hunts, together with the regulation of female sexuality and the growing emphasis on women’s place in the domestic sphere, gradually resulted in male dominance in the public sphere (Bottigheimer, 2004, pp. 43-44).

According to Lilyane Mourey (cited in Zipes, 2006, p. 46), when Perrault was selecting the folk tales for his 1697 collection, he retained only those that enabled him to develop his political and social views – this explains the limited number of tales that he included in the collection, and the numerous alterations that he made to the tales also show that he was not concerned with restoring the tales in their authenticity. The motifs in Perrault’s tales come from folk tales that were known in France in his time, and from the literary fairy tales published by

Straparola and Basile (Zipes, 2006, p. 43). When he weaved together these folkloric and literary motifs, he also shifted the narrative perspective – from that of the peasantry to that of the bourgeoisie and aristocracy. This shift had a major influence on the ways that children were supposed to perceive their social roles and sexuality, and it also explains the enduring popularity of the tales in middle-class families in the 19th and 20th century (Zipes, 2006, p. 43).

In his analysis of Perrault’s version of “Little Red Riding Hood”, Zipes (2006, p. 44) illustrates how radical Perrault’s shift in the narrative perspective in this particular tale was. The version of the oral folk tale that Perrault used as the basis for his “Little Red Riding Hood” became popular in the 17th century France during the witch hunts due to the common superstition regarding the existence of werewolves. It depicts two scenes of a pagan initiation ritual – when a peasant girl encounters a werewolf, he serves her the flesh and blood of her dead grandmother, and he also explicitly seduces her by instructing her to take off her clothes and burn them. She climbs into the bed with him and when he later reveals his intention to eat her, she manages to trick him and runs away (Zipes, 2006, p. 44). The first reference to the pagan folk culture was removed by Perrault and he turned this tale not into a warning tale, but rather into a guilt-inducing one – the strong and clever female character was replaced with a delicate, helpless and naive bourgeois girl who is at the end of the tale gobbled up (raped) by the wolf because she is not able to tame her sexual desire (Zipes, 2006, pp. 45-46).

At the same time, as it has already been described, Perrault also successfully maintained the illusion that he was reproducing the authentic voice of an uneducated tale-teller. This practice of simulation was later adopted by the Grimms and other fairy tale writers and it “became the dominant style and ideology of the fairy tale” (Harries, 2003, p. 72).

As the romantic nationalism began to grow in Germany at the end of the 18th century, the association of the fairy tale genre with the folk culture and oral tradition became stronger (Harries, 2003, p. 26). As Bottigheimer (1987, p. 14) points out, the national importance that German intellectuals attached to fairy tales at that time began the process of the Grimms’ fairy tales’ canonization before the very publication of their collection – they referred to the unfinished collection as a “treasure”, and later on praised the Grimms for “reveal[ing] the German nation’s true identity to itself”. The Grimms themselves referred to Charles Perrault’s tales in the introduction to the 1812 edition of their *Children’s and Household Tales*, praising their allegedly authentic simplicity and naivety, and disparaging the *conteuses* as “his inferior imitators” (Harries, 2003, p. 22). As a result of the introduction of elementary schooling,

literacy rates in Germany rose, and the number of published children's books surged in the mid- and late-nineteenth century (Bottigheimer, 1987, p. 18). Since the Grimms' tales corresponded with the contemporary belief that children's literature should also improve them "religiously, morally, and socially" (Bottigheimer, 1987, p. 19), the collection was incorporated in the elementary school curriculum in 1850 (Bottigheimer, 1987, p. 21).

During the 1970s, the assumption that the Brothers Grimm published authentic transcriptions of oral folk tales that they collected from peasants was proved wrong when Germanist Heinz Rölleke published his groundbreaking studies of the tales – by comparing the Grimms' original transcriptions with the texts that they published, he exposed the large extent of their editorial interventions, together with the fact that they drew heavily on literary fairy tales (such as those published by Perrault) and also collected the versions of the tales from educated middle-class informants (Haase, 2004, p. 10).

According to Zipes (2006, p. 62), the reason why the Brothers Grimm revised and kept revising the tales (they published seven editions of their tales, with the original publication intended for both adults and children) is that they wanted the tales to serve the purpose of promoting and cultivating patriarchal and bourgeois norms and values of the 19th century, i.e. their intention was to make the tales "appropriate" for the audience of the growing middle-class. The revisions were mostly done by Wilhelm Grimm, the more religious and conservative one of the brothers (Zipes, 2006, p. 62). As numerous German writers and critics pointed out during the mid-twentieth century, though the Grimms' tales were "ingenious and perhaps socially relevant in their own times, [they] contained sexist and racist attitudes and served a socialization process that placed great emphasis on passivity, industry, and self-sacrifice for girls, and on activity, competition and accumulation of wealth for boys" (Zipes, 2006, p. 60).

Tatar (1987, pp. 7-8) mentions that what the Grimms gradually removed from the tales were any references to premarital sex and pregnancy. In the folk version of "The Frog King", the princess throws the frog against the wall, it falls down on her bed and transforms into a handsome prince, whereupon she lies down in the bed next to him. By the second edition of their collection, the bed part is completely removed and the frog simply transforms as it hits the wall. In addition, the couple's retirement to the bedroom is dependent on their wedding which takes place when the princess's father explicitly approves of it (Tatar, 1987, pp. 7-8). Among the fairy tales that originally portrayed pregnancy is "Rapunzel", where the passage in which she wonders why her clothes have become so tight was also removed (Tatar, 1987, p. 18).

Similar interventions can be identified in the edited version of “Little Red Riding Hood”. The tale exposes the patriarchal fear and regulation of female sexuality (in a similar way to Perrault’s version which was in fact the Grimms’ source) as it stresses the innocence of the girl and also communicates the message that girls are punished for their curiosity and lust, i.e. if they wander off the path (Zipes, 2006, pp. 65-66). In their version, however, Little Red Riding Hood and her grandmother are saved by a hunter who is supposed to represent “a father figure devoid of sexuality” (Zipes, 2006, p. 66).

The Grimms were, however, not so much concerned about graphic descriptions of violence (Tatar, 1987, pp. 7-8). Tatar (1993, p. 31) observes that portrayals of harsh punishments were justified by various fairy tale collectors for their alleged moral and pedagogical function. As folk tales transformed into children’s literature, the curiosity and disobedience depicted in them gained negative connotations and many tales started to be used for promoting the corrective function of punishments, which Tatar (1993, p. 39) refers to as “a pedagogy of fear and terror”.

Another aspect of the socializing process of the 19th century which the Grimms incorporated in their tales is the emphasis on women’s place in the home. In the altered 1812 version of “Snow White”, the dwarfs *permit* her to stay with them only if she agrees to do the household chores that the dwarfs assign to her – she is asked to cook and sew for them, make their beds, knit, wash the dishes and keep the house clean and tidy while they work in the mines. In their 1810 manuscript, however, the dwarfs *persuade* her to stay and the only chore they ask her to do is cooking (Zipes, 2006, p. 66). As Zipes (2006, p. 66) suggests, due to this rephrasing, Snow White is morally obliged to do the chores – this way the Grimms reinforce the notion that a woman’s role in the domestic sphere is morally justifiable.

Bottigheimer (1987, p. 51) also discusses the Grimms’ editorial interventions concerning their textual silencing of good female characters. Bottigheimer (1987, p. 51) remarks that direct and indirect speech patterns form a significant part of analysing the content of the tales since “discourse can be understood as a form of domination, and speech use as an index of social values and the distribution of power within a society”. As Zábrodská (2009, p. 62) notes, gender identities are constructed in discourse through language, determining and reinforcing the positioning of individuals in social reality. Therefore, language use in discourse reveals how masculinity and femininity is constructed in particular socio-historical contexts (Zábrodská, 2009, p. 62) (see also section 2.1.1). In her analysis of the editorial history of

“Cinderella”, Bottigheimer (1987, pp. 58-59) points to the striking textual reduction in the direct speech of good female characters and their associates, i.e. Cinderella, her mother and the doves (from 25 utterances in the 1812 edition to 10 in the 1857 edition), and a significant increase in the direct speech of male characters, i.e. her father and the prince (from 4 utterances in the 1812 edition to 11 in the 1857 edition). This way, Cinderella is condemned to be almost permanently silent – she does not speak when she is at the ball, while she works, when she is derided by her stepsisters, or when she tries on the slipper (Bottigheimer, 1987, p. 53). These editorial interventions reflect the Christian ideal of a silent and obedient woman described earlier in this chapter and, as Bottigheimer (1987, pp. 52-53) points out, they appear in the tales of “Hansel and Gretel”, “Rapunzel” and “Snow White” as well.

The previously described method of weaving together the folkloric and literary motifs, which was used by Charles Perrault and the Grimms, was employed by Hans Christian Andersen as well – in the case of “The Little Mermaid” (1837), he drew inspiration from the folk tale characters of water sprites and he was also familiar with Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué’s tale *Undine* (1811) and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s *The New Melusine* (1812) (Zipes, 2005, p. 36).

It is necessary to note that the 19th century society was intensely preoccupied with issues of biological essentialism, eugenics and also race – in order to ensure and morally justify the dominance of the ruling class, social inequalities were claimed to derive from biological predetermination, i.e. only select people who possessed allegedly innate or hereditary qualities (such as diligence or responsibility) could succeed in the emerging free market economy (Zipes, 2006, p. 86). This ideology was also applied to justify gender inequalities (see section 2.1.1).

Andersen’s attitude towards the essentialist ideology was an ambivalent one – he believed that privilege stemmed from biological determination and took pride in his “innate” artistic ability, and at the same time, he was embarrassed by his working class origin and strived to gain acceptance by the upper class, for he was “a man who hated to be dominated though he loved the dominant class” (Zipes, 2006, p. 83). This ambivalence is also reflected in his tales where he heavily draws on the Protestant Ethic and depicts the suffering and humiliation which is inherent in climbing the social ladder (Zipes, 2006, pp. 81-82). Thus he creates what Zipes (2006, p. 91) refers to as “the discourse of the dominated”. As Tatar (2002, p. 302) observes, Andersen sees suffering as “the badge of spiritual superiority” – enduring the suffering and humiliation is what makes his protagonists triumph and it leads to their salvation.

As Jackie Wullschlager (cited in Teverson, 2013, p. 76) writes, and as it has been also described earlier in this section, the children's books which were written in Hans Christian Andersen's time were not meant to amuse children – they were educational texts which were supposed to improve them morally. This moral appeal, together with the essentialist ideology mentioned above, is also reflected in his tale “The Little Mermaid” (1837). It depicts the suffering and torture that the little mermaid as “a member of the ‘lower species’” has to endure in order to gain an immortal human (Christian) soul (Zipes, 2005, p. 36). Apart from having her tongue cut out and feeling unrelenting pain when she walks, she is obliged to do good deeds as an airy spirit for three hundred years. Children are also warned at the end of the tale that their misbehaviour will prolong her sentence (Zipes, 2005, pp. 36-37). As Zipes (2005, pp. 108-110) further explains, it is therefore not the prince that she is mainly preoccupied with (also, pursuing a man would be considered an expression of sexual desire and therefore deemed improper for a young girl) – rather than being a tragic love story, it represents a story of a pagan girl's conversion to Christianity. The torture, humiliation and taming of female characters is what Andersen's fairy tales have in common with the Grimms' tales (e.g. “King Thrushbeard”) (Zipes, 2005, p. 123) and they are also another example of the “pedagogy of fear and terror” (Tatar, 1993, p. 39) which was promoted in the 19th century.

Since the fairy tales written by Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm had been established as the dominant and canonical mode, it resulted in defining the tales written by female fairy tale writers in the 19th and 20th century as “subversive and oppositional” (Harries, 2003, p. 14). As Blackwell (2004, p. 74) writes, German female fairy tale writers, such as Bettina von Arnim, Ludowine von Haxthausen or Annette von Droste-Hülshoff, used fairy tales mainly for entertainment, but also for introspection, social criticism, autobiographical narration or as a metaphor for traumatic life events. Some of these writers were also among the Grimms' informants, though their tale versions were not always accepted by the Grimms, as in the case of Annette von Droste-Hülshoff's tale – her tale “King One-Leg” bore an obvious resemblance to the tales of the *conteuses*, and as such was not accepted by the Grimms, who described it in their manuscript as “contrived” (Blackwell, 2004, p. 91).

This chapter has demonstrated how the fairy tale writers in the 17th and 19th century incorporated patriarchal values in their tales and through editorial interventions also constructed gender-specific identities which were supposed to provide behavioral models for children and support the socializing process of their times. It has also demonstrated that the formation of the fairy tale canon was largely influenced by the gender of the writers.



### 3. Feminist revisionism

The following chapter defines the scope of postmodern feminist revisionism, and drawing on the concepts described in section 2.1.1, it provides an analysis of three feminist revisionist fairy tale books – Neil Gaiman’s fairy tale *The Sleeper and the Spindle* (2014), Louise O’Neill’s novel *The Surface Breaks* (2018) and Deirdre Sullivan’s fairy tale collection *Tangleweed and Brine* (2018).

As the previous chapters have shown, the modern literary fairy tale was originally institutionalized and used as a vehicle for promoting patriarchal values. The revelation of the “double control” that male authors asserted over both the female voice and the literary text (Rowe, 1989, p. 61) originated in the social and literary movements of the 20th century (see section 2.1.1), and it resulted in numerous rereadings and rewritings of classic fairy tales. Angela Carter (1983, p. 69), the author of the pioneering collection of feminist revisionist fairy tales *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), writes that “[r]eading is just as creative an activity as writing and most intellectual development depends upon new readings of old texts”, adding that she is “all for putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode”.

As Kérchy (2011, iv) points out, postmodern revisions seek to “challenge the univocity of meanings and epistemic certainties” represented by classic fairy tales. Postmodern feminist revisions are therefore not concerned with simply updating the content of the tales ideologically or stylistically – they rather aim to question the narrative construction and assumptions regarding gender, and by taking into consideration various versions of the tales expose the multiplicity of voices and issues which were suppressed as the tales were institutionalized for children (Bacchilega, 1997, p. 50). The discourse which these revisions form also works as a supplement to academic discussions concerning contemporary feminist issues (Kérchy, 2011, ix). However, as Joosen (2011b, p. 177) remarks, and as it is also discussed later in this chapter, this discourse can sometimes not only popularise feminist ideas through intertextual references, but also perpetuate theories or concepts which are considered to be outdated. Given the current widespread interest in the issues of feminism and gender, the 21st century fairy tale revisions not only appeal to adult and young adult audiences, but they are often intentionally written for them (Bacchilega, 2013, pp. 12-13).

Drawing on the postmodern concept of intersectionality, the major themes that the YA feminist revisionist fairy tales discussed in the following subchapters explore are emancipation, LGBTQ+<sup>1</sup>, body image, sexuality, gender-based violence<sup>2</sup>, disability, class and race. The fairy tales also reflect the postmodern emphasis on the plurality of meanings and perspectives since all of them have open or ambiguous endings and they are narrated from the perspective of both major and minor characters that appear in the original literary fairy tales.

### **3.1 Neil Gaiman's *The Sleeper and the Spindle***

In his book *The Sleeper and the Spindle* (2014) Gaiman weaves together the classic fairy tale of “Snow White” and “Sleeping Beauty” and creates a new tale where Snow White (she is addressed only as ‘the queen’ in the book) becomes the main character. The narration starts with preparations for the wedding of the queen and the prince. One day before the wedding, the queen receives a message from three dwarfs that there is a curse which puts everyone to sleep spreading beyond the borders of the neighbouring kingdom (Gaiman, 2014, p. 20). She decides to postpone the wedding and save the enchanted princess and also her own kingdom (Gaiman, 2014, p. 21).

The main theme that Gaiman explores in this fairy tale is women's emancipation. The stereotypical image of women as passive objects without their own will, which is perpetuated in classic fairy tales, is deconstructed in several ways in the narrative. Firstly, the queen is given her own voice through textual introspection – the reader can ‘read her mind’ and thus she does not represent the passive image of the *Other*, but she becomes the authentic and active *Self* (Donovan, 1997, pp. 211-212). It also illustrates that she is well aware of the limiting character of traditional gender roles and expectations which were imposed on women in the past:

She wondered how she would feel to be a married woman. It would be the end of her life, she decided, if life was a time of choices. In a week from now, she would have no choices. She would reign over her people. She would have children. Perhaps she would die in childbirth, perhaps she would die as an old woman, or in battle. But the path to her death, heartbeat by heartbeat, would be inevitable. She could hear the carpenters in the meadows beneath the castle, building the seats that would allow her people to watch her marry. Each hammer blow sounded like a heartbeat (Gaiman, 2014, p. 14).

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<sup>1</sup> This is a recently preferred inclusive version of the initialism which is used to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer individuals, with the ‘+’ indicating also the existence of other sexual and gender identities, e.g. pansexual, gender-fluid, etc. (Straussman, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> Gender-based violence stems from gender inequality and is defined as violence which is directed against an individual because of their gender. It also affects people of that gender disproportionately, e.g. the majority of victims of domestic and sexualized violence are women (Council of Europe, n.d.)

In addition, the introspection serves as an explanation for her decisions – she consciously refuses to submit to these expectations by postponing the wedding. This way Gaiman subverts the image of a traditional fairy tale heroine who “lives only through the male and for marriage” (Zipes, 2006, p. 41). Female agency, however, does not concern only the character of the queen – the dwarfs are told in a village inn that not only men, but also women have tried to save the enchanted princess (Gaiman, 2014, pp. 15-16). Women are therefore not portrayed only as passive observers of men’s heroic deeds, but they are enabled to become heroines themselves.

Secondly, Gaiman aims to deconstruct the gendered binary oppositions which appear in classic fairy tales by utilising the gender reversal strategy – he ascribes to men the characteristics which are stereotypically attributed to women and vice versa (Joosen, 2011a, p. 86). Throughout the story, he depicts the queen as a calm and rational person, employing logical deduction when she faces a problem. Men, on the contrary, are described as rather incompetent or handsome simpletons – when the queen leaves her first minister in charge of the kingdom, she asks him to “do his best neither to lose it nor to break it”, and she tells the prince “not to take on so” and “chuck[s] him beneath his pretty chin” (Gaiman, 2014, p. 21). This retelling strategy, together with the other type of gender reversal in which the male protagonist is simply replaced with a female one or vice versa (Joosen, 2011a, p. 86), was widely utilised mainly in the writings of the second feminist wave in the 1970s and 1980s and stemmed predominantly from the insufficient knowledge about the socio-historical contexts of fairy tales’ origin, the lack of inspiring role models, and misunderstanding the equality goal as advocating sameness (Joosen, 2011a, pp. 92-93). Even though this strategy can help to develop readers’ awareness of gender stereotypes, when it is employed uncritically, it ultimately contributes to retaining the system of binary oppositions and promotes the misconception that the rise of one gender can happen only at the expense of the other (Joosen, 2011a, pp. 88-90).

Another theme which pervades classic fairy tales is the Christian taboo imposed on female sexuality. According to the doctrine of ‘the fall of Adam’ due to Eve’s curiosity, empowered female sexuality poses a threat to men and is therefore presented as evil (Donovan, 1997, pp. 213-214). As Zipes (2006, p. 50) observes, in Charles Perrault’s time, nonmarital sex was ordained a sin by the church and children were brought up to fear and loathe sex per se. Gaiman addresses the issue of women’s sexual liberation when he lets the queen “do the honours” and

wake the enchanted princess up with her kiss (Gaiman, 2014, p. 49). In doing so, he also challenges the heteronormativity<sup>3</sup> of classic fairy tales.

Gaiman also refers to the clash between liberated women and conservative women, who strive to preserve the patriarchal system which oppresses them, but which they can benefit from at the same time (Kandiyoti, 1988, pp. 282-283). After the queen wakes the enchanted princess up with a kiss, it is revealed that she is not the princess but a witch – the real princess is revealed to be the old woman the queen and the dwarfs met when they entered the castle (Gaiman, 2014, p. 52). The witch explains that she has cursed the princess and the kingdom in order to get back her youth and beauty (Gaiman, 2014, p. 52). She also identifies the queen as someone who is “not of our blood” and speaks about the difficulty of “maintaining order among those of the Sisterhood who have survived into this degenerate age” (Gaiman, 2014, p. 59). This plot twist can be interpreted as a reference to the concept of patriarchal bargain – a coping strategy which makes women compete for men’s attention and protection through preserving the female qualities which are valued in patriarchy (Kandiyoti, 1988, pp. 283-284), e.g. youth and beauty. This is how the oppressive patriarchal system makes them destroy each other – the princess kills the witch by thrusting the enchanted spindle into her chest (Gaiman, 2014, p. 59), but contrary to the classic fairy tale happy ending, she is not restored to her former youth and beauty (Gaiman, 2014, pp. 62-63).

The final reference to women’s liberation can be found at the end of the tale when the queen refuses to accept the traditional gender role imperative and she decides not to return to her kingdom to marry the prince (Gaiman, 2014, p. 66). Making this choice also means challenging the concept of amatonormativity<sup>4</sup> and stressing the importance of women’s emancipation which enables them to live out their lives in a more diverse and fulfilling way.

### **3.2 Louise O’Neill’s *The Surface Breaks***

Louise O’Neill’s novel *The Surface Breaks* (2018) is a retelling of Hans Christian Andersen’s literary fairy tale “The Little Mermaid” (1837). She elaborates on the themes and motifs in the original story and uses it as a framework to provide a portrayal of women’s subjugation in a patriarchal society. In doing so, she also devises a subplot that deals with the

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<sup>3</sup> A term which was coined by Michael Warner to describe the pervasive belief that heterosexuality is the default sexual orientation, which results in its privileged social status (Warner, 1993, xxi).

<sup>4</sup> A term coined by Elizabeth Brake which describes the widespread assumption that a romantic relationship and marriage is a goal that all people universally share (Brake, 2012, pp. 88-89).

life story of the Sea Witch and the Sea King. Contrary to Andersen's tale, O'Neill gives her female characters their own voice by utilising first person narration in the novel – the story is narrated by the little mermaid, and the life story of the Sea Witch is narrated by herself. All the characters in the novel are also given names (most of the names of the mer-people refer to figures from Greek and Irish mythology<sup>5</sup>) and in the case of the little mermaid, they also symbolise her search for identity and her transformation from a naive, obedient and superficial girl into a strong and independent one – her deceased mother Muireann gave her the name Gaia (O'Neill, 2018, p. 4), which her family refuses to use and insists on calling her Muirgen (O'Neill, 2018, p. 5), and the family of Oliver Carlisle (the human man she falls in love with) calls her Grace (O'Neill, 2018, p. 160).

O'Neill also portrays the little mermaid as having red hair (O'Neill, 2018, p. 2) and the Sea Witch as having a black tail and being fat (body image represents one of the major themes in the subplot) (O'Neill, 2018, p. 112), making an intertextual reference to the Disney film version of the tale (*The Little Mermaid*, 1989). Also, the conviction of the little mermaid that Oliver is her true love (O'Neill, 2018, p. 97) is a reference to the film version (*The Little Mermaid*, 1989) rather than Andersen's original tale. The novel is therefore illustrative of what Bacchilega (2013, p. 27) describes as “the fairy-tale web”, i.e. the hypertextuality of the “intertextual, multivocal, and transmedial” adaptations in the globalised world of the 21st century. The fairy-tale web also reveals the shapeshifting nature of the fairy tale as a genre (Bacchilega, 2013, p. 27) (see also chapter 1).

The first issues that O'Neill addresses at the very beginning and then throughout the story are the silencing of women and the pressure which is put on them to meet arbitrary beauty standards. When the little mermaid asks her grandmother Thalassa eagerly when she will be finally allowed to break the surface and see the world above the sea, she reminds her about the Sea King's hatred of the human world and silences her “for [her] own good” (O'Neill, 2018, p. 1). The little mermaid also mentions that she has “never been allowed to talk much” since her “father doesn't care for curious girls” (O'Neill, 2018, p. 1). As O'Neill (2018, p. 120) writes, since they were children, mermaids in the kingdom “have been told that being slim is as important as being beautiful, as necessary as being obedient, as desirable as remaining quiet”.

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<sup>5</sup> For detailed information on the individual mythological figures, see e.g. Pierre Grimal's *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology* (1996) and James MacKillop's *A Dictionary of Celtic Mythology* (2017).

Tatar (2002, p. 303) points out that Andersen describes the underwater kingdom almost as a paradise, but it is a paradise with a very strict social hierarchy – the sea king’s mother, for instance, wears twelve oysters on her tail, while those of lower rank wear only six. As Zipes (2006, p. 90) suggests, this stylisation and ennoblement of folk motifs reflects Andersen’s attempt to meet the “high art” standards which were set by the bourgeoisie. O’Neill elaborates on this motif and provides the reader with a graphic description of the grandmother scraping away the scales and knitting six pearls into the fishtail of the little mermaid as they prepare for the birthday celebration, pointing out to the little mermaid that pain is the price women have to pay for beauty (O’Neill, 2018, p. 3). The little mermaid also explains that she is obliged to wear the pearls to demonstrate her superiority to the mer-people of lower rank (O’Neill, 2018, p. 3). The double standard of appearance for men and women set in the kingdom becomes apparent at the court ball when it is revealed that men are not obliged to wear such decoration because, as the Sea King remarks, there is no need for them to be beautiful (O’Neill, 2018, p. 25).

O’Neill also hints at the issue of eating disorders and body image when the Sea King reprimands one of his daughters for her appetite, indicating that a weight gain may put her suitors off (O’Neill, 2018, p. 58), or when the little mermaid sees how the human girls on the boat where Oliver celebrates his birthday induce vomiting in themselves and try to cover parts of their bodies, commenting on how much food they have eaten (O’Neill, 2018, pp. 48-49) and how “disgusting” they are (O’Neill, 2018, p. 49).

The theme of arranged marriage is depicted in the novel as well – the little mermaid is betrothed to the leader of the kingdom’s army, Zale, who abuses her (when she tries to confide it to her grandmother she silences her and refuses to believe it) and whom she is terrified of (O’Neill, 2018, p. 97). He is also plotting to start a war since he is obsessed with the idea of killing every Salka (see below) in the kingdom (O’Neill, 2018, pp. 80-81).

O’Neill further addresses the implicit reference to social inequality and exclusion in the underwater realm when she provides the reader with a description of the segregated area of the kingdom – the Outerlands (O’Neill, 2018, p. 12). The little mermaid describes the mer-folk living there as “the ones who pray to the forbidden gods, those whose bodies were hatched misshapen, maids who did not adhere to the standards of beauty my father prefers, those who were sterile or barren” (O’Neill, 2018, p. 102). This is also the area where the Sea Witch’s realm – the Shadowlands – is located, and where the Rusalkas (or ‘Salkas’), who are under her protection, live (O’Neill, 2018, pp. 63-64). O’Neill’s Rusalkas are half mythological sirens and

half rusalkas characters with pale green hair, claws and razor-sharp teeth (O'Neill, 2018, pp. 263-264), whom she describes as drowned human women who were “the jilted, the victims, the orphans, and the abused” (O'Neill, 2018, p. 291), mentioning their “eyes blooming purple from insistent fists, chunks of hair torn out at the roots, legs and hearts torn apart while screaming” (O'Neill, 2018, p. 343). It can be argued that the purpose of these characters is not only to refer to the social stigmatisation of the victims of domestic and sexualized violence, but also to rehabilitate the female monsters from patriarchal mythology since, as Zimmerman (2021, p. 3) notes, “all the stories about monstrous women [...] are stories told by men”, e.g. Homer, Ovid or Sophocles. The rehabilitation concerns the character of the Sea Witch as well, as it is discussed later in this subchapter. The issue of domestic violence is also reflected in the little mermaid's remarks about the continued effort of the sisters to meet the Sea King's expectations and “be perfect” since they are afraid of him “raising his voice or his trident or his hand” (O'Neill, 2018, p. 118). Sexualized violence is further depicted in scenes where Oliver's friend Rupert harasses a servant girl (O'Neill, 2018, p. 172) or when he attempts to rape a drunk girl (O'Neill, 2018, pp. 244-245). He also attempts to rape the little mermaid on the boat where Oliver throws a party to celebrate a year since the shipwreck, but she manages to push him into the sea where he is killed by the Salkas (O'Neill, 2018, pp. 260-264). O'Neill also repeatedly refers to Andersen's theme of inferiority that the little mermaid feels towards humans, e.g. in one dinner scene when she thinks that they would not eat the seaweed she is supposed to eat, being convinced that “they would laugh, call us animals” (O'Neill, 2018, p. 62).

The next themes explored in the novel are the regulation of female sexuality and persecution of LGBTQ+ people. After saving Oliver's life during the sea storm (O'Neill, 2018, pp. 55-56), the little mermaid visits the Sea Witch to ask her for help. The Sea Witch points out to the little mermaid that what draws her to Oliver is not love but lust, which she tries to deny, arguing that women “are not allowed to feel in such a way” (O'Neill, 2018, p. 115). O'Neill further addresses the issue of women's sexual liberation when she points to the fact that upon drinking the Sea Witch's potion, the little mermaid grows not only human legs, but also human genitals, and she depicts a masturbation scene to illustrate the subsequent exploration of her sexuality (O'Neill, 2018, pp. 174-175). The Sea Witch also tells the little mermaid that she is not the first of the sisters to have visited her – it is revealed that her sister Nia is a closeted lesbian and she came to the Sea Witch, begging her to perform a ritual (the Sea Witch implicitly refers to female genital mutilation) that would cure her “unnatural desires” (O'Neill, 2018, p. 120), which she refused to do and sent her away (O'Neill, 2018, pp. 120-121).

In order to build an empowering plot twist (see below), O'Neill retains the theme of pain and suffering from Andersen's original tale and she provides the reader with a vivid description of the Sea Witch cutting out the tongue of the little mermaid (O'Neill, 2018, p. 131), warning her, however, that it is not wise to underestimate the value of her voice and give it up so easily (O'Neill, 2018, p. 127). The little mermaid also has to endure the pain caused by her bleeding, disintegrating feet, but she manages to keep this a secret with the help of Daisy, a servant girl who looks after her during her stay at the Carlisle's house, bandages her feet every day and gives her painkillers (O'Neill, 2018, p. 162).

During the one-month period that the little mermaid has been given by the Sea Witch to make Oliver fall in love with her (O'Neill, 2018, p. 125), she also resolves the mystery surrounding her mother's death, which was (together with her desire for Oliver and her fear of Zale) another reason why she decided to leave the underwater kingdom (O'Neill, 2018, pp. 123-124). When Oliver and his friends find the little mermaid (mute and naked) on the beach and take her to his house, Oliver's mother Eleanor instantly becomes suspicious of her and keeps asking her who she is and where she is from (O'Neill, 2018, pp. 138-141). Later on, the little mermaid discovers a painting of a woman that bears a striking resemblance to her in a locked room which belongs to Oliver's deceased father, Alexander (O'Neill, 2018, p. 214). At the party on the boat that Oliver throws to celebrate a year since the shipwreck (it also falls on the last day of the one-month period that the little mermaid has been given by the Sea Witch), drunk Rupert describes to the little mermaid what happened to Alexander, revealing to her his own feelings of jealousy and inferiority he bears against their wealthy family when he alleges that Oliver's charming and independent girlfriend Viola (who died in the shipwreck) was dating him only because of his "[m]oney and power, that's the only things you whores seem to care about" (O'Neill, 2018, p. 259). He tells her about Alexander's claim that he was saved during a sea storm by "a girl who came from the sea" (O'Neill, 2018, p. 259), but nobody believed him (he was even committed to a mental hospital) and since the girl never came back, he drowned himself in the sea out of despair (O'Neill, 2018, pp. 259-260).

Rupert's story is later confirmed by the Sea Witch who makes an appearance at the party as a charming and witty singer Flora, who also has a mesmerising voice – the little mermaid's voice (O'Neill, 2018, p. 251). Flora's character is another reference to the Disney film version of the tale, where the sea witch creates a similar human alter ego named Vanessa (*The Little Mermaid*, 1989). When the little mermaid later creeps into Oliver's cabin to kill him with the dagger her sisters have been given by the Sea Witch in exchange for their hair, she finds Flora



lying in the bed with him (O'Neill, 2018, pp. 273-274). She transforms herself back into the Sea Witch and explains to the little mermaid what happened to her mother – she reveals to her that the Sea King is her younger brother (O'Neill, 2018, pp. 280-282) and her mother married him to end the war with the Salkas (she was blackmailed into doing that when the Sea King, who had been obsessed with her since she was twelve, had her beloved brother Manannán killed and blamed it on the Salkas) he started when he became the Sea King after their father's death, and when he found out that she was planning to leave him for Alexander and take their daughters with her, he killed her and made them believe that she abandoned them (O'Neill, 2018, pp. 284-293). When the little mermaid asks the Sea Witch if her mother also came to her to get human legs, she explains that she did not need to since she had magical powers that enabled her to shed her tail, but she kept it a secret (O'Neill, 2018, pp. 287-288). O'Neill then further addresses women's loss of autonomy in a patriarchal society when she lets the Sea Witch explain that all mermaids used to possess magical powers:

But we were told such powers weren't *mermaid-like*. We were told that no mer-man would want to be bonded with us if we were more powerful than they were. They warned us that our powers made us too loud. Too shrill. And so women became quiet because we were promised that we would be happier that way. And our powers were lost. And it happened so quickly too. That which we take for granted can so easily be taken away from us, if we do not remain vigilant (O'Neill, 2018, p. 288).

The Sea Witch explains to the little mermaid that she did not manage to help her mother, but she hoped that she could help her daughter and that Oliver would fall in love with her, which did not happen. Therefore, she has come to tell her that she does not have to die at sunrise – she can take the dagger, thrust it into her own heart and thus turn into a Salka (O'Neill, 2018, p. 290). The Sea Witch then implores her to join her and the Salkas, to help them achieve peace in the kingdom by ridding it of her father's army, and to show the mermaids how to restore their lost powers (O'Neill, 2018, p. 294). The little mermaid, devastated and enraged by what she has learned, embraces her identity as Gaia, and after confronting and killing the Sea King (who has come to the boat to bring her back to the kingdom) with the use of her restored magical powers, thrusts the dagger into her heart and makes a promise to her mother and herself that she “will have [her] vengeance” (O'Neill, 2018, p. 309). Unlike Andersen's little mermaid, who accepts the self-denial and submission as necessary for “gain[ing] divine recognition” (Zipes, 2005, p. 37) and thus cannot be described as “antiauthoritarian” or “emancipatory” (Zipes, 2005, p. 36), O'Neill's Gaia refuses to do the same and resolves to destroy the oppressive system itself.

In the subplot dealing with the life story of Ceto (the Sea Witch) and Nerites (the Sea King), O'Neill explains why Ceto left the palace for the Shadowlands and also suggests the reason behind the tyrannical reign of Nerites. Ceto explains that the hatred her brother has borne towards her since they were children stems from the fact that she was endowed with more magical powers than him – “he was the boy, and boys were supposed to be more powerful” (O'Neill, 2018, p. 282). Ceto's parents also forced her to hide her powers when she was young – O'Neill makes a reference to the issue of witch hunts when she writes that women with magical powers were declared to be “unwieldly” (O'Neill, 2018, p. 356) in the past and that Ceto's grandmother, who was a healer, was accused of witchcraft and sentenced to death. The powers were also the reason behind the banishment of the Salkas to the Shadowlands (O'Neill, 2018, pp. 356-357). Ceto not only refused to renounce her powers, but also to conform to the beauty standards at the court, so when her brother became the Sea King, she decided to join the Salkas in the Shadowlands (O'Neill, 2018, pp. 281-283) since she felt deep sympathy for them and it was also the only place in the kingdom where she could “be true” (O'Neill, 2018, p. 281).

As far as the representation of men in this novel is concerned, it is mostly negative – the good male characters are the minor ones, e.g. Muireann's brother Manannán or Oliver's friend George, who seems to keep a constant watch on Rupert, frequently telling him to “leave the girl[s] alone” (O'Neill, 2018, p. 172), and he also prevents Rupert from raping the drunk girl (O'Neill, 2018, pp. 257-258). Oliver's character is not depicted as utterly good either – he is described as rather a spoilt, self-absorbed man who is also deeply traumatised by his father's suicide (O'Neill, 2018, pp. 215-216). Even though the prevailing portrayals are the negative ones, O'Neill utilises them critically and provides the reasons behind the behaviour of the characters to explore the issue of toxic masculinity<sup>6</sup>.

Therefore, it can be argued that she is well aware of the ways in which traditional gender roles limit men's lives and she aims to draw the reader's attention to this problem – in order to achieve this, she also infuses the narrative with many examples of gendered phrases and expressions which are still perpetuated in contemporary discourse, e.g. when Oliver confides to the little mermaid that he has been scared to go sailing since the shipwreck and calls himself “a fucking pussy” (O'Neill, 2018, p. 200), when little Nerites is told by his father “to stop

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<sup>6</sup> This term describes the socio-cultural norms and expectations which are derived from traditional gender roles and associated with the gender stereotype of manhood, such as “strength, lack of emotion, self-sufficiency, dominance [and] sexual virility” (Johnson, 2020). Men are under significant social pressure to meet these expectations – failing to do so can affect their mental health or result in sexualized or domestic violence (Johnson, 2020).

crying, to be a proper mer-man” (O’Neill, 2018, p. 321), or when young Ceto recalls how she has been told that “boys will be boys” and “will always have their urges” (O’Neill, 2018, p. 325). These examples illustrate how the usage of gendered language in everyday discourse retains the system of binary oppositions and endorses gender essentialism, and also how it normalises and justifies harmful behaviour (Bigler and Leaper, 2015, pp. 187-190).

### **3.3 Deirdre Sullivan’s *Tangleweed and Brine***

Deirdre Sullivan’s book *Tangleweed and Brine* (2018) is a collection of fourteen fairy tale retellings – her narratives are short, introspective and lyrical, consisting mostly of short declarative sentences, and with almost no direct speech. Second person narration represents the dominant type of narration in the book, though Sullivan also utilises first and third person narration in some of the tales (Bhroin, 2017). Since gender roles and stereotypes affect all people to some extent, second person narration seems to be an effective way of highlighting this fact. The fairy tales in this book are divided into two sections<sup>7</sup> which are derived from their common setting or the elements they feature – the first one, “Tangleweed”, contains “earthy tales featuring forests, flora [and] fauna”, and the second one, “Brine”, contains “tales of water, rivers, seas and wells” (Bhroin, 2017). This division suggests a reference to the romantic fairy tale tradition of the 19th century – particularly to the Brothers Grimm who used “natural and elemental imagery” extensively in their tales (Bottigheimer, 1987, p. 24).

#### **3.3.1 “Slippershod”**

The first tale in the collection is a retelling of “Cinderella”. The main themes that Sullivan explores in this tale are emancipation and the issue of ableism<sup>8</sup>. The tale is written in the second person, assigning the Cinderella character to the reader. Sullivan elaborates on the motif of Cinderella’s unusually small feet and she portrays her as a person with dwarfism (Sullivan, 2018, p. 4) – this condition is also one of the reasons why her stepsisters mistreat her (Sullivan, 2018, p. 5). In a way similar to O’Neill’s Gaia, Sullivan’s Slippershod is “empowered by the strong bond with her dead mother” (Bhroin, 2017), whom she portrays as having the same medical condition (Sullivan, 2018, p. 5). Sullivan also depicts Slippershod as a practical and skilful person who had to learn how to take care of herself when her mother died and her father

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<sup>7</sup> The 2018 edition of Sullivan’s fairy tale collection includes a supplementary section named “And They All Lived” which contains the fourteenth tale.

<sup>8</sup> This term “refers to bias, prejudice, and discrimination against people with disabilities” (Villines, 2021). Ableism also “hinges on the idea that people with disabilities are less valuable than nondisabled people” (Villines, 2021).

became estranged from her – he was away on business all the time and she was left alone in the house (Sullivan, 2018, pp. 4-6). Nevertheless, she is aware of her skills and abilities and also of the fact that the relationship with her father is beyond repair – he is away on business most of the time, and “[e]ven when he’s home, he isn’t there” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 7), so while her stepsisters leave for the ball to meet the prince (Sullivan, 2018, p. 8), she decides to leave her home for a world that is different from the one that her stepsisters dream of – the one “[w]here people do things, make things[,] [c]arve them out” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 9). Among the things that she takes with her are also her mother’s clothes (which she has altered to fit her) and shoes – “[Y]ou plan your future. You try on mother’s shoes. The slipper fits” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 10).

### **3.3.2 “The Woodcutter’s Bride”**

The second tale is a retelling, or rather a sequel to “Little Red Riding Hood”. It is written in the first person and Sullivan elaborates on the themes and motifs from Perrault’s and the Grimms’ version of the tale to portray “the suburban nightmare that befell Little Red Riding Hood after she was saved” (Garlick, 2018, p. 24), i.e. the deadening life of a homebound housewife. She spends her days cleaning the house and cooking for her husband, waiting for him to return from the forest. The tale is set in winter (Sullivan, 2018, p. 11) and the forest itself is described as rather sinister – Little Red Riding Hood mentions that “[i]t’s beautiful but on its inky edges something stirs to fidget with my gut” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 12). Sullivan also addresses the theme of the suppression of female sexuality when she describes Little Red Riding Hood as a young and delicate girl, “porcelain and hollow, [...] like a china bird with onyx-bright eyes”, who is scared of her “ripening” body (Sullivan, 2018, p. 12) and reminds herself that she must “[s]tay on the path” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 16), and who keeps thinking about the time when she “was a small girl [and] something happened to [her] in the forest”, “something altogether strange and best forgotten” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 17). At the end of the tale, Sullivan depicts a masturbation scene to further illustrate this theme – Little Red Riding Hood has discovered the wolf skin that her husband hid under the floorboards in their house, and while he is away, she gets undressed, wraps it around her body and allows herself “to wish for things unspoken[,] [f]oreign things that glint beneath the snow and could be filth” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 18).

### **3.3.3 “Come Live Here and be Loved”**

The third tale in the collection is a retelling of “Rapunzel”. It is written in the second person, assigning the character of Rapunzel’s mother to the reader. The themes that are explored in this tale are traumatic pregnancy and adoption. Sullivan draws on the motif from the Grimms’ version of the tale – the craving of Rapunzel’s mother for the star-shaped flower – to address the issue of pregnancy hunger and food cravings. As Tatar (2002, p. 105) points out, rapunzel (or rampion bellflower) is a savoury herb and in many versions of the tale, the girl is named after this plant. Sullivan portrays the craving that Rapunzel’s mother has for various plants – she also starts to feel insatiable hunger for the star-shaped flower, and since it is not possible to get it anywhere else, she and her husband decide to venture in the garden of the witch. It is, however, not their intention to steal the plant, but to ask the witch for it (Sullivan, 2018, pp. 22-23). When the witch appears in the garden, Rapunzel’s mother explains to her that it is not her but the baby who “is hungry for these little stars” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 26). They offer the witch gold in exchange for the plant – she, however, asks Rapunzel’s mother if she can touch her stomach and upon doing that, she tells her that the baby she is expecting is a witch, mentioning its double set of shark-like teeth – the same teeth that she herself has (Sullivan, 2018, p. 27). The witch explains that her daughter could be a danger to the village and offers to take care of her when she is born, promising to treat her as her own daughter and protect her – she also mentions that she will have long golden hair and will be “[w]alled in stone” and thus “restrained” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 30). The witch then suggests that Rapunzel’s mother can help the miller’s family who are expecting another child and cannot afford it – she agrees and decides to adopt their child (Sullivan, 2018, pp. 31-32). As Bhroin (2017) writes, by portraying Rapunzel, her mother and the witch this way, Sullivan aims to subvert the binarism of evil step/mothers and witches, and good, innocent daughters which frequently appear in classic fairy tales. The ambiguous portrayal of the female characters in this tale is also reflected in the reference to Rapunzel’s hair since in classic fairy tales, as Tatar (2002, p. 110) notes, golden hair indicates not only beauty, but also inner goodness.

### **3.3.4 “You Shall Not Suffer...”**

The fourth tale in Sullivan’s collection is a retelling of “Hansel and Gretel”. It is also written in the second person, assigning the character of the witch to the reader. It can be argued that the main objective that Sullivan pursues in this tale is the rehabilitation of the witch – she draws on the themes of hunger and abandonment which are depicted in the Grimms’ version of the tale

(Tatar, 2002, p. 44), but in Sullivan's tale it is the witch who primarily has to endure them. In relation to these themes, Sullivan also explores the issues of body image and fatphobia<sup>9</sup>. She writes that the witch has been kind and caring since she was a child, always looking after various wounded animals, but she was also unfortunate – “a friendless child, a barrel-chested, sturdy little thing who played alone”, “needing something kinder than a human” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 33). Sullivan then describes the ostracism and dehumanization the witch has experienced since her childhood – “the world's not built for soft and sturdy things”, “[i]t likes its soft things small and white, defenceless” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 33), “people comment on you, like a cow, a dog[,] [a] thing”, “you never felt you were a person” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 36). The consequent craving of the witch for any kind of affection – “[t]he gap in you that needed to be filled”, “[t]here was not enough bread inside the world to fill the ache” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 34) – demonstrates itself through her night-time binge eating (Sullivan, 2018, p. 35). Later on, her father starts to lock their cupboards and she has to ask for permission if she wants to cook or eat something. Sullivan hints at the issue of domestic violence when she mentions the witch's deceased mother and her father who would “sometimes [...] hit her on the face[,] [s]o everyone would see he had that power”, and that the witch experiences the same (Sullivan, 2018, p. 37). One night, a spirit of an animal she has tried to save appears in the kitchen and leads her to the forest, “the place unwanted children go”, “[l]eft to wander, starve inside the dark” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 36). It appears two more times and leads her to a clearing with a little hut – the witch decides to build there a house “[o]f nourishment[,] [o]f healing” and “leave food outside for the unwanted” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 39). Sullivan then makes a reference to the folk belief regarding witches stealing milk (Nildin-Wall and Wall, 1993, pp. 67-68) when she shows the witch transforming into a hare and sucking milk from cows that “gently let [her] take [her] nourishment” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 39). At the end of the tale, Sullivan addresses the consequence of the witch's lifelong dehumanization when she mentions that people fear her because she has become “inhuman” and grown a “carapace”, “a hardness over all [her] soft, a jointed case somewhere twixt bark and seashell” in order to protect herself (Sullivan, 2018, p. 40). When Hansel and Gretel come, she notices that Gretel resembles her younger self, and Hansel “speak[s] harshly” to her and has a “sullen, cold” face (Sullivan, 2018, p. 40). The ambiguous ending suggests another reference to the Grimms' version of the tale – “You'll try to help but you will not make

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<sup>9</sup> This term describes the bias, stigma and discrimination against people because of their weight, e.g. that such people are unattractive, lazy or less intelligent, which can then result in insults or bullying. When an individual internalizes these beliefs, it can affect their self-esteem and lead to disordered eating (e.g. overeating), depression, anxiety, etc. (Villines, 2022).

promises. The things you care for sometimes try to hurt. You must protect yourself. And those around you” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 40).

### **3.3.5 “Meet the Nameless Thing and Call it Friend”**

The fifth tale in the collection is a retelling of “Rumpelstiltskin”. It is written in the third person and the main theme explored in this tale is the lack of women’s autonomy in a patriarchal society. The plot is identical to the Grimms’ version of the tale, with two minor alterations – Sullivan uses the theme of the value which is attached to women’s appearance in patriarchy to explain the origin of the ‘straw to gold’ claim, and in her version of the tale, it is also the miller’s life that is at stake. Sullivan also describes the story from the girl’s perspective to stress the patriarchal control asserted over women’s lives: “When you’ve money. [...] [People] think it stops. It doesn’t. The daughter knows that now. From a father to a something to a husband. From big man down to little back to big” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 42). The miller’s daughter is described as a plain, tall girl with beautiful golden hair (Sullivan, 2018, pp. 42-43) and a body that is not “soft threads woven into silk, but thick rough cables pulsing like muscles on the chests of fishermen” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 46). Her manly appearance is the reason why she is still unmarried, which worries her father, who keeps “asking [her] about men” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 45). Sullivan also mentions her “want for something more than this” and her thoughts about “[t]he roads that she could take” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 44). The miller admires his daughter’s hair because it is the same as the hair of her deceased mother, and when she oils it every evening, it starts to gleam softly, which he describes as straw turning into gold (Sullivan, 2018, pp. 43-44). One evening in a tavern, he boasts about his daughter’s beautiful hair and being drunk, he starts to talk about her “magic power”, her ability to spin straw into gold (Sullivan, 2018, p. 47). Sullivan then hints at the issue of witch hunts, when she mentions the daughter feeling “the lick of flame against her boots” when her desperate father tells her what he has done, and when she recalls another girl who has been burned (Sullivan, 2018, p. 47). In the morning, a man from the castle comes and tells the miller that the prince will marry his daughter if she spins straw into gold – if she does not, they will both be hanged (Sullivan, 2018, pp. 48-49). She is taken to the castle and as she is spinning the straw, she pierces her palm with the spindle to stay focused (Sullivan, 2018, pp. 49-50). Upon that “the nameless thing [comes] out the wall”, and tells her that it is her friend and wants to help her (Sullivan, 2018, p. 51). In order to save herself and her father, she makes a deal with it (Sullivan, 2018, p. 51).

### **3.3.6 “Sister Fair”**

The sixth tale, which is again written in the second person, is a retelling of “Fair, Brown, and Trembling”. This tale is an Irish version of “Cinderella” – it describes the story of three king’s daughters, Fair being the oldest and Trembling being the youngest and most beautiful one. Trembling is kept at home by her sisters for the fear of her getting married before they do (Curtin, 1985, p. 257). The prince who is in love with Fair (Curtin, 1985, p. 257) leaves her when he falls in love with Trembling upon seeing her during the Mass in the church, and he eventually marries her (Curtin, 1985, pp. 260-262). Fair tries to take revenge on Trembling and kill her by pushing her into the sea, but she is saved and Fair is punished (Curtin, 1985, pp. 262-264). Sullivan retells the story from Fair’s perspective, portraying Trembling as the most beautiful of the sisters and also as a person with autism, thus exploring the theme of disability. She depicts the ambiguous feelings Fair and Brown bear towards Trembling – they both love her, being worried about “what will become of her” once they get married, and are hurt by her indifference and behaviour which they do not understand (Sullivan, 2018, p. 56). Fair describes her past attempts to scrub Trembling’s body and keep her clean, to which she responded with screaming and “later she would wince to hear [her] tread” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 56). She then explains that this is the reason why Trembling is dirty and wears ragged clothes – “she’s happiest that way” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 56). When a prince Fair has seen only once before (Sullivan, 2018, p. 58) comes to ask the king for her hand, she describes her mixed feelings about him, mentioning his “fiery eyes” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 59). When the prince sees Trembling, he changes his mind and asks for her hand instead (Sullivan, 2018, p. 61). After some time, Fair notices that Trembling “is smiling less when she comes home” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 62). Fair is worried about her and when she accidentally encounters the prince by the lake one day, she seduces him and pushes him into the nearby raging river in order to protect her (Sullivan, 2018, pp. 63-65). It can be argued that by portraying Fair this way and by providing the reason behind her behaviour, Sullivan aims to subvert the stereotypical depiction of evil step/sisters which is perpetuated in classic fairy tales. The subversive portrayal concerns also the character of the prince, since Sullivan depicts him as a cruel, predatory person (Sullivan, 2018, p. 61) who is preoccupied with only two things – “[b]eauty and a womb” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 62).

### **3.3.7 “Ash Pale”**

The seventh tale is the last one in the “Tangleweed” section of the book – it is a retelling of “Snow White” and it is written in the second person, assigning the character of Snow White to



the reader. This is the second tale in the collection in which Sullivan subverts the binarism of evil stepmothers and innocent daughters (Bhroin, 2017), since she portrays Snow White as the villainess and the main themes that she explores in this tale are class and power. Snow White is described as a person who prides herself on her royal birth and when her father marries a young servant after her mother's death, she is not willing to accept that, mentioning the "insolence" of the girl (Sullivan, 2018, p. 66) and her "[c]ommon blood" (Sullivan, 2018, p. 67). Sullivan also addresses the issue of misandry, portraying it as a consequence of gender inequality – being afraid that her pregnant stepmother may give birth to a prince, who will then deprive her of her powerful position (Sullivan, 2018, pp. 67-68), Snow White secretly leaves the castle and goes to the forest (Sullivan, 2018, p. 70). In a little chapel in the forest, she uses the magic that her deceased mother, who is portrayed as a powerful witch, taught her, and she crafts seven little figures there – she breathes life into one of them and sends it to the castle (Sullivan, 2018, pp. 70-71). When she returns, she is "welcomed back as though [she] were the queen and not the princess", and it is revealed that her stepmother's baby is dead, "black as coal, a little lump of charred and wizened flesh" (Sullivan, 2018, p. 73). Her father gradually becomes estranged from her stepmother and she is "demoted back to staff" later on (Sullivan, 2018, p. 74). At the end of the tale, Snow White mentions that she is not willing to adapt to traditional gender roles, speaking of "[a] coffin for a woman while she lives" (Sullivan, 2018, p. 75). She also refers to her father's impending death (Sullivan, 2018, p. 74), to the remaining figures in the forest, waiting there until she needs "protection, might or vengeance", and to her future life: "Old stories new, you'll venture where you will" (Sullivan, 2018, p. 75).

### **3.3.8 "Consume or be Consumed"**

The eighth tale opens the "Brine" section of the book and it is a retelling of "The Little Mermaid". It is written in the second person, assigning the character of the little mermaid to the reader. Sullivan uses Andersen's original tale as a framework to portray the objectification<sup>10</sup> of women. She portrays the ways in which the little mermaid perceives her transformed body and personality – she feels as "a broken thing", "[a] thing that differs", but "[b]efore, [she] always thought [she] were a person" (Sullivan, 2018, p. 80). Sullivan also refers to the themes of inferiority and suffering from Andersen's tale when she mentions that the little mermaid

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<sup>10</sup> In general terms, objectification is defined as "treating and dehumanizing a person as a thing, instrument or object" (Paasonen et al., 2021, p. 4). In feminist theory, objectification also means "the reduction of women to their physical attributes and heterosexual attractiveness in ways that mitigate their individuality and agency" (Paasonen et al., 2021, p. 7).

“wanted to be equal”, and that humans see suffering as “something pretty”, something that “batters you, like sea-glass, to a jewel” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 80). She depicts the little mermaid’s fear of human hunger and the brutality that it represents for her (Sullivan, 2018, pp. 81-82). Sullivan achieves this by referring to the fact that half of the little mermaid’s body “was once for eating here”, and that her transformation into a woman has contributed to her dehumanization: “All of you is meat here. Woman, fish. It’s all to be consumed. That is your purpose” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 87). Sullivan also mentions that the little mermaid is going to be “given as a prize” to the father of the prince’s bride since he “loves the pretty women” and their dancing (Sullivan, 2018, p. 88). The little mermaid refers to the crucified body of Christ later on, despising his passivity and the fact that “he doesn’t fight” and “he just accepts” the suffering which is inflicted upon him (Sullivan, 2018, p. 87). She also says that she is now fully aware of what a soul is and that she does not want to obtain one any more, mentioning the pointless suffering that humans have to endure in the name of an indifferent god (Sullivan, 2018, p. 89). When her sisters come for her and bring her the dagger, she decides to kill the prince and return to her home: “You are not a gift. You’re not a thing. You slide the cold blade in” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 90).

### **3.3.9 “Doing Well”**

The ninth tale in the collection is a retelling of “The Frog King”. It is written in the second person, assigning the character of the princess to the reader. As it has already been pointed out (see section 2.1.2), the folk version of this tale contained references to sex which were later removed by the Grimms (Tatar, 1987, pp. 7-8). Sullivan elaborates on this theme to address the issues of sexual consent<sup>11</sup> and bodily autonomy. In her version of the tale, the encounter of the princess with the bewitched prince takes the form of a sacrificial ritual. For the purpose of breaking the spell, every year a baby girl is chosen in the kingdom, “[n]obility and peasantry alike” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 93). She is brought up in a cloister in order “to keep [her] body safe” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 93), a chain with a padlock around her neck, with new “[l]inks added every year” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 94). Sullivan suggests the purpose of the ritual when she writes that in the chapel where the ritual takes place, candles are “lit to Fertility [and] Obedience” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 91). During the ritual, the girl is obliged to follow a set of instructions – she

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<sup>11</sup> Consent-based legislations (such as those in the USA, Canada or Ireland) qualify rape as a violation of sexual consent and therefore their legal definitions of rape also contain definitions of sexual consent (Popova, 2019, p. 31). For instance, Canadian Criminal Code not only defines consent as “the voluntary agreement to engage in the sexual activity [...]”, but it also lists a number of situations in which consent is presumably not obtained, e.g. when someone “abuses a position of power, trust or authority” (cited in Gotell, 2015, p. 59).

must drop the golden orb into the well, upon which the frog will bring it to her and unlock the chain around her neck with the key which is inside the orb (Sullivan, 2018, p. 95). It is also mentioned that the ritual will end and the girl will be executed if the frog changes the colour of his skin to match her dress since “[i]t means that he feels threatened by [her]” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 95). Besides the other instructions which refer to the Grimms’ version of the tale, such as sharing her plate with the frog (Sullivan, 2018, p. 95), the girl also must not “flinch” if the frog “reach[es] out his sticky tongue to taste [her] skin” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 93), or if he “clamber[s] upon [her] lap”: “You are to smile, to listen to him. Your body may begin to respond with panic. Force this far away, and if you cannot quell it all entirely, pretend arousal” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 96). Similarly, when he crawls over her body in the bed, she must not “encourage or discourage this” since she is “for him” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 96). At the end of the tale, it is revealed that if the frog does not change, her life will be saved and she will return to the cloister because it means she is “just a girl”, but if he turns into a prince, it means she is a witch and she will be burned (Sullivan, 2018, p. 96).

### **3.3.10 “The Tender Weight”**

The tenth tale in the collection is a retelling of “Bluebeard”. It is written in the second person, assigning the character of Bluebeard’s wife to the reader. Besides being a rehabilitation of the character of Bluebeard (Bhroin, 2017), Sullivan’s version of the tale also addresses the themes of male witches<sup>12</sup> and domestic violence. The tale starts with the wedding – Bluebeard’s new bride mentions his youthful appearance which seems to contradict the rumours regarding his alleged old age and the number of his ex-wives (Sullivan, 2018, pp. 98-99). She is portrayed as a plain, skinny (Sullivan, 2018, p. 98) and obedient girl (contrary to the wife described by Perrault in his version of the tale – see section 2.1.2) – Sullivan describes her obedience as the result of domestic violence, mentioning her “father’s hands across [her] mother’s face, around her throat” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 103). When they arrive at Bluebeard’s castle, he gives his wife a bunch of keys which also includes the key to the forbidden chamber – he, however, does not forbid her to enter it, but asks her to “come and find [him]” before she looks inside (Sullivan, 2018, p. 101). Even though Bluebeard is portrayed as a kind and caring person, who treats his wife with respect (Sullivan, 2018, p. 104), she is afraid that she may somehow upset him and “start to fear his hands” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 104), so she does not dare to ask questions about his

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<sup>12</sup> For detailed information on male witches, see e.g. Rolf Schulte’s *Man as Witch: Male Witches in Central Europe* (2009).

ex-wives or venture in the forbidden chamber (Sullivan, 2018, pp. 106-107). In the course of time, she falls in love with him due to his affectionate behaviour towards her. One night, he wakes her up, and asks her to follow him to the forbidden chamber. He looks rather disturbed and when she unlocks the door and enters the chamber, she sees that it is full of dead male bodies, and they all have Bluebeard's face (Sullivan, 2018, pp. 108-109). He tells her that his "mother was a witch" and he has "witch blood", and "he walks [her] through the deaths that he has died by human hands" (Sullivan, 2018, p. 111). He explains that when someone murders him, he comes back after some time – he always wakes up in the forbidden chamber, and despite his numerous attempts to bury the corpses, they keep coming back to the chamber as well. Each time he dies, his wife leaves the castle, since she has no reason to stay (Sullivan, 2018, pp. 111-112). Sullivan's claims that "there is something magic in this man" and that "[h]e is worth keeping" (Sullivan, 2018, p. 112) suggest that the reason why he is destined to keep coming back may be his non-toxic masculinity and his behaviour towards women. At the end of the tale, Bluebeard and his wife watch six riders approaching the castle – her brothers. They kill Bluebeard, leaving "[t]he tender weight of [his] blood" upon her hands (Sullivan, 2018, p. 115): "You love a witch. And when you love a witch, you must prepare. For somebody will come. And they will find that witch" (Sullivan, 2018, p. 114).

### **3.3.11 "Riverbed"**

The eleventh tale in Sullivan's collection is a retelling of "Donkeyskin". It is written in the first person, utilising the perspective of the king's daughter. Sullivan draws on the theme of incestuous desire from the original literary fairy tale written by Charles Perrault (Tatar, 2002, pp. 212-213) to explore the themes of women's emancipation and their objectification. As Tatar (2002, p. 227) points out, unlike evil step/mothers who are usually punished in classic fairy tales, fathers often escape punishments and are "excused for their behavior and absolved of guilt". This also happens in Perrault's tale, since the desire of the king is "rationalized as momentary madness brought on by the death of his spouse" (Tatar, 2002, p. 216), and at the end of the tale, it is mentioned that he "ha[s] purged himself of all lawless desires" (Tatar, 2002, p. 227). Tatar (2002, p. 213) also writes about the racial stereotypes that appear in Perrault's tale, particularly the emphasis which is put on the contrast of the princess's white skin and the dark skin of the donkey which she wears to disguise herself, and the mention of the "dark and ugly" Moors who attend the wedding feast. Since race represents a constituent part of intersectional empowerment of women (Bhavnani and Coulson, 2003, pp. 74-75), Sullivan addresses this theme and portrays the princess and her mother as Black women. She also utilises

the theme of patriarchal obsession with women's appearance and their objectification to develop the plot of her tale – the princess describes her father as a man who is “greedy for beautiful things”, such as “[j]ewels, pieces of art [and] [l]ocal girls from villages and townships” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 117), and she mentions his “vow [t]hat He would only marry if He met a woman with my mother's face again” which he made when her beautiful mother died (Sullivan, 2018, p. 118). She also mentions that after her death, he stopped looking after the kingdom and it has been administered by his greedy advisors since then (Sullivan, 2018, p. 117). Sullivan writes that the princess's mother was a woman who was not afraid to speak her mind (Sullivan, 2018, p. 116), and the princess inherited not only her temperament, but also her fondness for donkeys – she says that their “soft rebellion” is what she particularly admires about them (Sullivan, 2018, p. 117). She also loves her kingdom, so when her father starts to force her into marrying him, she refuses to flee and confronts him in front of the whole court, stating that if he does not stop, she will mutilate her face so that she will not look like her mother any more (Sullivan, 2018, pp. 119-122). Consequently, her hands and feet are tied up, and she is locked up in her room for several days – in another attempt to force her into the marriage, the king has her beloved donkey killed and orders the servants to replace the princess's blanket with its skin (Sullivan, 2018, pp. 122-123). The princess, enraged, demands to speak with her father and she tricks him into believing that she will marry him (Sullivan, 2018, p. 123). Later on, she asks him to take her to the river, since it is the place where he first met her mother, and she wants “to better understand the love He felt” (Sullivan, 2018, pp. 124-125). When they arrive there, she enters the river with her father and drowns him. The soldiers who accompanied them later confirm her claim about “the witchcraft in the woods” which caused that the king “turned into a fish [and] He swam away” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 127). It is mentioned earlier in the narrative that some of the soldiers have daughters as well and they therefore disagree with the king's actions (Sullivan, 2018, pp. 123-124). Sullivan explains at the end of the tale, that the princess did it to save not only herself, but also the kingdom, mentioning what she plans to enact: “I get to ruling. Taxes. Bargains. Peace” (Sullivan, 2018, pp. 127-128). Also, the skin of the donkey has an empowering function in Sullivan's tale, since the princess has it made into a cloak and wears it proudly on the throne (Sullivan, 2018, p. 128).

### **3.3.12 “The Little Gift”**

The twelfth tale is a retelling of “The Goose Girl”. It is written in the first person, utilising the perspective of the servant girl. The concept of class reversal which appears in the Grimms' version of the tale (Bobby, 2009, pp. 232-233) is retained in Sullivan's tale as a means of

subverting the image of a traditional fairy tale princess and exploring the themes of class and persecution of LGBTQ+ people. The servant girl, Rilla, makes a reference to the patriarchal treatment of lower class women at the very beginning of the tale when she mentions that her fifteen-year-old mother was raped during “[h]er first week in the castle” and that she does not really know who her father is (Sullivan, 2018, p. 129). She also says that she has kept the princess company since they were children and that it was always her who was punished for both her own mischiefs and for the princess’s ones (Sullivan, 2018, p. 129). She lists the various types of corporal punishments that she had to endure, mentioning that “[t]here is no end of hurts that can be visited on the powerless” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 132). She also mentions the “guilty-fascinated” eyes of the princess since she had to look as Rilla was being punished (Sullivan, 2018, p. 130). In order to emphasise the social inequality between the princess and the servant girl, the princess’s name is not mentioned in the tale and Rilla says that she addresses her only as “Your Highness”, “Princess” or “My princess” in order “to keep [herself] safe” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 132). It is also revealed that Rilla is secretly in love with the princess (Sullivan, 2018, pp. 132-134). On their journey to meet the princess’s husband, Rilla and the princess camp beside the river (Sullivan, 2018, pp. 132-133), and the princess makes a reference to women’s fear of toxic masculinity when she confides to Rilla that she does not want to marry the prince since she is worried about “what [she]’ll have to do [w]ith him”, mentioning “certain things that [she] [has] heard” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 134), upon which Rilla recalls how many times she herself has been harassed by stable boys and footmen (Sullivan, 2018, pp. 134-135). The princess then seduces Rilla and later on reveals to her that she loves her and “cannot bear to be with someone else” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 136). Rilla, however, is well aware of the possible consequences of their relationship, mentioning the persecution of LGBTQ+ people and the “penalties for loving wrong” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 135). When the princess asks Rilla to reverse their roles so that she does not have to marry the prince, Rilla agrees since she is in love with her and she also knows that she does not really have a choice: “[W]ho am I to disobey my own princess?” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 136). They reverse their roles and Rilla decides to send the princess to the geese to protect her from men, knowing that it is a place where she will spend time only with children (Sullivan, 2018, p. 138). However, this decision is “what lets the resentment in” and Rilla’s “gift to her begins to be a burden” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 139). The princess soon finds out that being a servant is not easy and she wants her life back – she tells the king that Rilla “imposed this life of toil upon her” and she “threatened her with such a range of hurts she held her tongue” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 140). Rilla is then condemned to death and drowned in the river (Sullivan, 2018, pp. 142-143) – she chose this punishment herself

(Sullivan, 2018, p. 142) when the king asked her “[w]hat should be done to servants who usurp their master’s place” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 141).

### **3.3.13 “Beauty and the Board”**

The thirteenth tale in Sullivan’s collection is a retelling of “Beauty and the Beast”. It is written in the third person, utilising the perspective of Beauty. As Tatar (2002, p. 59) notes, the best known version of this tale was written in 1756 by the *conteuse* Madame de Beaumont. Zipes (2006, p. 53) points out that Madame de Beaumont belonged to the generation of French female fairy tale writers that is considered to be less “innovative” and “more conservative and pedagogical” than the earlier *conteuses*. Her version of the tale reflects the period theme of arranged marriage and “endorses obedience, self-denial, and a form of love based on gratitude rather than passion” (Tatar, 2002, p. 60). Sullivan utilises this theme to explore women’s emancipation. In her version of the tale, Beauty is portrayed as an illegitimate child (Sullivan, 2018, p. 145) of a king who died when she was little (Sullivan, 2018, p. 148). She is thought by others to be “[a] quiet little creature, scared of people [and] [n]ot right in the head” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 146). After her father died, “her mother displeas[e]d somebody who matter[ed]” and she was walled up somewhere in the castle (Sullivan, 2018, p. 146). The girl has spent many years searching the castle, hoping to find that place – “[a] grave to visit or a place to look” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 152). Sullivan also utilises the theme of the socio-religious conventions that women had to conform to in the past (see section 2.1.2) to develop the plot of her tale when she mentions the skills that her mother taught the girl after her father died: “They use their god to warp you to their ways. But if there is above, there is below. And you can use the things that live there” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 149). One day, the new queen summons the girl to give her a choice – either she will marry a man they have chosen for her, or she will be walled up like her mother (Sullivan, 2018, p. 152). She agrees to marry the man, but since she knows about his cruelty and “[h]is trail of broken brides” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 152), she decides to use her blood and a ouija board that her mother crafted (Sullivan, 2018, p. 149) to summon a demon and asks him to possess her: “Come live in me. A lodger in my body and my brain. And, if the man they’ve sold me like a pig to lays a hand on me, then venture to the surface. Come and play. Teach him the things the world teaches women” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 154). The Beast accepts her sacrifice and “[t]hey venture out into the moonlit halls, walking naked through the dangerous places unafraid and wild with cold, bright beauty” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 155).

### 3.3.14 “Waking Beauty”

The fourteenth tale in the collection is a retelling of “Sleeping Beauty”. It is written in the second person, assigning the character of the prince to the reader. In Giambattista Basile’s version of this tale called “Sun, Moon, and Talia” (1636), the king who discovers the girl rapes her in her sleep (Tatar, 2002, p. 95). Sullivan utilises the theme of rape in her version of the tale to subvert the image of a traditional fairy tale prince and to address the issue of toxic masculinity. The prince says that he has known the story about the sleeping girl since he was a little boy, mentioning that none of those who tried before him “were man enough to set her free” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 158). He carves his way through the thorn bushes, despising the trapped, rotting corpses of the princes who “weren’t strong enough or quick enough” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 159). He also despises the princess, mentioning his battlefield wounds and that “[p]iercing is a woman’s way to fail”: “[I]n her stead, you would have found a way to free yourself” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 159). When he enters the hall in the castle, he spots a sleeping rat and crushes it underfoot, wondering if the princess will “be the same”, “[a]n easy conquest in a silent place” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 160). The prince also mentions that he is a second-born son and as such, he “needs to work harder, longer” – “[i]t doesn’t come as easy to the spare” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 161). Sullivan provides the reader with further reasons behind the prince’s cruelty and ruthlessness when she describes how traditional gender roles and stereotypes reflect in the relationship he has with his parents: “[Your father] thought you soft, a boy who knew no want. You wanted his respect so very much. You put away your books and fought your battles. [...] When your mother cried to see your scars, you pushed her off” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 162). She also mentions the lack of affection that men experience as a consequence of this social setting: “When you were a little boy, [...] your father would tousle your hair and your mother would kiss you and hold you close. [...] When you reach a certain age, that warmth stops. You’d like a wife to make you warm again” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 163). The prince, however, hides his feelings to meet the expectations of patriarchy: “The way you feel is not for other people. You keep it to yourself. You are a man. You know what is expected” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 162). To further develop the plot, Sullivan points to the value which was attached to women’s virginity in the past. When the prince reaches the tower and finds the sleeping princess, he says that “[i]t takes more than a kiss to wake a woman” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 164), and he mentions that “[t]here is a secret way” to “make sure that she’s yours” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 163), that if she loses her virginity, “no other man will have [her]” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 164): “Your princess is so perfect on the bed. And when she wakes...A smile. A kiss. A welcome. Softness, warmth. All the



women's things denied to men. You'll have them all. There will be beauty in your life again. You will be safe. And you deserve it" (Sullivan, 2018, p. 164).

As has been demonstrated in the analyses above, the fairy tales in Deirdre Sullivan's collection focus mainly on portraying women and the ways in which traditional gender roles and stereotypes limit their lives. In doing so, Sullivan also subverts the stereotypical polarisation of female fairy tale characters into "virtuous, passive and delicate heroines" and "powerful but demonic villains" (Bhroin, 2017), and explores the multiple sources of oppression that they are subjected to. Male characters, on the contrary, are sidelined in the majority of the tales and thus not analysed in greater detail – when they are mentioned in the narrative, their portrayals tend to be negative, with only brief references to toxic masculinity (e.g. in the tale "You Shall Not Suffer..."). Nevertheless, Sullivan elaborates on this issue as well and she provides the reader with a detailed description of toxic masculinity in the tale "Waking Beauty". She also provides the reader with a portrayal of non-toxic masculinity in the tale "The Tender Weight". Therefore, it can be argued that in a way similar to Louise O'Neill's novel, Sullivan's fairy tale collection also aims to analyse the impacts of patriarchy on both men and women.

This chapter has described how selected contemporary feminist retellings of classic fairy tales utilise the postmodern concepts of intersectionality and plurality of perspectives and expose the issues which were edited out of fairy tales to demonstrate the ways in which traditional gender roles and gender stereotypes limit both men's and women's lives. It has also shown that despite the fact that the feminist writers are aware of the limitations that traditional gender roles pose to men, they tend to focus mainly on portrayals and analyses of toxic masculinity, the reason being probably the significance of the fact that toxic masculinity often manifests itself as violent behaviour towards women.

## **4. Using fairy tales in ELT**

This chapter describes the cross-disciplinary approach to using fairy tales in ELT with regard to the key competences and expected outcomes which are specified in the Framework Education Programme for Basic Education in the Czech Republic. It also describes the RWCT Programme and the ERR Framework which are utilised in the practical part of this thesis.

As Taylor (2000, ix) points out, fairy tales are suitable for developing “language and cognitive skills at nearly any level”. They enable learners not only to practise the four basic language skills, but also to “compare, contrast, and evaluate”, and focus on skills such as “analyzing, drawing inferences, synthesizing, summarizing, and noticing underlying text structures” (Taylor, 2000, p. 3). This is the reason why fairy tales are particularly suitable for integration with communicative approach and content-based instruction – they interconnect literature with other fields of humanities and social sciences, e.g. sociology or history (Taylor, 2000, pp. 3-4). Therefore, as Jones and Schwabe (2016, pp. 5-6) observe, this cross-disciplinary approach to fairy tales enables teachers to utilise them for improving critical-thinking abilities of learners.

The development of the above-mentioned skills and abilities also corresponds with the objectives of basic education which are defined in the Framework Education Programme for Basic Education (FEP BE) in the Czech Republic – namely with the key competences and expected outcomes regarding the development of communication competences (MŠMT, 2021, pp. 10-11) and foreign language skills (MŠMT, 2021, pp. 16-17). However, critical thinking and gender equality, which are also the focus of the research in the practical part of this thesis, are not dealt with comprehensively in the document. The expected outcome regarding the development of critical thinking is included only as a subpoint in problem-solving competences (MŠMT, 2021, p. 11). Gender equality, as Smetáčková (2008, pp. 14-15) points out, is addressed in the educational content in the FEP BE only through subpoints related to stereotypes and prejudices in general, which raises a number of issues, as it is also discussed in the practical part of this thesis.

### **4.1 The RWCT Programme**

The RWCT (Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking) Programme is an internationally recognised educational programme which originated in the USA and is aimed at developing critical-thinking abilities of learners – it introduces them to the principles and methods of

critical thinking and shows them how to effectively utilise them in the learning process (Čapek, 2015, p. 387). As David Klooster (cited in Siegllová, 2019, pp. 22-23) points out, critical thinking is often inaccurately interpreted as the mental operation of comprehension or application, or as creative or intuitive thinking, but it is rather the ability of an individual to think independently and form their own opinions on the basis of critical analysis and objective assessment of information, which also correlates with the development of communication competences, cooperation skills, effective questioning and reasoned argumentation. Therefore, critical thinking can also be defined as the result of the employment of all the six types of mental operations which are categorised in Benjamin Bloom's taxonomy (Siegllová, 2019, p. 23), i.e. knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation (Siegllová, 2019, p. 21). The RWCT Programme helps to develop critical-thinking abilities of learners through utilising methods which are based on the constructivist learning approach (Čapek, 2015, p. 387). This is, as Yves Bertrand (cited in Zormanová, 2012, p. 11) points out, a learner-centered approach which emphasises the fact that in order to learn effectively, learners should not be only passive recipients of new knowledge, but they should actively construct it themselves – the learning process thus builds upon learners' prior knowledge and its integration with new knowledge. To achieve this, the RWCT Programme utilises the ERR Framework which is described in the following section.

#### **4.1.1 The ERR Framework**

This framework consists of three sequential stages which guide learners through the process of acquiring new knowledge – evocation (E), realisation of meaning (R) and reflection (R). During the first stage, learners recall what they already know about the topic, i.e. the purpose of this stage is to identify their preconceptions. The aim of this stage is also to motivate learners and engage their interest (Zormanová, 2012, p. 115). The purpose of the second stage is to present learners with new knowledge – they relate it to their prior knowledge and confirm or disprove their preconceptions. The last stage is aimed at learners' reflection on the learning process. The purpose of this stage is also to encourage learners to express and share their opinions about the knowledge they have acquired (Zormanová, 2012, pp. 116-117). The methods which the ERR Framework utilises also enable learners to develop their productive and receptive language skills throughout the whole learning process (Siegllová, 2019, p. 27).

This chapter has defined the theoretical framework for the practical part of this thesis by interconnecting the cross-disciplinary approach to fairy tales with the RWCT Programme.

## **Practical part**

### **5. Research aim and research questions**

The following chapter describes the research aim and research questions together with the methodology which was employed in the research conducted for the practical part of this thesis.

As the analysis of selected contemporary feminist retellings of classic fairy tales in chapter 3 of the theoretical part of this thesis has shown, they explore a wide range of gender-related themes which seem to be particularly relevant to the lives of teenage learners of English. In order to analyse this relevance and examine the potential benefits of their usage in ELT, the research which is described in the following chapters utilises selected fairy tales from chapter 3 of the theoretical part of this thesis together with a variety of selected RWCT methods with the aim of finding out whether the feminist retellings of classic fairy tales can help develop learners' awareness of gender stereotyping. For the purpose of achieving this aim, the research also seeks to answer the following research questions:

- To what extent do learners' preconceptions correspond with the gendered binary oppositions depicted in classic fairy tales?
- Are there any gender-related differences among learners in terms of interpreting and accepting non-stereotypical fairy tale characters?
- Do non-stereotypical fairy tale characters contribute to building empathy in learners?

The research questions take into account not only the purpose of the individual stages of the ERR Framework (see section 4.1.1), but also the role that literature as such can play in the development of critical-thinking abilities of learners, since it is often claimed that literature promotes empathy which is by many teachers believed to be "the highest level of critical thinking" (Schneider, 2020). The methodology which was employed in the research design is described in the following subchapter.

#### **5.1 Methodology**

Given the purpose of the research for the practical part of my thesis, I decided to conduct a mixed methods research which is a research design that aims to explore a given research problem through collecting and analysing both qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell,

2015, pp. 3-4). Specifically, I used an exploratory sequential design, where the first stage of collecting and analysing qualitative data is followed by the second stage of collecting and analysing quantitative data (Creswell, 2015, p. 39).

For the first stage of my research, I selected five fairy tales from chapter 3 of the theoretical part of this thesis dealing with themes which I found to be the most relevant ones to teenage learners, i.e. emancipation, body image, consent and masculinity. The aim of the lessons was to introduce the learners to each theme, respectively. Each time, I brought with me the book that we were going to discuss to show it to the learners and I also made use of the accompanying illustrations for the individual fairy tales during the lessons (see Appendix 3). After selecting the fairy tales, I also chose the RWCT methods (each method is described in greater detail in the following chapter) which I found suitable for discussing each tale and its main theme and created five lesson plans which I used during five 45-minute lessons of English with a group of ten 9th graders (originally, there were twelve learners in the group – eight girls and four boys, but two of the boys decided not to take part in the research) at a lower secondary school with extended language teaching. There were no learners with specific learning difficulties in the group and all the learners also had a common cultural background, i.e. they were all Czech. Prior to conducting the research, I presented it to the head of the school and then I also had a meeting with the group's English teacher to ask her if I could sit in on one of their classes since I wanted to get to know the learners better, introduce myself and also explain the purpose of my research to them. Due to the sensitive and potentially triggering nature of some of the themes, I also wanted to point out to the learners that I was not going to judge their opinions and that if they would not want to share them in the class, I was going to respect that<sup>13</sup>. Also, the group's English teacher was present in the classroom during all our lessons, but she did not participate in any of the activities.

Since I was going to use authentic literary texts with the learners and I knew from their English teacher and from my observation that their knowledge of English corresponded with the B1 – B2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), I also decided to create a glossary to accompany each tale (see Appendix 2). To reduce the number of words potentially unknown to the learners and to adjust the lesson plans to the 45-minute time frame, I also adapted and abridged the original texts. Since I wanted to preserve as much of their authenticity as possible and maintain the comprehensibility at the same time, I

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<sup>13</sup> I proceeded in accordance with the PSHE Association guidance on teaching about mental health and emotional wellbeing when I was preparing and teaching the individual lessons.

mostly only omitted various modifying structures and parts of the texts which were not essential for understanding the plot. In a very few cases, I simplified the language which the author used in the original text, e.g. in her tale “You Shall Not Suffer...” Sullivan writes that the witch “found a form of leverets abandoned” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 34) – I wrote in the abridged version of the tale that the witch “found baby hares abandoned” (see Appendix 2). The tale I had to edit most significantly was Gaiman’s *The Sleeper and the Spindle* (2014). Due to its length, I had to omit a considerable part of the original text and merge the remaining parts so that they followed the original plot. For this purpose, I also had to rewrite a couple of sentences, but I did not change the meaning conveyed in the original sentences in any way. I also wanted the learners to focus only on one particular theme during each lesson, so when I was editing the tales, I also omitted parts of the texts which dealt with a theme that was different to the one I wanted to discuss (but again only in the tales where it would not hinder the comprehension), e.g. the references to domestic violence in Sullivan’s tale “You Shall Not Suffer...”. I present and analyse the findings of the first stage of my research in the following chapters, utilising the research methods of observation and qualitative analysis of the learners’ products.

For the second stage of my research, I created a reflective questionnaire (see Appendix 4) whose purpose was to evaluate the impact of the lessons on the learners and their attitudes and to find out their opinions about the individual fairy tales and the themes that we discussed during the lessons. The quantitative results of the questionnaire together with their analysis are presented in the following chapters.

This chapter has summarised the process of designing the research, the lesson plans and the reflective questionnaire which I present and analyse in greater detail in the following chapters.

## 6. Lessons and their analysis

This chapter provides a detailed description of the lesson plans that I created for the lessons, and it also presents the findings of both stages of my research.

### 6.1 Lesson 1

The first lesson that I created is based upon Neil Gaiman’s fairy tale book *The Sleeper and the Spindle* (2014). The aim of this lesson was to introduce the learners to the theme of emancipation. I decided to start the research with this tale because I perceive the main theme that it depicts as an umbrella term for all the remaining themes that I discussed with the learners. All the learners were given a worksheet (see Appendix 1) with tasks corresponding to the following lesson plan:

The ERR Framework Stage	Time	Teaching Method	Organisational Form	Teaching Aids
<b>E</b>	5 minutes	Mind Map	Frontal, Individual	Worksheet
<b>R</b>	25 minutes	Directed Reading-Thinking Activity (DRTA)	Frontal, Individual	DRTA Chart, Abridged version of the fairy tale “The Sleeper and the Spindle”, Illustration for this fairy tale
<b>R</b>	10 minutes	Discussion	Frontal, Individual	Worksheet
	5 minutes	Cinquain Poem	Frontal, Individual	Worksheet

**Table 1** Lesson plan for Lesson 1

As far as the organisational form of the tasks is concerned, I decided to use only the frontal and individual form for all the tasks in all the lesson plans since I used the tasks as research tools and therefore I needed to get individual responses from the learners. Upon the completion of each task, I always elicited responses from individual learners and we went through the tasks as a class. It is also worth mentioning that generally, the learners were listening attentively when someone was speaking and they never made any disrespectful comments regarding the content of the tales or their classmates' opinions and experiences. When I saw that the learners were struggling with a task or did not understand what they were supposed to do (this happened quite often since they were not familiar with almost any of the RWCT methods, but I counted with this since I had asked their English teacher about it prior to conducting the research) I always gave them more detailed explanations of what I wanted them to do and also provided them with clues to possible answers.

As far as the activity for the evocation stage of this lesson is concerned, I decided to choose a mind map since it is regarded as an activity suitable for identifying the preconceptions of learners and their associations related to a given topic (Čapek, 2015, p. 335). I drew a part of a blank mind map on the whiteboard and briefly explained to the learners what I would like them to do, but I could see that some of them did not know how to begin, so I told them to focus on the appearance of the princess, her character, people around her, etc. As for the girls' associations, many of them wrote "dresses", "jewellery", "long hair", "castle", "rich", "blond", "pretty" and "beautiful". Some of them also wrote "tall" and "young" and associated her with "nature" and "animals". Only one girl described the princess as "smart" and "educated" and having "brown hair and eyes". Some of the girls also described her as being "kind", "nice", "cheerful" and "reliable". One girl also wrote "prince". The boys seemed a little lost and I noticed that they eventually cooperated in completing the task. Their associations were, in contrast, rather negative and judgemental – they described the princess as "blond", "beautiful", "weak", "dramatic" and "narcistic"<sup>14</sup>.

The RWCT method that I decided to use for the realisation of meaning stage of this lesson was the Directed Reading-Thinking Activity (DRTA) since I wanted the learners to realise the contrast between the traditional fairy tale narrative and the gender reversal that Gaiman utilises in his tale. This method seemed suitable for this purpose since it is based on a sequential reading of individual parts of a given story and on the predictions of the learners

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<sup>14</sup> Since I decided to quote authentic answers of the learners, I did not correct any of the mistakes that they had made.



regarding the individual events in the story (Sieglová, 2019, p. 143). The first part of the activity consists of the teacher identifying a set of suitable keywords that summarise the story and presenting them to the learners. The learners then first create their own version of the story based on those keywords (Sieglová, 2019, p. 143). At the beginning of this activity, I presented the learners with the following set of keywords: queen – sleeping curse – rescue mission – emancipation. I checked if they understood the meaning of all of them and also asked if someone could explain the meaning of the word ‘emancipation’. I did not get any response from them, so I briefly described the meaning in general as the freedom to choose to live your life the way you want, and also told them that we were going to discuss the concept in greater detail later on. Then I asked the learners to create their own version of the story that we were going to read and when they were ready, I asked some of the learners to share their stories. Generally, all the learners followed the plot of the classic version of “Sleeping Beauty” with a minor alteration – they mostly assumed that the queen was the person affected by the curse. Also, only one girl managed to incorporate the theme of emancipation into her version of the tale since she assumed that the queen was going to be saved by a princess who was then rewarded with freedom, so she “[left] the kingdom and live[d] her life as a fairy” (see Appendix 1). Upon the completion of this activity, we proceeded to read Gaiman’s tale. Each learner was given an abridged version of the fairy tale with the parts of the tale and a glossary for each of them cut out on individual slips of paper (see Appendix 2). Sieglová (2019, p. 143) suggests that in order to make this activity more appealing to learners, it is possible to replace some parts of the text with pictures or illustrations. I decided to try this and I used one of the illustrations for Gaiman’s tale as Part 4 of the abridged version of the tale (see Appendices 2 and 3). I instructed the learners on how to fill in the DRTA chart and we went through the individual parts of the tale as a class – I always let them read a part of the tale, fill in the corresponding sections of the DRTA chart and then I elicited answers from them since I needed to see if and how they understood the text. This activity was really challenging for the learners and it also proved to be one of the most difficult activities that we did during the lessons. I believe that this was caused partly by the discontinuity of the tale due to my heavy editing and partly by the expectations of the learners regarding the plot of the tale. Since the learners misunderstood some events in the story I had to clarify and explain a lot and the activity took much more time than I originally expected.

For the reflection stage of this lesson, I chose two activities – a discussion task and a cinquain poem. In the first task, I asked the learners to answer the following two questions:

Why do you think the queen decided not to return to her kingdom and marry the prince? and What do you think is the message of the story? As for the girls, some of them managed to come up with quite accurate answers to the first question – they wrote that “She wants freedom and she thinks freedom isn’t in the marriage”, “She wanted to be free and not to worry about men because it’s annoying”, or that “[S]he still wants to live her life and not be committed to one person”. One girl also wrote that “She didn’t want to be queen”. The other girls wrote that it was because she fell in love with the princess and wanted to marry her instead of the prince. As for the second question, they mostly did not answer it – only one girl wrote that the message was “Don’t marry and live your life”. The boys, in contrast, did not manage to come up with almost any answers. One of them, however, suggested a parallel between emancipation and breaking free from slavery when he compared the queen to a character from Harry Potter and wrote that she probably “wants to be free like that weird orlike elf Dobby”. As far as the second question is concerned, the boys both wrote that they had “no clue” what message the author was trying to convey. As for the cinquain poem, it represents a type of brainstorming and its purpose is to help learners associate concepts regarding a particular topic. These associations are arranged into categories in the individual lines of the poem – the first line represents the topic, the second line consists of two adjectives that describe the topic, the third line consists of three verbs that describe the topic, the fourth line is a four-word sentence and the last line is a synonym for the topic from the first line (Čapek, 2015, pp. 45-46). I decided to choose it as the final activity for this lesson because I wanted to see if the tale helped the learners understand the term ‘emancipation’. Unfortunately, we did not have enough time to complete the activity, but I managed to briefly summarise the concept and I also pointed out to the learners that emancipation concerns various groups of people and that we were going to discuss it during the following lessons.

## **6.2 Lesson 2**

The second lesson that I created utilises the fairy tale “You Shall Not Suffer...” by Deirdre Sullivan. The aim of this lesson was to introduce the learners to the theme of body image. I decided to devote two lessons to this theme since a person can have either negative or positive body image (Brazier, 2022) and I wanted to discuss both. Thus, this lesson deals with negative body image and is linked to Lesson 3 which deals with positive body image – the activities for the evocation and reflection stage of Lesson 3 refer back to Lesson 2. This theme

also proved to be the most appealing one to the learners (see the quantitative results of the reflective questionnaire in subchapter 6.6). At the beginning of the lesson, each learner received a worksheet (see Appendix 1) which corresponded with this lesson plan:

The ERR Framework Stage	Time	Teaching Method	Organisational Form	Teaching Aids
<b>E</b>	5 minutes	Freewriting	Frontal, Individual	Worksheet
<b>R</b>	5 minutes	Questionstorming	Frontal, Individual	Worksheet, Illustration for the fairy tale “You Shall Not Suffer...”
	25 minutes	Directed Note-Taking Activity (DNA)	Frontal, Individual	DNA Chart, Abridged version of the fairy tale “You Shall Not Suffer...”
<b>R</b>	10 minutes	Mind Map	Frontal, Individual	Worksheet

**Table 2** Lesson plan for Lesson 2

As for the evocation stage of this lesson, I decided to choose the activity of freewriting. I needed to identify the preconceptions of the learners regarding the character of a fairy tale witch and this method seemed suitable for this purpose since it represents another method used for brainstorming ideas and associations and it allows learners to write down any ideas that spontaneously come to their mind (Sieglová, 2019, p. 84). In order to be completed successfully, this method requires learners to follow these rules as they write: write in sentences, not only in words; write down every idea that comes to your mind; do not correct grammar or spelling; do not go back to read your text, just keep writing; if you run out of ideas, write anything that comes to your mind, e.g. *I don't know what to write now* or *I'm thinking* (Sieglová, 2019, p. 84). Since the learners were not going to use their mother tongue during the activity, I

also added the rule “If you do not know the English word for something, write it in Czech”. Prior to the activity, we went through the rules with the learners and then I gave them three minutes to complete the task. I was not sure whether the activity would not be too difficult for the learners, but I observed that generally, they managed to write continuously and most of them also wrote really long descriptions of the character. As for the girls’ associations, they varied greatly. Some of them wrote that a fairy tale witch “can be good or bad” and “pretty or ugly” that “it depends”. Others wrote that “she usually doesn’t look as pretty as others”, “is old”, has “grey hair” and “big nose”. Most of them associated the witch with “dark” or “black clothes” and “long black hair”. One girl wrote “maybe a hat”. They also mentioned “potions” and that she is “powerful” and “can talk with animals” – mostly they linked her to cats and rats. Some of them wrote that witches “live far from people” in “a hut near forest”. One girl also described her as having “blond hair”, “red eyes”, “wings” and “missing one ear”. Another girl mentioned that “some like mess or are just unorganised”. One girl also mentioned that she “kills children and eats them”. The boys’ associations were similar to some of the girls’ – they both portrayed the witch as a negative character. One boy particularly wrote that “she intends her actions to harm others for her personal gain like power, strength, etc.” The other boy wrote that “she doesn’t like kids” and that she also cooks them and eats them – he particularly mentioned that “she likes kids who are good at school”, assuming that it is probably “because they have the best meat”.

For the realisation of meaning stage of this lesson, I decided to use two activities – questionstorming and the Directed Note-Taking Activity (DNA). As Čapek (2015, p. 53) writes, questionstorming represents a specific type of brainstorming and its purpose is to make learners come up with as many questions for a given topic as possible within a given time limit. I chose this activity because I wanted to introduce the learners to the fairy tale through the accompanying illustration and make them think about the story as well. For this purpose, I needed to use an activity which would be short and relatively easy to do for the learners. I gave each pair of learners a copy of the illustration (see Appendix 3) and explained to them what I would like them to do and then gave them a time limit of two minutes to complete the task. Since I wanted to provide them with a clue to the theme we were going to discuss, I waited a short while and then told them to look at the witch’s body carefully. They managed the task without much difficulty. The questions of all the learners were quite similar – they mostly asked “Who is that little girl?”, “Why does she keep the animals?” and “What’s that on her skin?”. Some of them also asked “Why she doesn’t have shoes?”, “Is she nice to people?” and “Does

she like children?”. For the analysis of Sullivan’s fairy tale, I decided to choose the DNA method. As Čapek (2015, p. 312) explains, this activity utilises a two-column chart and requires learners to identify main ideas in a particular text – they write the parts of the text which contain the main ideas in the left column of the chart and in the right column of the chart they write explanations of how they understand the given parts. Čapek (2015, p. 312) also mentions that it is possible to modify this activity – the teacher identifies the main ideas and only asks learners to explain how they understand them. Since I thought that the standard DNA method might be too difficult for the learners and also rather time-consuming, I decided to use the modified version suggested by Čapek (2015). Prior to the activity, each learner was given an abridged version of the fairy tale (see Appendix 2) and I also briefly introduced the tale – I told them that it is based on the fairy tale “Hansel and Gretel” and that it is narrated from the perspective of the witch utilising second person narration. I also told them that I had divided the tale into two parts – Part 1 describes the witch’s childhood and Part 2 explains why she decided to leave the village and live in the forest in a house made of food. After that, I explained to them how to fill in the DNA chart and let them read the tale. Also, I told them to pay attention to how the witch perceives her body. When they were ready, we went through their interpretations of the chosen excerpts and then I also summarised the main ideas. Generally, they did not have any major problems with comprehending the story and its message. However, when we finished the discussion, one of the boys raised his hand and he asked me a question regarding my explanation of the end of the tale – he wanted to check whether I suggested that it conveys the message that when a person is mistreated by someone, they may start to behave in the same way because they want to protect themselves. I confirmed that and explained it in greater detail – I could see from his facial expression that he did not agree with me, but he did not want to develop the conversation, so I did not push him. I would also like to mention here that generally, both boys were cooperative during the lessons, but they almost never completed the tasks for the realisation of meaning stage of the lessons, i.e. the tasks which required them to express their opinion about the tales – I noticed a couple of times that each of them wrote something down, but they eventually erased it, so I did not get a chance to read it. Nevertheless, they both provided me with an explanation for that in their reflective questionnaires (see the last two questionnaires in Appendix 4).

Before we proceeded to complete the mind map, which was the activity that I had chosen for the reflection stage of the lesson, I explained to the learners the term ‘body image’. I described it in general terms as the relationship that we have with our body, and the feelings

that we have about our body – whether we feel good in it or not (Brazier, 2022). Then I referred the learners back to the tale and asked them to think about the factors that influence a person’s body image and about the ways in which they can influence it and I asked them to create a mind map using their ideas and the ideas from the tale. When they were ready, we discussed their ideas as a class. Among the ideas that most of them mentioned were “stress”, “anxiety”, “depression”, “bad mental health”, “diet culture”, “media”, “magazines”, “eating disorders”, “unhealthy relationships”, “bullying”, “beauty standards”, “unrealistic photoshop”, “influencers editing posts on instagram”, “low self love”, “rude comments on someone’s body”, “feeling alone” and “comparing yourself to others”. One of the boys also mentioned “laziness”, “envy”, “pride” and “wrath”.

### 6.3 Lesson 3

As I have mentioned above, this lesson is linked to Lesson 2 and its aim was to introduce the learners to the theme of positive body image. For this purpose, I chose an excerpt from the novel *The Surface Breaks* (2018) by Louise O’Neill. All the learners were provided with a worksheet (see Appendix 1) with tasks corresponding to the following lesson plan:

The ERR Framework Stage	Time	Teaching Method	Organisational Form	Teaching Aids
<b>E</b>	10 minutes	Venn Diagram	Frontal, Individual	Worksheet
<b>R</b>	25 minutes	Double-Entry Journal	Frontal, Individual	Double-Entry Journal Chart, Excerpt from the novel <i>The Surface Breaks</i>
<b>R</b>	10 minutes	Venn Diagram	Frontal, Individual	Worksheet

**Table 3** Lesson plan for Lesson 3

As for the evocation stage of this lesson, I decided to utilise a Venn diagram. This diagram makes use of two or more overlapping ellipses and enables learners to compare and contrast two or more ideas, concepts, problems, etc. – each ellipse represents a set of unique characteristics regarding the individual concepts or ideas and the overlap or intersection of the ellipses illustrates the characteristics shared between them (Čapek, 2015, p. 255). At the beginning of this activity, I referred the learners back to the theme of negative body image that we discussed during Lesson 2 and I asked them to recall its characteristics and write them down into the left part of the diagram. Then I told them that we were going to discuss the opposite concept of positive body image and asked them to think about its possible characteristics, write them down into the right part of the diagram and also think about what these two concepts have in common and write their ideas down into the intersecting part of the ellipses. Surprisingly, it was rather difficult for most of them to complete the diagram – they managed to complete the left part of the diagram since they remembered the characteristics quite well, but they struggled with describing the concept of positive body image and the intersection was the most difficult part for them to complete. I first tried to give them only clues to possible answers, but it did not help them much, so I had to provide them with concrete answers and explain the concept in greater detail. Among the few characteristics of positive body image that the girls listed was “self love”, “self respect”, “not counting calories”, “accepting not hating yourself”, “don’t care about what you eat” and “hardworking”. Interestingly, the boys, as well as some of the girls, misinterpreted the diagram as a scale and they focused mainly on what a person with negative or positive body image does and how they are treated and viewed by other people – one of the boys wrote into the left part of the diagram “being called ugly, fat, lazy, basic”, into the right part of the diagram “being called handsome, strong, hardworking” and into the intersecting part “you act so normal”. The other boy wrote into the left part of the diagram “be lazy”, “don’t going outside”, “many haters”, into the right part of the diagram “less haters”, “going to gym”, “eat healthy food”, “be fit”, “doing some sports” and into the intersecting part “just normal guy”, “sometimes go to workout”, “sometimes eat bad food (KFC, McDonald)”. Since I did not want to reveal all the ideas depicted in the excerpt from the novel, I only briefly addressed the misconceptions that they mentioned and we proceeded to the next task.

For the realisation of meaning stage of this lesson, I decided to use a double-entry journal. Čapek (2015, pp. 310-311) points out that this method is suitable for making learners realise the connection between a particular text and the real world – it utilises a two-column chart and it allows learners to share their thoughts on the content of the text by choosing extracts

from the text, writing them into the left column of the chart and writing their comments regarding the individual extracts into the right column of the chart. I gave each learner a copy of the excerpt from the novel (see Appendix 2), explained to them that it is based on the fairy tale “The Little Mermaid” and I also briefly introduced the character of the Sea Witch and her life story. Then I explained to them how to fill in the double-entry journal chart and let them read the excerpt. The girls commented on various extracts from the novel. One girl mentioned that she had the same experience with her mother and she talked about it quite openly and confidently in the class – she also wrote down in the chart that “It hurts but it makes you stronger if you learn to love yourself” and that “It’s important to support yourself when none else does”. She also commented on the fact that people often get blamed that they are too sensitive – she wrote that it is “One of the things that hurt the most, but make you the strongest” and that “Everybody is beautiful in some way”. Another girl commented on this fact as well, mentioning that “Always when somebody told me something I didn’t like I got anxious when they said it”. This girl also commented on the claim *You cannot have beauty for nothing*, mentioning that “Many people say it and I hate it”, and on the part which describes the Sea Witch’s friends telling her to go swimming more often – she wrote that “It’s easy to say, but hard to do. I think that nobody should comment on someone’s look”. Another girl mentioned that loving yourself is “a good mindset” and that the claim *You cannot have beauty for nothing* is “creating a thought that you need to change in order to be pretty”. Some of the girls also commented on the last part of the excerpt, mentioning that they “like that she’s confident” and are “happy to see she loves her body and she doesn’t care what others say”. They also wrote that “It’s actually sad, because it doesn’t matter how you look on the outside but how you are in the inside. I think she can find a man who will love her the way she is” and that “When a man doesn’t love you as you are, it’s not true love”. Another girl wrote that “It’s OK to feel good in your skin, but she’ll be overweight, which is unhealthy”. One girl mentioned the Sea Witch’s relationship with her friends, asking “How can she handle having none to talk to and not care about opinions of others?” Her comment on the fact that the Sea Witch describes herself as fat also provides a definition of how internalized fatphobia works: “I couldn’t say something like this – everyone has always told me being fat isn’t good/beautiful. If I would say something like that, I would start believing it and I’d think that is bad”. As for the boys, I saw them read the excerpt, but they did not fill in the chart.

I decided to use a Venn diagram also for the reflection stage of this lesson since I thought that comparing the characters from the tales might help the learners to understand the concept



of body image better. Thus, I again referred them back to the character of the witch that we discussed in Lesson 2 and asked them to compare her with the character of the Sea Witch. This time, it was easier for them to complete the diagram, yet some of them still struggled with completing the intersection. Besides the feelings and emotions of the characters, the girls mentioned most often that unlike the Forest Witch, the Sea Witch is “accepting her body and what she looks like”, “loving herself” and that “she thinks she is beautiful” and has “good relationship with her body”. The boys also mentioned the feelings and emotions of the characters, though the observation of one of the boys was strikingly shallow – he wrote about the Forest Witch that “She’s really sad” and about the Sea Witch that “She’s kinda sad”. The other boy wrote about the Sea Witch that “She’s kind”. As for the intersection, the learners often wrote “body image”, “witches” and “fat”. One girl also wrote that they both “live in nature” and “are misunderstood”.

#### 6.4 Lesson 4

The fourth lesson that I created utilises the fairy tale “Doing Well” by Deirdre Sullivan. The aim of this lesson was to introduce the learners to the theme of consent. Each learner was given a worksheet (see Appendix 1) with tasks corresponding to the following lesson plan:

The ERR Framework Stage	Time	Teaching Method	Organisational Form	Teaching Aids
<b>E</b>	5 minutes	Questionstorming	Frontal, Individual	Worksheet, Illustration for the fairy tale “Doing Well”
	5 minutes	Yes/No Chart	Frontal, Individual	Yes/No Chart
<b>R</b>	25 minutes	Yes/No Chart	Frontal, Individual	Yes/No Chart, Abridged version of the fairy tale “Doing Well”
<b>R</b>	10 minutes	Inferencing	Frontal, Individual	Worksheet

**Table 4** Lesson plan for Lesson 4

I decided to use the method of questionstorming for the evocation stage of this lesson since I again wanted to introduce the learners to the fairy tale through the accompanying illustration and also provide them with a clue to the theme that we were going to discuss. I gave each pair of learners a copy of the illustration (see Appendix 3) and a time limit of two minutes to complete the task. The questions that the learners asked were again quite similar. They mostly asked “Why is there a frog?”, “Why the frog has a tail?”, “Why she has those chains?” and “Why does she have paintings on her face?” One girl also asked “Why is she on a chess board?” and “Is she going to a wedding?” Only one of the two boys attended the lesson and he was the only one who asked the questions “Is that frog a prince?”, “Is she sad?” and “Can she escape from chains?” The second activity that I chose for this stage was a Yes/No Chart. I wanted to find out whether the learners were familiar with the concept of consent to some extent and also whether they had any misconceptions about it. Čapek (2015, p. 266) writes that this method is particularly suitable for integration with the ERR Framework – it utilises a four-column chart where the learners mark their opinions regarding a given topic before and after their reading of a particular text which deals with the topic. The first column consists of a set of statements prepared by the teacher, the second column “Before reading” is used by learners to mark their opinion regarding the individual statements (i.e. whether they agree or disagree with the statement), the third column “After reading” is where the learners mark whether their opinion has changed after reading the text, and in the fourth column they write the supporting evidence for their opinion that they have found in the text (Čapek, 2015, p. 266). For this purpose, I prepared a set of statements dealing with the most common misconceptions about consent, namely those concerning the ways of establishing and obtaining a person’s consent (Mount Sinai Adolescent Health Center, n.d.). Prior to the activity, I told the learners that we were going to discuss the concept of consent and asked them if someone could explain the term. I found out that they were not familiar with it and also the word ‘consent’ was new to them, so I translated it and explained it in general terms as a person’s voluntary agreement to do something – I also pointed out to them that it concerns everyday life situations in which people interact with each other in some way, e.g. when someone wants to borrow something from someone they need to obtain that person’s consent, and that it also plays an important role in intimate relationships (Mount Sinai Adolescent Health Center, n.d.). Then I asked the learners to go through the individual statements to check if there were any other words they did not understand. They did not understand the words ‘obtain’ and ‘establish’, so I translated them and I also clarified the meaning of the statements containing those words and then asked the learners to mark their opinion concerning the individual statements in the “Before reading” column.

Then we went through their answers as a class and I noticed only two misconceptions among their answers – some of them agreed that silence implies consent (statement no. 1 in the Yes/No Chart) and some of them thought that it is always possible to obtain a person’s consent (statement no. 3 in the Yes/No Chart). I did not address their misconceptions at this stage since they were going to compare them with the ideas in the tale during the following stage of the lesson.

I provided each learner with a copy of the abridged version of the tale (see Appendix 2) and I introduced them to the original literary fairy tale “The Frog King” since they were not familiar with it. I also explained the meaning of the title of Sullivan’s tale and the issues in the original tale that she addresses through her retelling. Then I explained to them how to complete the remaining columns of the chart and let them read the tale. I assumed that since the individual violations of consent are quite explicitly described in the tale, it might not be too difficult for the learners to do the task, but none of them managed to complete the fourth column of the chart. I believe that it was due to the fact that not only the concept of consent was new to them, but also the fairy tale and the activity itself. In addition, the text of this tale is considerably demanding in terms of vocabulary. Therefore, I went through the individual statements with the learners and linked them to the corresponding events in the tale.

As for the reflection stage of this lesson, I decided to utilise the method of inferencing. This method represents a type of brainstorming – the teacher provides learners with incomplete information concerning a particular topic and their task is to infer and formulate ideas and hypotheses related to the topic (Sieglová, 2019, p. 92). For this purpose, I decided to present the learners with the “FRIES” acronym – this acronym created by the organisation Planned Parenthood is widely used for explaining the key characteristics of consent, i.e. that consent is “Freely given”, “Reversible”, “Informed”, “Enthusiastic” and “Specific” (Planned Parenthood, n.d.). I provided the learners with these five characteristics, translated them into Czech and then asked them to complete the definition of each characteristic. This activity was, however, again rather challenging for most of them, so we went through the individual characteristics together and I also illustrated what is meant by each of them with concrete examples from the tale.

## **6.5 Lesson 5**

The fifth lesson that I created is based on the fairy tale “Waking Beauty” by Deirdre Sullivan. The aim of this lesson was to introduce the learners to the theme of masculinity. I

decided to use this fairy tale in the last lesson since it also encompasses the themes of consent and emancipation that we discussed with the learners in the previous lessons. The worksheet (see Appendix 1) that all the learners received corresponded with this lesson plan:

The ERR Framework Stage	Time	Teaching Method	Organisational Form	Teaching Aids
<b>E</b>	5 minutes	Cinquain Poem	Frontal, Individual	Worksheet
<b>R</b>	5 minutes	Inferencing	Frontal, Individual	Illustration for the fairy tale “Waking Beauty”
	20 minutes	Double-Entry Journal		Double-Entry Journal Chart, Abridged version of the fairy tale “Waking Beauty”
	5 minutes	Inferencing		Worksheet, Abridged version of the fairy tale “Waking Beauty”
<b>R</b>	10 minutes	Diamante Poem	Frontal, Individual	Worksheet

**Table 5** Lesson plan for Lesson 5

As for the evocation stage of this lesson, I utilised a cinquain poem since I wanted to identify the learners’ preconceptions regarding the character of a fairy tale prince. The preconceptions of the girls could be divided into two categories – some of them portrayed the prince as “handsome”, “nice”, “loyal”, “kind”, “optimistic” and “working” person who “usually saves someone” and “finds his princess”. Other girls, in contrast, described him in a rather negative way as someone who is “handsome” but also “egoistic”, “looking into the mirror” and who “(only) cares about himself”. They also often mentioned that he is “royal”, “busy”, “fighting” and “riding a horse”. Only one of the two boys attended the lesson and he did not

manage to complete the whole diagram, but he also mentioned that the prince is “handsome” and “riding a horse”.

As far as the realisation of meaning stage of this lesson is concerned, I decided to use the method of inferencing and a double-entry journal since I first wanted to provide the learners with a clue to the theme we were going to discuss and then find out their opinions regarding the ideas expressed in the tale. I gave each pair of learners a copy of the illustration accompanying the tale (see Appendix 3) and a time limit of two minutes to answer the following questions related to it: Why is the prince portrayed this way? What do you think he is like? To my surprise, they did not find the illustration sinister in any way. They mostly pictured him as a “fighter” who is “brave”, “saving her”, “fights for her and is strong for her”. They also described his appearance, mentioning that he is “handsome” and has “long hair”, “brown hair”, “green eyes” and is “strong”. The boy described him as being “big”, “strong” and “fighter”. One girl interpreted the illustration in the following way: “He’s looking at the sleeping princess the same way we are, so simply ‘we’ are the shadow. I think he’s a good guy and he’s trying to save her”. After completing the activity, I gave each learner a copy of the abridged version of the tale (see Appendix 2), explained to them that it is based on the fairy tale “Sleeping Beauty” and that it is narrated from the perspective of the prince utilising second person narration. Then I reminded them how to fill in the double-entry journal chart and let them read the tale. Since I wanted to provide them with another clue to the main theme of the tale, I also told them to pay attention to whether the prince is happy and has a healthy personality. The girls chose various extracts from the tale to comment on. Some of them commented on the claim that men are not supposed to be afraid of death – they wrote that “it should be choice, not supposed to be like this” and that “It’s too much to ask for because everyone fears death”. They also commented on the statement that men and women are treated differently, mentioning that “Many times women get compliments men mostly don’t. That’s a bit unfair”, that “He needs to make others happy, but not himself” and that he “Talks about how men need to be the heroes since the start or else they’ll fail”. Other girls commented on how the treatment from his parents changed when he started growing up and that he was not good enough for his father – they wrote that “Parents want him to be ‘manly’” and “That’s one of the worst feelings and it’s good that he tries his best to be good and do good stuff. It’s some kind of motivation but every person takes it differently and he took it the bad way. He wanted to be strong and prove to him that he is enough”. They also commented on the mention of the prince’s envy regarding his older brother, stating that “I agree with him. It isn’t fair. They should be treated the same way”, and that he

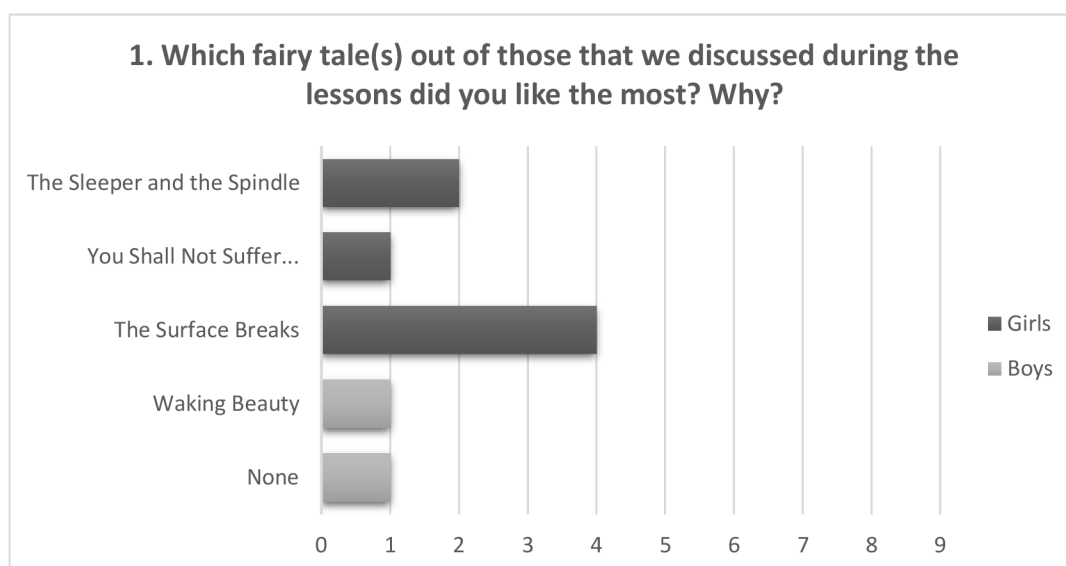
hides his feelings so that he does not appear to be weak – “Everyone should have someone who they talk to or who they can trust”. As for the boy, I saw him read the text and he also wrote a comment in the chart, but he eventually erased it. Upon the completion of this activity, we moved on to the other inferencing task. I wanted the learners to use the information from the text and try to infer the ending of the tale, so I asked them to answer the following two questions: What do you think happens at the end of the story? Why do you think so? Mostly, they assumed that the princess “wakes up but she’ll not like him because of he’s trying to be someone he doesn’t want to be” or that “He kisses the princess, she wakes up and he wants to marry her but she doesn’t want to”. Some of them wrote that “She marries him” and it would be “happy ending”. One girl also wrote that “He’s gonna kiss the princess, she will wake up and he’ll get arrested because she is only 14 and he’s a grown man”. Originally, I was thinking about reading a part of the ending out to them from the book, but I decided not to do that since it might disturb them. Also, I wanted to discuss the theme of masculinity as such and not to dwell on that particular scene, so I revealed to the learners that the prince rapes the sleeping princess and then drew their attention to how the author describes his motive – Sullivan (2018, p. 164) suggests that deep inside, the prince knows that what he is about to do is not right, he is even thinking about “go[ing] home again”. He is, however, so afraid that if he gives up, he will appear weak and he will not get what he thinks he has been entitled to for a long time, that he does not care he will make someone else unhappy (Sullivan, 2018, p. 164). He even convinces himself that the princess “will be very grateful when she wakes” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 166). The learners all seemed really interested in the explanation and listened attentively for the whole time.

The activity that I decided to choose for the reflection stage of this lesson was a diamante poem. This method is similar to a cinquain poem since it is also used for helping learners associate characteristics related to a particular topic (Čapek, 2015, p. 43). There are, however, more types of this poem and I decided to use the type called an antonym diamante poem since it allows learners to compare two terms that have opposite meanings – it represents a transition from one term to the other with the fourth, middle line consisting of characteristics that the two terms have in common (Čapek, 2015, pp. 44-45). I chose this type since I wanted the learners to compare the terms ‘toxic masculinity’ and ‘non-toxic masculinity’ which are both related to men’s emancipation. Prior to the activity, I explained the meaning of these terms to them and how they relate to the tale. Unfortunately, we did not have much time to complete the diagram, so I decided that we would go through it as a class line by line – I always provided learners with clues to possible answers, gave them some time to complete the particular line and then elicited

answers from them. As for the first term, they used the following characteristics – “selfish”, “unhappy”, “not showing emotions”, “not being respectful”, “cruel”, “violent” and “manipulates”. The characteristics that they used for the second term were the following – “healthy”, “happy”, “chill”, “nice”, “sensitive”, “caring”, “kind”, “cares about people”, “helps”, “respectful” and “asking for someone’s consent”. One girl also wrote the note “Andrew Tate”<sup>15</sup> next to the ‘Toxic masculinity’ box on her worksheet. Nevertheless, not all of them managed to complete the diagram and none of the learners came up with any ideas for the fourth line, so I provided them with the following suggestions – “man”, “behaviour”, “personality” and “emotions”.

## 6.6 Reflective questionnaire

After the realisation of all the lessons, I asked the learners to fill in a reflective questionnaire (see Appendix 4) since I wanted to find out their opinions about the individual fairy tales and the themes that we discussed during the lessons and also to evaluate the impact of the lessons on the learners and their attitudes. I brought the learners the questionnaire together with their signed worksheets, which I collected at the end of each lesson, so that they could keep them. The questionnaire consisted of three semi-open questions, and it was filled in by nine of the learners (one girl was absent that day). The purpose of the first question was to find out which fairy tales they liked the most and why:

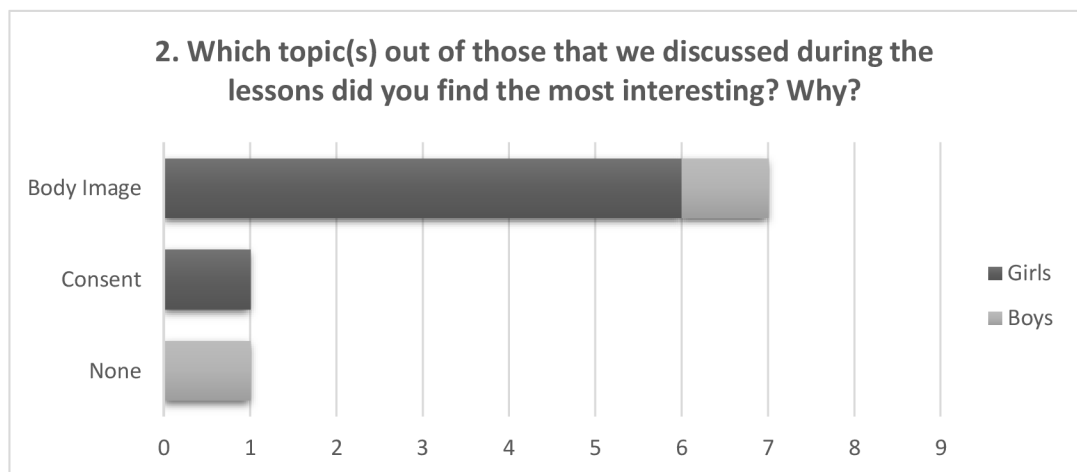


**Figure 1** The quantitative results of the questionnaire – Question No. 1

<sup>15</sup> Andrew Tate is an internet celebrity who rose to fame through the “extreme[ly] misogyn[istic]” content he posted on various social media platforms (Das, 2022). His accounts have recently been removed from the platforms “after concerns about his influence on his millions of followers escalated” (Holpuch, 2022).

As Figure 1 illustrates, the fairy tale that the girls liked the most was the excerpt from the novel *The Surface Breaks* (2018). They mentioned the following reasons why they liked the story and the character of the Sea Witch – “I liked how she loved her body”, “I felt empathy to the main character” and “I’ve never heard about how exactly feels someone who is fat and who likes his body at the same time”. One girl also mentioned that it was “because of the backstory and her personality”. The second most popular tale was *The Sleeper and the Spindle* (2014). One of the two girls who chose this fairy tale stated that the particular reason why she liked it was its non-heteronormativity – “Because it was different than other fairy tales. In *The Sleeper and the Spindle* is queen and she fall in love with princess. In the other fairy tales is usually a boy, that fall in love with her”. The other girl only wrote that it “was the most interesting one and I remember it the most”. The girl who chose the tale “You Shall Not Suffer...” did not specify the reason, she only wrote “I don’t know but I like it”. As for the boys, one of them chose the tale “Waking Beauty” – he wrote that it was because “it was fairy tale that I little bit knew before”. The other boy wrote that he did not like any of the tales because he found “the topics to be very left leaning”.

As far as the second question is concerned, its purpose was to find out which topics were the most interesting ones for the learners and why:



**Figure 2** The quantitative results of the questionnaire – Question No. 2

Figure 2 shows that the most interesting topic for the learners was body image. Two of the girls only wrote that they liked the topic because “it was interesting”. Three girls stated that the reason was the relatability of the topic – the first girl mentioned that “I feel like this is very close to me”, the second one wrote that “I have my own experiences so it was nice to talk about it” and the third one mentioned that “in my age it’s the biggest topic. Especially girls are



interested in body image so much. Sometimes it's not healthy". The last girl wrote that it was interesting "Because the body image can change your confidence and self love. And when you don't have self love you'll be rude to other people and you don't feel good in your skin". The boy did not mention why he found the topic interesting. The girl who chose the topic of consent wrote that it was "Because it's a serious one (but all of them are), it just sticks out to me". The second boy did not choose any topic. He wrote that he did not find the topics to be worthy of attention, mentioning that "All of them intend to solve certain social problems, which are either somewhat important or not at all" and that in his opinion "Economical problems are far more severe than social issues".

As for the third question, its purpose was to find out whether the learners would be interested in discussing similar stories and topics at school more often:

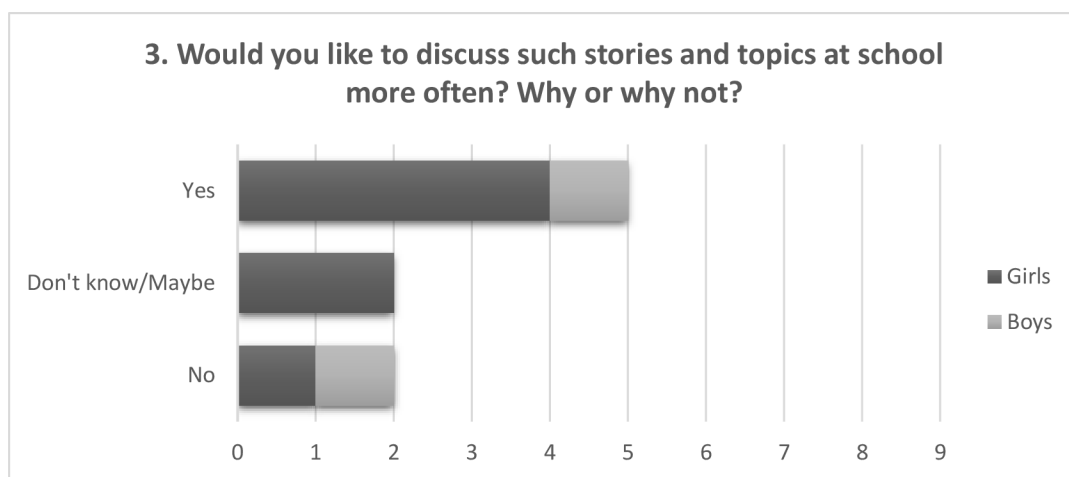


Figure 3 The quantitative results of the questionnaire – Question No. 3

As Figure 3 shows, most of the learners would be interested in discussing these issues at school more often. Two girls mentioned that they "would like to discuss it more because it's interesting". One girl mentioned that "it was more interesting than normal classes and I wasn't so bored. And I had what to say". Another girl mentioned that she would like to discuss the topic of body image in particular – "I think we should learn about how we can influence it (not because we eat something and don't eat something) by our minds. If we believe and hope we have an amazing body, we will". Two girls were not sure – one of them mentioned that "maybe yes, it is very interesting and something new for me" and the other stated "I don't really know, maybe in highschool, because im still trying to perfect my english and i don't understand some of the words. But overall its great to spread awarness". One of the boys also commented on the fact that the lessons were demanding in terms of language – "Well it's surely good thing but

for me the topics was too hard but sometimes but when I understood it was cool, so I think sometimes we could do that in school”. Only one girl stated that she would not be interested in discussing the topics, but she did not mention why, she only wrote “No, I don’t like it”. The other boy stated that “some of these topics are useless to discuss, because most of us have moral standarts so we won’t ‘rape’, ‘threaten’ or ‘hurt’ someone” and that he “would rather learn about the American elections or something else”.

This chapter has described the process of creation and realisation of the individual lessons and presented the findings of both the qualitative and the quantitative stage of my research. The findings and their implications are analysed in greater detail in the following chapter.

## 7. Research results

This chapter summarises the research results and provides answers to the individual research questions with regard to the aim of the research.

The aim of the research conducted for the practical part of this thesis was to find out whether the feminist retellings of classic fairy tales can help develop learners' awareness of gender stereotyping. For the purpose of achieving this aim, the research also sought to answer the following research questions:

- To what extent do learners' preconceptions correspond with the gendered binary oppositions depicted in classic fairy tales?
- Are there any gender-related differences among learners in terms of interpreting and accepting non-stereotypical fairy tale characters?
- Do non-stereotypical fairy tale characters contribute to building empathy in learners?

As far as the first research question is concerned, it was answered with the help of the activities which were used during the evocation stage of Lesson 1, Lesson 2 and Lesson 5. These activities were focused on identifying the learners' preconceptions regarding the character of a fairy tale princess, a fairy tale witch and a fairy tale prince respectively. As it has been demonstrated in subchapter 6.1, 6.2 and 6.5, the preconceptions of the learners corresponded with the gendered binary oppositions depicted in classic fairy tales only to a certain extent since many of the learners also had preconceptions about the characters that seemed to rather correspond with the depictions of the characters in contemporary fairy tales. Nevertheless, these depictions are not completely free of gendered binary oppositions and stereotypes either (e.g. the amatonormativity of contemporary fairy tales which some of the learners' answers also referred to) and thus they still proved useful as the basis for the discussions.

As for the answer to the second research question, the opinions of the learners expressed during the lessons and the results of the reflective questionnaire suggest that both the girls and the boys tended to value the individual fairy tales on the basis of their relatability. As Cleto and Warman (2019, p. 103) point out, "there is nothing inherently wrong with finding a text to be relatable" unless "relatability becomes the ultimate factor that determines a text's worth". This problematic nature of relatability can be aptly illustrated with the answers that one of the boys

provided in his reflective questionnaire – to a certain extent, his gender grants him a privileged position in patriarchy (see the beginning of chapter 3 where the gender-related disproportion in the victims of domestic and sexualized violence is mentioned) and from this position he refuses to acknowledge the relevance of issues which do not directly affect him, while most of the girls described the issues (or at least some of the issues) as being relevant to their lives. Moreover, his answers also illustrate the need to comprehensively address the development of critical-thinking abilities of learners in the FEP BE which is mentioned in chapter 4, e.g. the false dilemma fallacy<sup>16</sup> that he commits when he claims that “Economical problems are far more severe than social issues” when in fact they are interrelated and equally important.

As far as the answer to the third research question is concerned, the results of the reflective questionnaire suggest that the ability of the learners to empathise with non-stereotypical fairy tale characters is greatly influenced by the relatability they have. Cleto and Warman (2019, p. 105) mention that in its relation to relatability, empathy can also be interpreted as “a willingness to engage with unfamiliar stories and subjectivities”. However, as the answer to the second research question has shown, there seems to be a link between this willingness and the ability of (some of) the learners to think critically.

The document Strategy 2030+, which addresses the education policy of the Czech Republic, explicitly mentions that “We need to transform the content and method of education so that the potential of all pupils, also taking into account gender equality and eliminating gender stereotypes, is developed in schools” (MŠMT, 2020, p. 44). However, close examination of the latest (2021) revision of the FEP BE reveals that the arguments made by Smetáčková (2008), which are briefly mentioned in chapter 4 of the theoretical part of this thesis, are still valid and the issue of gender equality is yet to be addressed comprehensively in the educational content in the FEP BE – the revision does not take into account the cross-curricular nature of gender equality issues and does not employ the term ‘gender’, but commonly uses the terms ‘role’ and ‘the opposite sex’, which may allow the reproduction of gender stereotypes and endorsement of biological and social essentialism (Smetáčková, 2008, p. 15).

It is necessary to point out that the validity of the research which was conducted for the practical part of this thesis is significantly influenced by the low number of learners (boys in particular) that took part in the research and also by the limited number of lessons which did

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<sup>16</sup> False dilemma is an example of a logical fallacy – these are “flawed, deceptive, or false arguments that can be proven wrong with reasoning” (Thompson, 2022). The purpose of a false dilemma is “to polarize the audience, promoting one side and demonizing another” (Thompson, 2022).

not allow more in-depth discussions with the learners about the individual issues. Nevertheless, as it has been demonstrated in this chapter, the feminist retellings of classic fairy tales seem to have the potential to help develop learners' awareness of gender stereotyping and their critical-thinking abilities, particularly in combination with the RWCT methods. Furthermore, they also seem to be suitable for exploring the cross-curricular potential of gender equality issues.

## Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to examine the potential benefits of the usage of contemporary feminist retellings of classic fairy tales in ELT with regard to the development of critical-thinking abilities of learners. In order to achieve this aim, this thesis utilised the cross-disciplinary approach to fairy tales in combination with the RWCT Programme.

The theoretical part of this thesis described the transformations of the literary fairy tale with regard to its reproduction and reflection of gender stereotypes. Specifically, it employed the feminist approach to explore the process of the institutionalisation of the modern literary fairy tale and its impact on the formation of the fairy tale canon. It demonstrated how the gender-specific identities constructed in the literary fairy tales written by Charles Perrault, the Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen served the purpose of promoting period values and norms. The subsequent analysis of the feminist revisionist fairy tales written by Neil Gaiman, Louise O'Neill and Deirdre Sullivan drew on this contextualisation and revealed the wide range of intersectional issues that these retellings address. The last chapter of the theoretical part focused on the usage of fairy tales in ELT and it demonstrated the potential benefits of this usage in combination with the RWCT Programme.

The mixed methods research which was conducted for the practical part of this thesis had two stages – a qualitative and a quantitative stage. In order to collect the qualitative data for the first stage of the research, five lesson plans which utilised selected retellings from chapter 3 in combination with selected RWCT methods were created and used during five lessons of English with a group of ten 9th graders at a lower secondary school with extended language teaching. For the purpose of collecting the quantitative data for the second stage of the research, a reflective questionnaire was created and it was filled in by the learners after the realisation of the individual lessons. The analysis of the research results revealed that the most influential factor in the learners' evaluation of the retellings was the relatability that they had. This finding seems to correspond with the results of a similar research conducted by Jarkovská (2013). As a part of her research, Jarkovská (2013, pp. 157-158) presented a class of 6th graders with the feminist fairy tale *The Paper Bag Princess* (1980) written by Robert Munsch. Generally, the class enjoyed the tale, but it was more appealing to the girls, particularly to the introverted ones (Jarkovská, 2013, pp. 159-160). It is, however, necessary to note that this fairy tale utilises the same gender reversal strategy as Gaiman's *The Sleeper and the Spindle* (2014) and as it was pointed out in subchapter 3.1, this may lead to reversing rather than deconstructing gender

stereotypes, which also happened in this case since some of the learners mentioned that they did not like the character of the prince and that he was stupid (Jarkovská, 2013, p. 159).

The analysis of the research results also suggested that the feminist retellings of classic fairy tales may provide a useful tool for the development of critical thinking abilities of learners. It was pointed out that neither gender equality nor critical thinking is comprehensively dealt with in the educational content in the FEP BE. However, the long-term aim of MŠMT concerning the transformation of the content and methods of education provides areas for further research, particularly when it comes to the awareness of gender stereotypes among teachers and their ability to address them since as it has been mentioned above, it is necessary to utilise the feminist retellings of classic fairy tales so that they help to deconstruct and not reverse gender stereotypes.

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## **List of abbreviations**

ELT – English Language Teaching

WHO – World Health Organization

YA – Young Adult

LGBTQ+ – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and other sexual and gender identities

FEP BE – Framework Education Programme for Basic Education

RWCT – Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking

ERR – Evocation, Realisation of meaning, Reflection

MŠMT – Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy

CEFR – Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

PSHE – Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education

DRTA – Directed Reading-Thinking Activity

DNA – Directed Note-Taking Activity

FRIES – Freely given, Reversible, Informed, Enthusiastic, Specific



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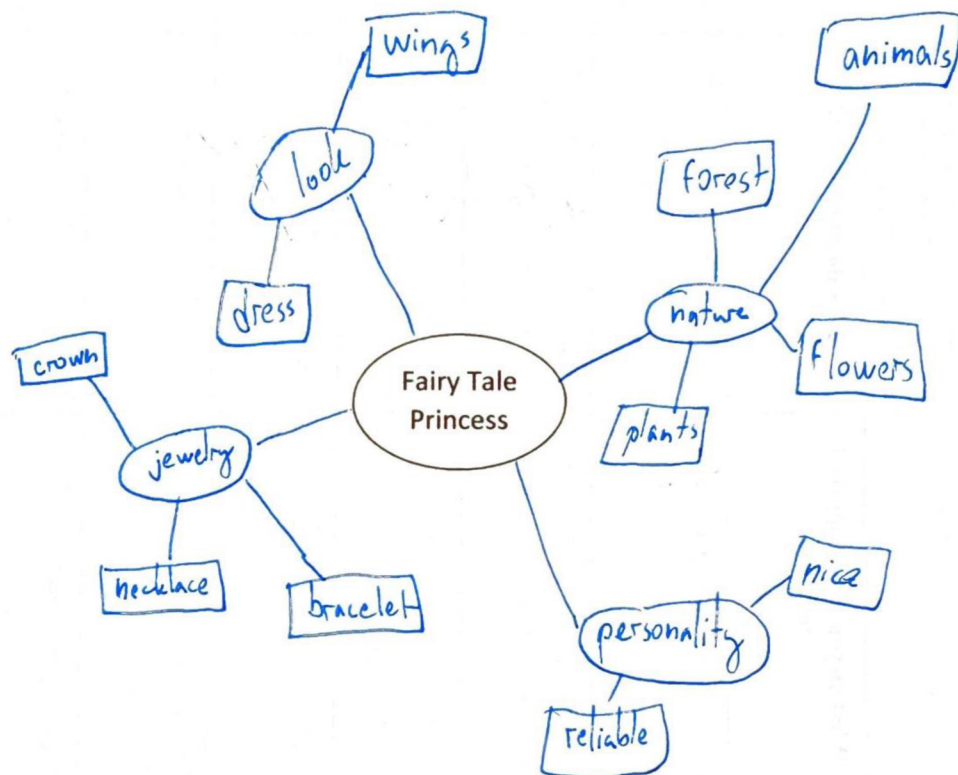
## Appendices

## Appendix 1 Examples of worksheets completed by the learners

### LESSON 1

#### 1. Mind Map

What characteristics do you associate with a fairy tale princess? Create a mind map using the words and expressions that come to your mind.



#### 2. Directed Reading-Thinking Activity (DRTA)

You are going to read the fairy tale “The Sleeper and the Spindle” by Neil Gaiman. Look at the keywords in the chart – what is the story about, in your opinion? Make predictions about the individual events in the story and then compare them with the excerpts.

Key words: queen sleeping curse rescue mission emancipation  ↑ freedom to choose	My story	It's a happy kingdom but the queen gets a sleeping curse, so the princess goes to a rescue mission to save her. At the end the queen gives emancipation to life her life, so the princess leaves the kingdom and lives her life as a fairy.		
	What do you think happened next?	Why do you think so?	What really happened?	
Part 1	She went to the carpenters.	Because she talks about them a lot.	She went to save the kingdom from the sleeping curse.	
Part 2	She tries to fight for her kingdom.	Because she talks about getting her armor.	They found the cursed princess.	
Part 3	They try to save the princess.	Because she's not good.	They kissed.	
Part 4	She saves her.	Because they kissed.	She made everyone sleep.	
Part 5	They will all sleep.	Because she made them..	She saved her.	
Part 6	They live happily ever after.	Because that's how fairy tale ends.	She leaves the kingdom.	

### 3a. Discussion

Answer the following questions:

Why do you think the queen decided not to return to her kingdom and marry the prince?

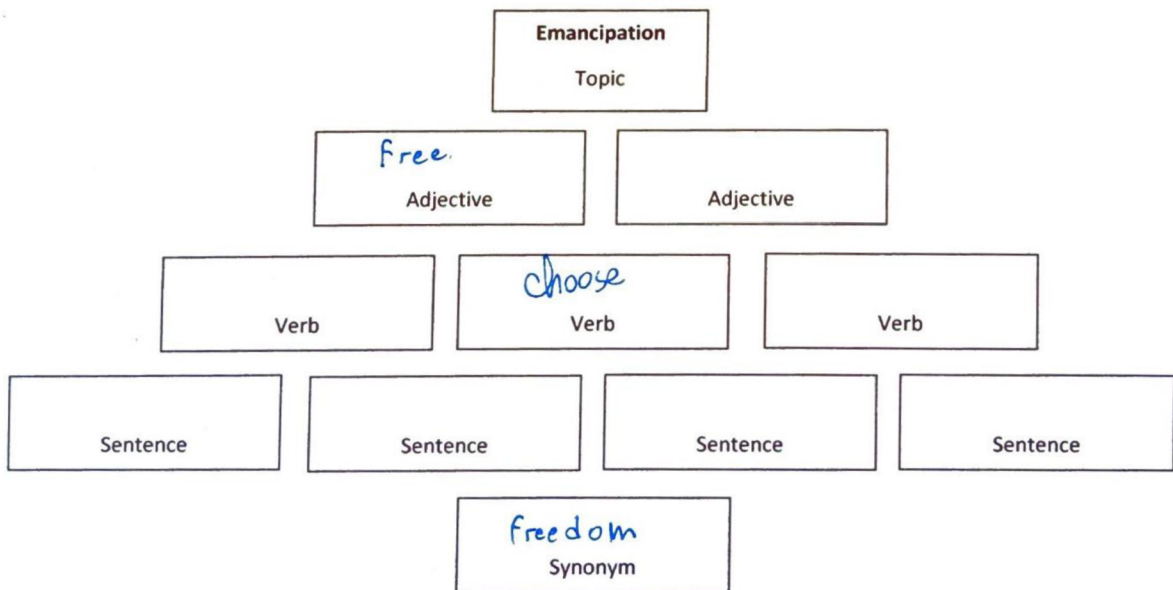
Because she still wants to live her life and not be committed to one person.

What do you think is the message of the story?

Don't marry and live your life.

### 3b. Cinquain Poem

Complete the diagram with suitable words to describe the term 'emancipation'.



## LESSON 2

### 1. Freewriting

How would you describe a fairy tale witch? Write a paragraph about her within the time limit of three minutes, and follow these rules as you write: write in sentences, not only in words; write down every idea that comes to your mind; don't correct grammar or spelling; don't go back to read your text, just keep writing; if you don't know the English word for something, write it in Czech; if you run out of ideas, write anything that comes to your mind, e.g. *I don't know what to write now or I'm thinking.*

She looks pretty so people won't think she is a witch, she has nice long black hair, wears black clothes, high heels shoes and nice dresses. She also owns 5 cats, two of them are black and 3 are brown. She is not so evil as everyone thinks, she uses white magic and crystals. People don't know her as a witch, but as a nice quiet lady that shows up sometimes in their village and everytime she does something odd things happens

### 2a. Questionstorming

Look at the illustration for the fairy tale you are going to read. What questions come to your mind? Write them down within the time limit of two minutes.

What is the cat's name  
Who is that little girl  
Why does she have a fox  
Is that tattoo on her body  
Can I eat her house?



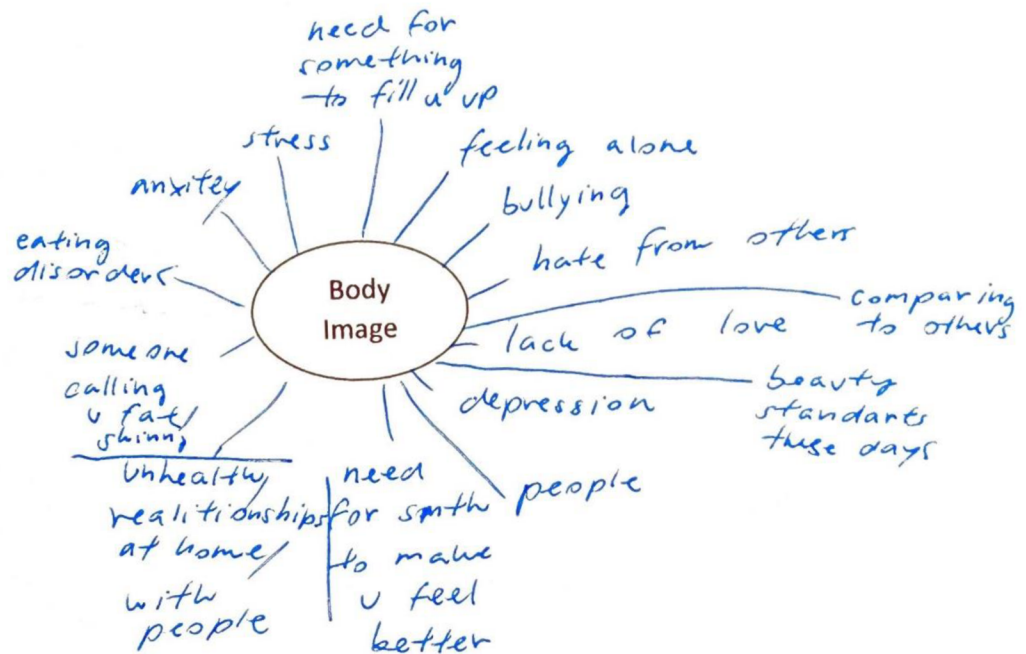
**2b. Directed Note-Taking Activity (DNA)**

Read the abridged version of the fairy tale "You Shall Not Suffer..." by Deirdre Sullivan and explain the chosen excerpts in the chart – how do you understand them? What is the author trying to communicate, in your opinion?

Excerpt from the text	How do you understand it?
<p><b>A</b> You were a friendless child, a barrel-chested, sturdy little thing who played alone. Who looked up through the branches seeking nests, needing something kinder than a human. <i>she was lonely and found friend in animals</i></p> <p><b>B</b> The world's not built for soft and sturdy things. It likes its soft things small and white, defenceless. You grew up, and piece by wounded piece you built a carapace around your body.</p> <p><b>C</b> The gap in you that needed to be filled was big, was huge. There was not enough bread inside the world to fill the ache. <i>she had ED because she filled her heart and pain with food</i></p> <p><b>D</b> Although you never felt you were a person. Not with other people in the room. When filtered through a different set of eyes, you pale and flatten. Picture-postcard freak. <i>she felt really different, the people were evil but she wasn't</i></p> <p><b>E</b> There is no comfort for you in your body. It is a thing to fill. That must be filled. <i>she doesn't feel good in her body</i></p> <p><b>F</b> You'll try to help but you will not make promises. The things you care for sometimes try to hurt. You must protect yourself. <i>she protect herself so she hurts others</i></p>	<p><i>she was a little girl that felt alone and sad. wanted to help animals and loved them. she had eating problems bcs of the way she felt. Then she decided to go live in a forest and built a house from food, where she kept her animals.</i></p>

### 3. Mind Map

What are the factors that influence a person's body image? How can they influence it? Create a mind map using your own ideas and the ideas from the story.



### LESSON 3

#### 1. Venn Diagram

Complete the diagram with the characteristics that describe negative and positive body image and what they have in common.



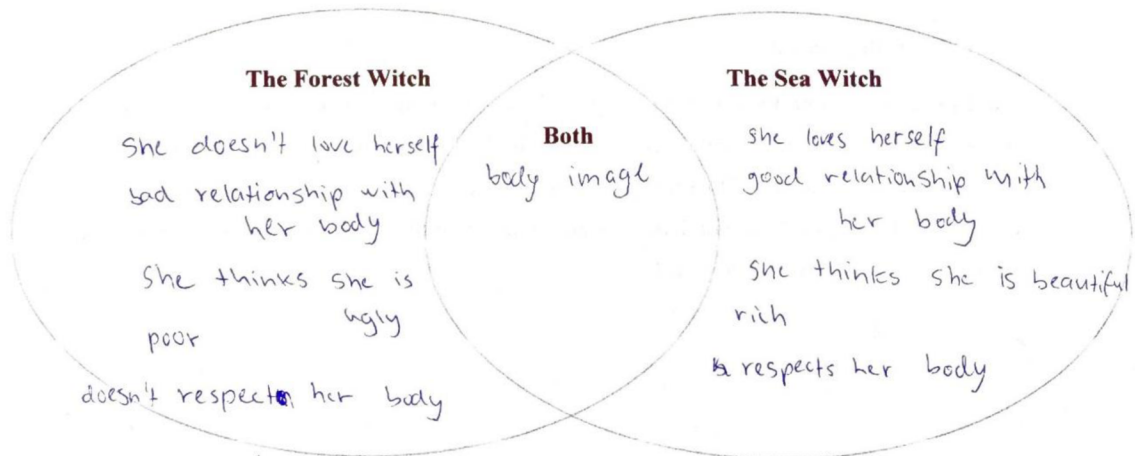
#### 2. Double-Entry Journal

Read the excerpt from the novel *The Surface Breaks* by Louise O'Neill. As you read, write down 5 – 6 quotes in the left column of the chart. In the right column, comment on each quote: How does it make you feel? Does it remind you of something you have heard? Do you agree or disagree with the quote? Do you have any questions about the quote? Is there any connection between the quote and the real world?

Quote from the text	My commentary
<p>what they don't understand is that I love myself, and that gives me a power none of them can take away from me.</p> <p>They have comforted themselves with the knowledge that I would never be married, that I would never find a man to love me as I am.</p>	<p>I am happy to see she loves her body and she doesn't care what others <sup>say</sup> say.</p> <p>It's actually sad, because it doesn't <del>matter</del> matter how you look on the outside but how you are in the inside. I think she can find a man who will love her the way she is.</p>

### 3. Venn Diagram

Complete the diagram with the characteristics that describe each witch and what they have in common.



## LESSON 4

### 1a. Questionstorming

Look at the illustration for the fairy tale you are going to read. What questions come to your mind? Write them down within the time limit of two minutes.

What does she have around her neck? Why does she have it?

What is in front of her? Not that frog, ~~is~~ that thing.

Why does she have paintings on her face?

### 1b. Yes/No Chart

Read the statements in the chart and decide whether you agree with them or not. Mark your answer in the "Before reading" column.

	Before reading	After reading	Evidence in the text
1. If a person is silent, they give their consent.	yes/ <u>no</u>	yes/ <u>no</u>	She's so afraid she can't even talk so she doesn't consent that
2. If a person is manipulated or pressured into saying 'yes', it isn't consent.	<u>yes</u> /no	<u>yes</u> /no	
3. There are situations in which it's not possible to obtain a person's consent.	yes/ <u>no</u>	<u>yes</u> /no	
4. If a person is in a relationship or married, their partner doesn't need to ask them for consent.	yes/ <u>no</u>	yes/ <u>no</u>	
5. Paying attention to a person's body language is important when establishing consent.	<u>yes</u> /no	<u>yes</u> /no	
6. It's necessary to get a person's consent for any kind of physical touch, e.g. sex, kissing, hugging, etc.	<u>yes</u> /no	<u>yes</u> /no	

## 2. Yes/No Chart

Read the abridged version of the fairy tale "Doing Well" by Deirdre Sullivan. Has your opinion changed in any case? Mark your answer in the "After reading" column and support it with the evidence that you have found in the text.

## 3. Inferencing

Complete the acronym "FRIES" with the definitions of the key characteristics of consent. Use your own ideas and the ideas from the story.

Freely given - You can choose to give it.

Reversible - ~~You~~ You can take back what you did or said.

Informed - You know about all of the things that you've agreed to.

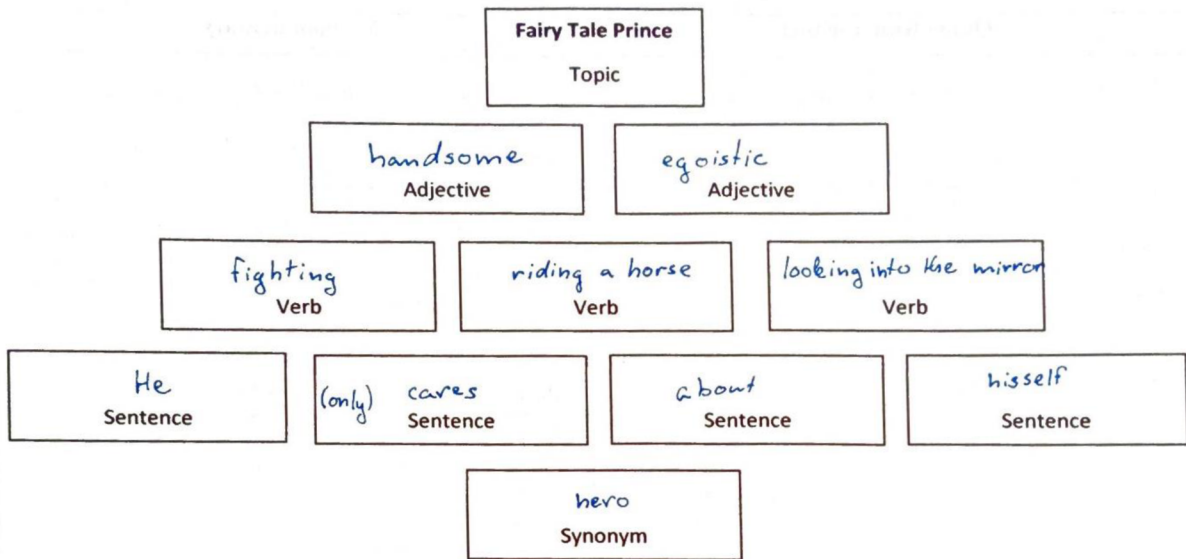
Enthusiastic - You're just excited or happy that this is happening.

Specific - It's told what kind of thing it is.

## LESSON 5

### 1. Cinquain Poem

Complete the diagram with the words that you associate with the character of a fairy tale prince.



### 2a. Inferencing

Look at the illustration for the fairy tale you are going to read. Why is the prince portrayed this way? What do you think he is like? Write down 3 – 4 words to describe him.

long hair  
strong

### 2b. Double-Entry Journal

Read the abridged version of the fairy tale "Waking Beauty" by Deirdre Sullivan. As you read, write down 5 – 6 quotes in the left column of the chart. In the right column, comment on each quote: How does it make you feel? Does it remind you of something you have heard? Do you agree or disagree with the quote? Do you have any questions about the quote? Is there any connection between the quote and the real world?

Quote from the text	My commentary
<p>A man doesn't fear death, he faces it.</p> <p>The way you feel is not for other people, you keep it to yourself.</p>	<p>I think it should be choice, not supposed to be like this.</p> <p>Everyone should have someone who they talk to or who <sup>they</sup> can trust.</p>

### 2c. Inferencing

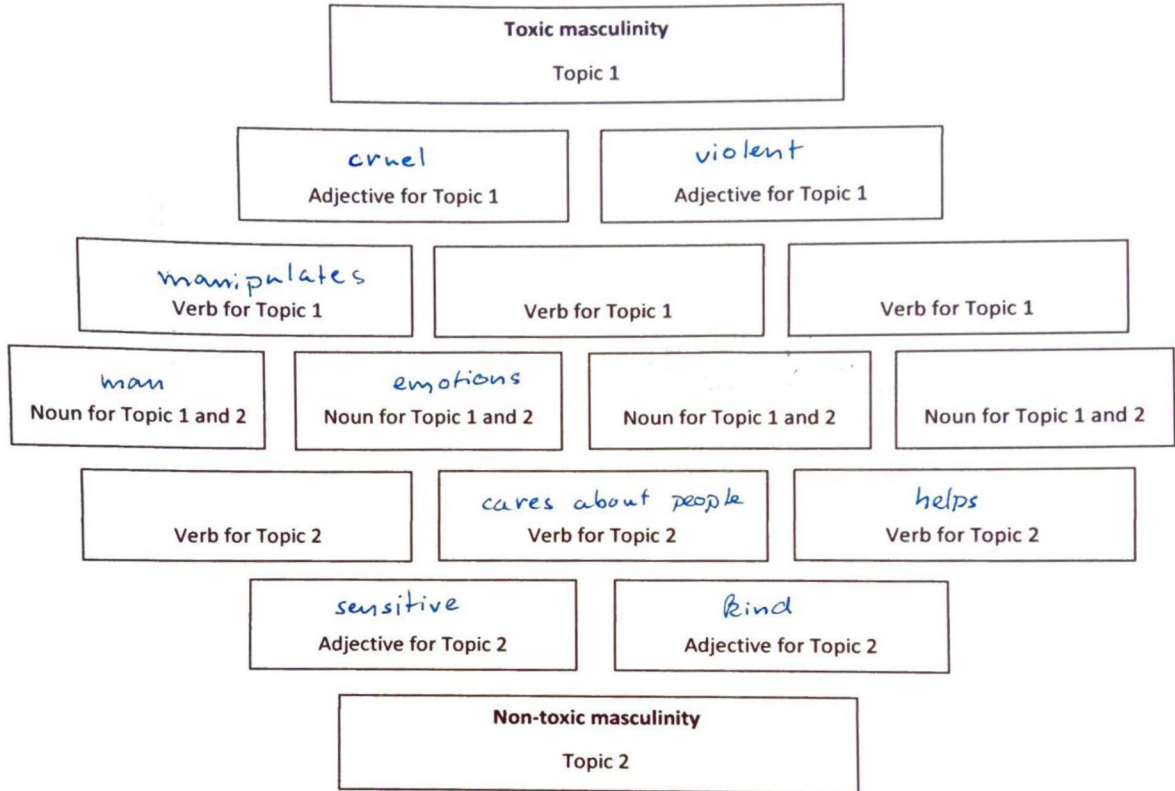
What do you think happens at the end of the story? Why do you think so?

The princess wakes up but she'll not like him because of he's trying to be someone he doesn't want to be



### 3. Diamante Poem

Complete the diagram with suitable words to describe each term.



## Appendix 2 Abridged versions of the fairy tales with glossaries

### Lesson 1 – Abridged version of the fairy tale book *The Sleeper and the Spindle* (2014) by Neil Gaiman.

**Part 1** The queen woke early that morning. She wondered how she would feel to be a married woman. It would be the end of her life, she decided, if life was a time of choices. In a week from now, she would have no choices. She would reign over<sup>1</sup> her people. She would have children. Perhaps she would die in childbirth, perhaps she would die as an old woman, or in battle. But the path to her death, heartbeat by heartbeat, would be inevitable<sup>2</sup>. She could hear the carpenters<sup>3</sup> in the meadows beneath the castle, building the seats that would allow her people to watch her marry. Each hammer blow<sup>4</sup> sounded like a heartbeat (Gaiman, 2014, p. 14).

#### **GLOSSARY**

<sup>1</sup>**to reign over** – vládnout

<sup>3</sup>**a carpenter** – tesař

<sup>2</sup>**inevitable** – nevyhnutelný

<sup>4</sup>**a hammer blow** – úder kladiva

**Part 2** “Asleep?”, asked the queen. “Explain yourselves. How so, asleep?” The dwarf<sup>5</sup> stood upon the table so he could look her in the eye. “Asleep,” he repeated. “People sleep in their smithies<sup>6</sup>, on milking stools<sup>7</sup>. The animals sleep in the fields. It is expanding<sup>8</sup>, the zone of the spell, a few miles every day.” The mountains that separated the two lands were impossibly high, but not wide. The queen could count the miles. “I am afraid,” said the queen, “that there will be no wedding tomorrow.” She called for a map of the kingdom, identified the villages closest to the mountains and sent messengers to tell the inhabitants<sup>9</sup> to evacuate to the coast. She called for her mail shirt<sup>10</sup>. She called for her sword<sup>11</sup>. She called for provisions<sup>12</sup>, and for her horse, and then she rode out of the palace, towards the east. The dwarfs were waiting for her, and they led her down deep into the tunnels, the way that the dwarfs travel (Gaiman, 2014, pp. 20, 21, 23).

#### **GLOSSARY**

<sup>5</sup>**a dwarf** – trpaslík

<sup>8</sup>**to expand** – šířit se

<sup>11</sup>**a sword** – meč

<sup>6</sup>**a smithy** – kovárna

<sup>9</sup>**an inhabitant** – obyvatel

<sup>12</sup>**provisions** – zásoby (potravin)

<sup>7</sup>**a milking stool** – stolička na dojení

<sup>10</sup>**a mail shirt** – drátěná košile

**Part 3** The fair-haired girl in the high tower slept. All the people in the castle slept. Each of them was fast asleep, excepting only one. The woman's hair was grey, streaked with<sup>13</sup> white, and so sparse<sup>14</sup> her scalp showed. She hobbled<sup>15</sup>, angrily, through the castle, leaning on<sup>16</sup> her stick, as if she were driven only by hatred<sup>17</sup>, slamming<sup>18</sup> doors, talking to herself as she walked. They caught her just as she reached the top of the steps: three men, no higher than her hips<sup>19</sup>, closely followed by a young woman in travel-stained<sup>20</sup> clothes. They walked her back into the round tower room (Gaiman, 2014, pp. 33, 47, 49).

#### **GLOSSARY**

<sup>13</sup>**streaked with** – prokvetlý

<sup>16</sup>**to lean on** – opírat se o

<sup>19</sup>**a hip** – bok

<sup>14</sup>**sparse** – prořídly

<sup>17</sup>**hatred** – nenávisť

<sup>20</sup>**travel-stained** – ušpiněný po cestě

<sup>15</sup>**to hobble** – belhat se

<sup>18</sup>**to slam** – prásknout, bouchnout

**Part 4** – see Appendix 3

**Part 5** “It was here, in this room,” said the old woman, suddenly. “And I was little more than a girl. There was only an old woman, sitting on the stool, spinning<sup>21</sup> wool into yarn<sup>22</sup> with her spindle<sup>23</sup>. She asked if I would like a go<sup>24</sup>. She took the wool in her hand and gave me the spindle to hold. She held my thumb and pressed it against the point of the spindle until blood flowed, and she touched the blood to the thread<sup>25</sup>. And then she said –” Another voice interrupted her. A young voice it was, a girl's voice. “I said, now I take your sleep from you, girl, just as I take from you your ability to harm<sup>26</sup> me in my sleep, for someone needs to be awake while I sleep. Your family, your friends, your world will sleep too. And then I lay down on the bed, and I slept, and they slept, and as each of them slept I stole a little of their life, a little of their dreams, and as I slept I took back my youth and my beauty and my power” (Gaiman, 2014, p. 52)

#### **GLOSSARY**

<sup>21</sup>**to spin** – příst

<sup>23</sup>**a spindle** – vřeteno

<sup>25</sup>**thread** – příze, vlákno

<sup>22</sup>**yarn** – příze

<sup>24</sup>**would like a go** – chtít to zkusit

<sup>26</sup>**to harm** – ublížit

**Part 6** The queen noticed the spindle lying on the floor, she picked it up and passed it to the old woman beside her. The old woman, who had once been a princess, held the yarn tightly in her hand, and she thrust<sup>27</sup> the point of the spindle into the golden-haired girl's breast. The old woman swayed<sup>28</sup>, and then she staggered<sup>29</sup>, and she would have fallen to the floor if the queen had not caught her first. The queen carried the old woman to the bed and placed her on the crimson<sup>30</sup> counterpane<sup>31</sup>. When the people in the castle woke up and reached the tower room, they saw an old woman asleep on a bed and they saw something else on the floor also: a tumble<sup>32</sup> of bones, a hank<sup>33</sup> of hair as fine<sup>34</sup> and as white as cobwebs<sup>35</sup>, and a tracery<sup>36</sup> of grey rags<sup>37</sup> across it (Gaiman, 2014, pp. 52, 59, 62, 63).

#### **GLOSSARY**

<sup>27</sup> <b>to thrust into</b> – vrazit, zabodnout do	<sup>31</sup> <b>a counterpane</b> – přehoz	<sup>35</sup> <b>a cobweb</b> – pavučina
<sup>28</sup> <b>to sway</b> – zakymácet se	<sup>32</sup> <b>a tumble</b> – hromádka	<sup>36</sup> <b>a tracery</b> – zbytky, kusy
<sup>29</sup> <b>to stagger</b> – zavrávorat	<sup>33</sup> <b>a hank</b> – chomáč	<sup>37</sup> <b>rags</b> – hadry
<sup>30</sup> <b>crimson</b> – karmínový	<sup>34</sup> <b>fine</b> – jemný	

**Part 7** “So,” said the dwarf with the brown beard. “If we head<sup>38</sup> due<sup>39</sup> west, we can be at the mountains by the end of the week, and we’ll have you back in your palace in Kanselaire within ten days.” “Yes,” said the queen. “And your wedding will be late, but it will happen soon after your return, and the people will celebrate, and there will be joy unbounded<sup>40</sup> through the kingdom.” “Yes,” said the queen. She said nothing, but sat on the moss<sup>41</sup> beneath an oak tree<sup>42</sup> and tasted the stillness<sup>43</sup>, heartbeat by heartbeat. *There are choices*, she thought, when she had sat long enough. *There are always choices*. She made one. The queen began to walk, and the dwarfs followed her. “You *do* know we’re heading east, don’t you?” said one of the dwarfs. “Oh yes,” said the queen. “Well, *that’s* all right then,” said the dwarf. They walked to the east, all four of them, away from the sunset and the lands they knew, and into the night (Gaiman, 2014, p. 66).

#### **GLOSSARY**

<sup>38</sup> <b>to head</b> – zamířit, jít	<sup>40</sup> <b>unbounded</b> – nesmírný, neomezený	<sup>42</sup> <b>an oak tree</b> – dub
<sup>39</sup> <b>due</b> – rovnou, přímo	<sup>41</sup> <b>moss</b> – mech	<sup>43</sup> <b>stillness</b> – ticho, klid

## Lesson 2 – Abridged version of the fairy tale “You Shall Not Suffer...” by Deirdre Sullivan.

### Part 1

You grew up soft. Your tender<sup>1</sup> heart would nurse a frightened fieldmouse rescued from a trap<sup>2</sup>. You'd try to help but always it would die. You gave them names. You were a friendless child, a barrel-chested<sup>3</sup>, sturdy<sup>4</sup> little thing who played alone. Who looked up through the branches seeking<sup>5</sup> nests<sup>6</sup>, needing something kinder than a human.<sup>A</sup> Sometimes dogs lash out<sup>7</sup> when they're in pain. You never minded it, you staunched the wound<sup>8</sup> and then you went on caring. You grew up soft, but still you learned to hide it. Piece by piece. The world's not built for soft and sturdy things. It likes its soft things small and white, defenceless<sup>9</sup>. You grew up soft, and piece by wounded piece you built a carapace<sup>10</sup> around your body.<sup>B</sup> Humans are peculiar<sup>11</sup> little things. You found baby hares<sup>12</sup> abandoned<sup>13</sup>. You tried to take them home. Your father wrung<sup>14</sup> their necks. He told you that he did it to be kind. The kindest thing, he said, without a mother. How would they survive? Yours had been gone for just over a twelve-month. You wanted so to mother<sup>15</sup> them to health. People weave<sup>16</sup> a kindness to their cruelty. Those little lives reminded you of that. At night, you folded hardened, ageing bread into your mouth, drank milk to stop the thoughts inside your head from spilling over<sup>17</sup>. The gap in you that needed to be filled was big, was huge. There was not enough bread inside the world to fill the ache.<sup>C</sup> At night-time you become a ravenous<sup>18</sup> thing. You hunger. How you hunger. The cupboards bare<sup>19</sup>, you've emptied them. Your gluttony<sup>20</sup> is something to conceal<sup>21</sup>. You cannot stop it but you must contain<sup>22</sup> it. This is when the witch in you begins. The small deceits<sup>23</sup> protect you, what you are. Conceal it well from knowledge and from eyes. You've always wanted love. Or touch. Approval<sup>24</sup>. People comment on you, like a cow, a dog, a thing. You have become another sort of noun. Although you never felt you were a person. Not with other people in the room. When filtered through a different set of eyes, you pale<sup>25</sup> and flatten<sup>26</sup>. Picture-postcard freak.<sup>D</sup> You find a turtle by a pond one day. It isn't well, you need to make it better. You borrow books for favours, read and do. Release<sup>27</sup> it back into the wild it came from. It will be eaten soon, you think.

### Part 2

That night inside the kitchen, it appears. A tall thing. A hare, it seems. But bigger than a wolf. It stares<sup>28</sup> at you. You go with it. Your hand upon its back. It slows its pace<sup>29</sup>. It wants you to be with it. This is new. You venture<sup>30</sup> to the border of the village. And when you reach the

forest, you let go. You have become afraid. What happens there is another sort of thing. It is the place unwanted children go. You've often wondered why you weren't put there. Left to wander<sup>31</sup>, starve<sup>32</sup> inside the dark. You are afraid. But there is something else inside as well. A kind of thrill<sup>33</sup>. Your father starts to notice missing food. He places locks upon the cupboards. Holds the iron keys upon his belt. You have to ask for his permission now. To cook. To eat. There is no comfort for you in your body. It is a thing to fill. That must be filled.<sup>E</sup> The shape of you. A rounded figure eight that roams<sup>34</sup> through markets, aching to be touched. For a kind word. A tender look. Some food. The second time it comes, it is a turtle. Wide and flat and round. Your hand pressed to its back, you dip a toe into<sup>35</sup> the forest night. You venture in; it shows you to a clearing<sup>36</sup>. There is a little hut there. The shape of home, but not a proper dwelling<sup>37</sup>. You look at it and love it in the night. The turtle lets you wander, takes you back. It will return. You know it in your heart. The following night, inside a bed, you feel a harsh<sup>38</sup> pulse just beneath your stomach. You see a flake<sup>39</sup> of skin has lifted off<sup>40</sup>. You stand inside the room. You are much smaller. Everything is big. Your eyes are on the two sides of your head. You run outside. You venture to the cows. Suck<sup>41</sup> your milky fill. They gently let you take your nourishment<sup>42</sup>. You venture back to bed, your stomach full. You are a girl again. But more than what you were. When your skin grows back, there's a little disc between your breasts that's hard as bone. You flick<sup>43</sup> it with a finger. You feel the contact but it doesn't hurt. You were a hare, and now you are a woman. Carapace. You have a carapace. It is a fieldmouse when it comes again. You grasp<sup>44</sup> its tail. It recognises you, the earth, this place, for what you are. A thing that it should welcome. That is worth it. You venture in, and know you won't come back. Inside the forest you will build a house. Of nourishment. Of healing. You will leave food outside for the unwanted. Loaves and ginger biscuits, milk and cheese. Your body will obey<sup>45</sup> you, warp<sup>46</sup> and change. And you will never ask before you feed. Years pass. And there are two. The girl's like you. You catch her pulling handfuls from your walls. The currant<sup>47</sup> buns, the gingerbread. The boy behind her eating just as hard. You are something else. Inhuman now. You've grown hardness over all your soft, a jointed case<sup>48</sup> somewhere between bark<sup>49</sup> and seashell. They fear you in the village. And abroad. When they abandon their litters<sup>50</sup> in the woods, they blame the witch in her home of food. They come to you, in spite of this, to ask for help. You listen when you can. You like to heal. You grew up soft. But life has grown you appetites, a shell. Little children gnawing<sup>51</sup> at your house. You open wide the sugar-candied window, and you call: 'Little children, little ones. Come in. Come in. Come in.' You offer them good food and a soft bed. You'll try to help but you will not make promises. The things you care for sometimes try to hurt. You must protect yourself.<sup>F</sup> And those around you. You welcome

in their desperate<sup>52</sup> little selves<sup>53</sup>. The girl. The boy. You turn the oven on. You get to baking (Sullivan, 2018, pp. 33-40).

## GLOSSARY

<sup>1</sup> <b>tender</b> – citlivý, starostlivý	<sup>21</sup> <b>to conceal</b> – skrýt	<sup>41</sup> <b>to suck</b> – sát
<sup>2</sup> <b>a trap</b> – past	<sup>22</sup> <b>to contain</b> – zkrotit, ovládnout	<sup>42</sup> <b>nourishment</b> – strava
<sup>3</sup> <b>barrel-chested</b> – statný, rozložitý	<sup>23</sup> <b>a deceit</b> – klam, podvod	<sup>43</sup> <b>to flick</b> – cvrknout
<sup>4</sup> <b>sturdy</b> – silný, zavalitý	<sup>24</sup> <b>an approval</b> – uznání, oblíbenost	<sup>44</sup> <b>to grasp</b> – uchopit
<sup>5</sup> <b>to seek</b> – hledat	<sup>25</sup> <b>to pale</b> –blednout, ztrácet se	<sup>45</sup> <b>to obey</b> – poslouchat
<sup>6</sup> <b>a nest</b> – hnízdo	<sup>26</sup> <b>to flatten</b> – zploštit, zplacatit se	<sup>46</sup> <b>to warp</b> – ohýbat se
<sup>7</sup> <b>to lash out</b> – ohnat se, útočit	<sup>27</sup> <b>to release</b> – vypustit	<sup>47</sup> <b>currant</b> – rozinkový
<sup>8</sup> <b>to staunch a wound</b> – zastavit krvácení z rány	<sup>28</sup> <b>to stare</b> – upřeně se dívat	<sup>48</sup> <b>a case</b> – obal, schránka
<sup>9</sup> <b>defenceless</b> – bezbranný	<sup>29</sup> <b>pace</b> – tempo	<sup>49</sup> <b>bark</b> – kůra
<sup>10</sup> <b>a carapace</b> – krunýř	<sup>30</sup> <b>to venture</b> – vydat se (někam)	<sup>50</sup> <b>litters</b> – smetí
<sup>11</sup> <b>peculiar</b> – zvláštní, podivný	<sup>31</sup> <b>to wander</b> – bloudit, toulat se	<sup>51</sup> <b>to gnaw</b> – okusovat
<sup>12</sup> <b>a hare</b> – zajíc	<sup>32</sup> <b>to starve</b> – hladovět	<sup>52</sup> <b>desperate</b> – zoufalý
<sup>13</sup> <b>abandoned</b> – opuštěný	<sup>33</sup> <b>a thrill</b> – vzrušení	<sup>53</sup> <b>a self</b> – ego, já
<sup>14</sup> <b>to wring</b> – zakroutit	<sup>34</sup> <b>to roam</b> – toulat se	
<sup>15</sup> <b>to mother</b> – pečovat	<sup>35</sup> <b>to dip a toe into</b> – vstoupit do (váhavě)	
<sup>16</sup> <b>to weave to</b> – proplést, spojit	<sup>36</sup> <b>a clearing</b> – mýtina	
<sup>17</sup> <b>to spill over</b> – přetéct	<sup>37</sup> <b>a dwelling</b> – obydlí, příbytek	
<sup>18</sup> <b>ravenous</b> – vyhladovělý	<sup>38</sup> <b>harsh</b> – ostrý	
<sup>19</sup> <b>bare</b> – prázdný	<sup>39</sup> <b>a flake</b> – šupina	
<sup>20</sup> <b>gluttony</b> – přejídání, nenasytost	<sup>40</sup> <b>to lift off</b> – odloupnout se	

### Lesson 3 – Excerpt from the novel *The Surface Breaks* (2018) by Louise O’Neill.

My skin is pale<sup>1</sup>, almost translucent<sup>2</sup> in the star-kissed water, fading into<sup>3</sup> a full tail also of night-navy scales<sup>4</sup>. *Too dark*, Mama says, although she says my skin is far too pale, so I'm not sure what exactly it is that would make her happy. When I was younger, I tried to believe that she was right, that being a woman meant being eternally<sup>5</sup> dissatisfied with yourself. I would have to spend my life always striving<sup>6</sup> to be better, to be something other than who I am. But it didn't make any sense to me. *Why?* I would ask her, *Why? Why? Why?* – but eventually I just gave up. And I think my mother hates me for that. When I was fourteen, she handed me a lotion harvested from brine<sup>7</sup> and seaweed that promised to make my face look rosier, and another one flushed with<sup>8</sup> feathers of coral that was supposed to scrape<sup>9</sup> my tail into a more acceptable shade<sup>10</sup>: azure, or cerulean blue<sup>11</sup>. Something that matched my eyes, I was told. *It burns*, I protested as Mama applied the unguent<sup>12</sup>, thick, sticky, and she told me to stop complaining. *You cannot have beauty for nothing*, she said, spreading an extra layer of the cream across my scales. I catch Mama looking at me sometimes. Usually it's when we are at the dinner table, she and Papa, my brother Nerites and me, and I have asked the servants to bring me an extra portion of sea-greens. I am often hungry, you see, and I do not feel the need to deny myself<sup>13</sup> and go to bed hungry. Papa and Neri are allowed to enjoy their food; I don't see why it should be so different for me. *I am nearly the same size as Neri*, I argue when Mama dismisses<sup>14</sup> the servant with a wave of her hand and I must watch the food disappear. *Surely it makes sense that I be given the same sustenance<sup>15</sup>?* *Yes*, she says. *You are the same size as Neri*. She takes a dainty<sup>16</sup> bite of her greens, then pushes it away from her, automatically looking at my father to make sure he notices her sacrifice<sup>17</sup>. *That is the problem, Ceto*. I am used to such comments, have grown weary<sup>18</sup> of both my father's attempts to defend me and my brother's obvious enjoyment in my humiliation<sup>19</sup>. Mama is not the only one to talk to me in such a way, although she is by far the most direct. At court<sup>20</sup>, the other maids speak in a practised fashion, ostensibly<sup>21</sup> saying very little while cutting you bone-deep, twisting the dagger<sup>22</sup> and smiling as you stumble away<sup>23</sup>, bleeding. *You have such a pretty face*, my friends will tell me. *Such beautiful skin!* and they smirk out<sup>24</sup> the side of their mouths at one another when they think I will not notice. *Do you want to come for an extra swim with us today, Ceto? You would be so beautiful if... if you swam a little more*, the kinder ones will try, as if I do not understand the true meaning behind their words. And if I dare<sup>25</sup> to challenge them, to ask them not to be so cruel, they will say, *We didn't mean anything by it!* And, *You're too sensitive, Ceto!* as if this is all my fault. As if I must



be dim-witted<sup>26</sup> because I am fat. I am not even allowed to use that word – fat – to describe my own body. *Impolite*, my mother says. *True*, Neri says afterwards, making sure Papa is out of earshot<sup>27</sup>. The mer-folk use "big-boned" and "fuller figured" to describe folk like me, but I like the word fat. I sit in front of my mirror, not combing my hair as the other mermaids do, but running my hands across my body and whispering<sup>28</sup>, *I am fat*. Fat, fat. I like how the word feels on my tongue, and I like how that word looks in the mirror. I refuse<sup>29</sup> to shrink away<sup>30</sup>. The others secretly resent<sup>31</sup> me for that. They have comforted<sup>32</sup> themselves with the knowledge that I would never be married, that I would never find a man to love me as I am. What they don't understand is that I love myself, and that gives me a power none of them can take away from me (O'Neill, 2018, pp. 314-317).

### GLOSSARY

<sup>1</sup> <b>pale</b> – bledý	<sup>13</sup> <b>to deny myself</b> – odříct si, odepřít si	<sup>25</sup> <b>dare</b> – opovážit se, dovolit si
<sup>2</sup> <b>translucent</b> – průsvitný	<sup>14</sup> <b>to dismiss</b> – poslat pryč	<sup>26</sup> <b>dim-witted</b> – zbedněný, blbý
<sup>3</sup> <b>to fade into</b> – přecházet do	<sup>15</sup> <b>sustenance</b> – výživa, strava	<sup>27</sup> <b>out of earshot</b> – mimo doslech
<sup>4</sup> <b>a scale</b> – šupina	<sup>16</sup> <b>dainty</b> – malý	<sup>28</sup> <b>to whisper</b> – šeptat
<sup>5</sup> <b>eternally</b> – věčně	<sup>17</sup> <b>a sacrifice</b> – oběť	<sup>29</sup> <b>to refuse</b> – odmítnout
<sup>6</sup> <b>to strive</b> – snažit se	<sup>18</sup> <b>weary</b> – unavený, otrávený	<sup>30</sup> <b>to shrink away</b> – zmenšit se
<sup>7</sup> <b>brine</b> – mořská voda	<sup>19</sup> <b>humiliation</b> – ponížení	<sup>31</sup> <b>to resent</b> – nesnášet
<sup>8</sup> <b>flushed with</b> – rudě zbarvený	<sup>20</sup> <b>court</b> – královský dvůr	<sup>32</sup> <b>to comfort</b> – utěšovat se
<sup>9</sup> <b>to scrape into</b> – odřít, seškrábnout	<sup>21</sup> <b>ostensibly</b> – zdánlivě	
<sup>10</sup> <b>a shade</b> – odstín	<sup>22</sup> <b>a dagger</b> – dýka	
<sup>11</sup> <b>cerulean blue</b> – blankytně modrá	<sup>23</sup> <b>to stumble away</b> – potácet se pryč	
<sup>12</sup> <b>an unguent</b> – mast	<sup>24</sup> <b>to smirk out</b> – ušklíbat se	

#### **Lesson 4 – Abridged version of the fairy tale “Doing Well” by Deirdre Sullivan.**

*Frogs grow from spawn<sup>1</sup>. Transform into tadpoles<sup>2</sup>. They have spiral guts<sup>3</sup>, and they are soft. Frogspawn must be protected. Do not remove it from the lake or pool. Observe the miracle of nature's changes. They are your prince's kin<sup>4</sup>. Respect that link. In every castle there are hidden rooms. For hidden women. This frog of noble birth was once a tadpole. Confined<sup>5</sup> inside dark waters by a foe<sup>6</sup>. In the chapel<sup>7</sup>, candles have been lit to Fertility<sup>8</sup>, Obedience<sup>9</sup>. Their faces sweet, they stare<sup>10</sup> out from the plaster<sup>11</sup> on the walls. The candles blaze<sup>12</sup>. The murmured<sup>13</sup> lull<sup>14</sup> of prayer. Stout<sup>15</sup> body. Protruding<sup>16</sup> eyes. You have heard stories. About what is coming. Cleft<sup>17</sup> tongue. Limbs<sup>18</sup> folded neatly underneath. Skin a pebbled<sup>19</sup>, puckered<sup>20</sup> dirty green upon the back. And on the stomach, pink and smooth as babies. But translucent<sup>21</sup>. When he's on top of you, you're told you'll feel it. You sleep in the chapel the night before the ritual. Anoint<sup>22</sup> your face with seven pungent<sup>23</sup> oils. You are to address him by his proper title. Not to meet his eyes till he moves first. He may reach out his sticky tongue to taste your skin. Do not flinch<sup>24</sup> from this. You are his bride. Your hair is washed and dried. Water for purity<sup>25</sup>. Air for clarity<sup>26</sup>. Your face is smeared with<sup>27</sup> brightly coloured clay<sup>28</sup>. Earth for fertility. Your eyebrows<sup>29</sup> singed<sup>30</sup> to darken on your brow<sup>31</sup>. Fire for protection. A witch can put her hands upon a man. And change him. It takes a witch to change a princeling<sup>32</sup> back. To bring about a change. To save a kingdom. You have been marked from birth for just this purpose. Cloistered<sup>33</sup> with the others. Secret spaces deep within this place where girls are trained. But there are passageways<sup>34</sup> to keep you safe. You've only seen a few men in your lifetime. You are hidden. Not their rose to pluck<sup>35</sup>. They know you're his. You need to hide to keep your body safe. The body that is his, or will be one day. And you have always known the road ahead. Every year, another babe is chosen. Nobility<sup>36</sup> and peasantry<sup>37</sup> alike. It varies, according to the seers<sup>38</sup>. Always a girl. He may address you in his cracked<sup>39</sup> frog voice. He can produce a range of different tones. And you must listen. You do not remember who your parents are. You were raised inside the castle walls. With certain skills. They like their women delicate, these princes. He will turn his hobbled<sup>40</sup> little back on you if you don't meet his standards. He has grown an extra leg. Do not look directly at it. Do not refer in any way to the extra leg. By no means<sup>41</sup> refer to it as a tail. It is not a tail. It is an extra leg. The little chain, with padlock<sup>42</sup>, is applied while you are still a babe. After they choose. Links added every year around your neck, as you grow. And if you grow too fast, or thick, then it will start to eat into your skin. Will strangle<sup>43</sup> at your windpipe<sup>44</sup>. Every breath a battle. Every beat. Your fingers trace<sup>45</sup> the shapely weight of it. And what will*

it feel like, to be without one? *His fingers, toes are webbed*<sup>46</sup>. *And you will kneel*<sup>47</sup> *while he works at the lock. This could take hours. Do not make a sound. Your prince will open you. And you must let him.* The orb<sup>48</sup> is beautiful, inlaid with<sup>49</sup> arcane<sup>50</sup> symbols. If you submerge<sup>51</sup> it, let it fall and drop, moist<sup>52</sup> grey hands will grasp<sup>53</sup> it through the water. He'll break the surface<sup>54</sup> holding it towards you. Close to your skin and his, it will burst open<sup>55</sup> like a bud<sup>56</sup>, and you will reach your fingers deep inside the golden core<sup>57</sup>. There you will find a key. You'll pass it to him, and then he will unlock the chain around your neck. Begin the marriage. *He may camouflage his skin to match your dress. This is not a good sign. It means that he feels threatened*<sup>58</sup> *by you. This will end the process – and your life.* The smell of incense<sup>59</sup> and the chanting<sup>60</sup> low. Rhythmic. You breathe it in. It's said to fog the brain. You take the orb. And you approach the well. *He may clamber upon*<sup>61</sup> *your lap*<sup>62</sup>. *This will leave a stain*<sup>63</sup> *that's shaped like he is. You are to smile, to listen to him. Your body may begin to respond with panic. Force this far away, and if you cannot quell*<sup>64</sup> *it all entirely*<sup>65</sup>, *pretend*<sup>66</sup> *arousal*<sup>67</sup>. *This will be believed. He is a prince.* The cleric<sup>68</sup> recites the story of the witch. The one who cursed His Highness. Her crimes, the punishment she underwent. *In the night, he will clamber into bed with you. His body will crawl*<sup>69</sup> *over yours. Do not encourage or discourage this. You are for him. And this is perhaps how the spell can be broken.* You drop it in. The cold plop of the orb against the water. *If he doesn't change, then you are just a girl. You will be free, to live inside the cloister with the rest. Their hands and voices have prepared you well.* You kneel. You close your eyes. You kneel and wait. For it to clamber up. The Prince. The Thing. Your husband. *But if he does, if the shape he once had rises in him. Then, my child, of course, you are a witch. And you shall burn* (Sullivan, 2018, pp. 91-96).

## GLOSSARY

<sup>1</sup> <b>spawn</b> – vajíčka	<sup>24</sup> <b>to flinch</b> – ucuknout	<sup>47</sup> <b>to kneel</b> – klečat
<sup>2</sup> <b>a tadpole</b> – pulec	<sup>25</sup> <b>purity</b> – cudnost	<sup>48</sup> <b>an orb</b> – koule
<sup>3</sup> <b>guts</b> – vnitřnosti	<sup>26</sup> <b>clarity</b> – čistota	<sup>49</sup> <b>inlaid with</b> – vykládaný
<sup>4</sup> <b>kin</b> – rodina, příbuzní	<sup>27</sup> <b>to smear with</b> – potřít	<sup>50</sup> <b>arcane</b> – tajemný, jen pro zasvěcené
<sup>5</sup> <b>to confine</b> – uvěznit	<sup>28</sup> <b>clay</b> – hlína, jíl	<sup>51</sup> <b>to submerge</b> – ponořit
<sup>6</sup> <b>a foe</b> – nepřítel	<sup>29</sup> <b>an eyebrow</b> – obočí	<sup>52</sup> <b>moist</b> – mokrý, vlhký
<sup>7</sup> <b>a chapel</b> – kaple	<sup>30</sup> <b>to singe</b> – opálit, ožehnout	<sup>53</sup> <b>to grasp</b> – uchopit
<sup>8</sup> <b>fertility</b> – plodnost	<sup>31</sup> <b>a brow</b> – čelo	<sup>54</sup> <b>to break the surface</b> – vynořit se
<sup>9</sup> <b>obedience</b> – poslušnost	<sup>32</sup> <b>a princeling</b> – princátko	<sup>55</sup> <b>to burst open</b> – rozevřít se
<sup>10</sup> <b>to stare</b> – zírat, upřeně se dívat	<sup>33</sup> <b>cloistered</b> – odloučený, izolovaný	<sup>56</sup> <b>a bud</b> – poupě, pupen
<sup>11</sup> <b>plaster</b> – omítka, sádra	<sup>34</sup> <b>a passageway</b> – chodba	<sup>57</sup> <b>a core</b> – střed, vnitřek
<sup>12</sup> <b>to blaze</b> – zářit, plápolat	<sup>35</sup> <b>to pluck</b> – utrhnout	<sup>58</sup> <b>threatened</b> – ohrožený
<sup>13</sup> <b>to murmur</b> – šeptat	<sup>36</sup> <b>nobility</b> – bohatí	<sup>59</sup> <b>incense</b> – kadidlo
<sup>14</sup> <b>lull</b> – konejšivý zvuk	<sup>37</sup> <b>peasantry</b> – chudí	<sup>60</sup> <b>chanting</b> – zpěv, chorál
<sup>15</sup> <b>stout</b> – silný	<sup>38</sup> <b>a seer</b> – věštec	<sup>61</sup> <b>to clamber upon</b> – vylézt na
<sup>16</sup> <b>protruding</b> – vystouplý	<sup>39</sup> <b>cracked</b> – nakřáplý	<sup>62</sup> <b>a lap</b> – klín
<sup>17</sup> <b>cleft</b> – rozečkaný	<sup>40</sup> <b>to hobble</b> – belhat se	<sup>63</sup> <b>a stain</b> – skvrna
<sup>18</sup> <b>a limb</b> – končetina	<sup>41</sup> <b>by no means</b> – v žádném případě	<sup>64</sup> <b>to quell</b> – potlačit
<sup>19</sup> <b>pebbled</b> – hrbolatý	<sup>42</sup> <b>a padlock</b> – visací zámek	<sup>65</sup> <b>entirely</b> – úplně
<sup>20</sup> <b>puckered</b> – svráštělý	<sup>43</sup> <b>to strangle</b> – škrtit, dusit	<sup>66</sup> <b>to pretend</b> – předstírat
<sup>21</sup> <b>translucent</b> – průsvitný	<sup>44</sup> <b>a windpipe</b> – průdušnice	<sup>67</sup> <b>arousal</b> – vzrušení
<sup>22</sup> <b>to anoint</b> – pomazat (obřadně)	<sup>45</sup> <b>to trace</b> – osahat, přejet po	<sup>68</sup> <b>a cleric</b> – kněz
<sup>23</sup> <b>pungent</b> – pronikavý (vůně)	<sup>46</sup> <b>webbed</b> – s plovací blánou	<sup>69</sup> <b>to crawl</b> – plazit se

## Lesson 5 – Abridged version of the fairy tale “Waking Beauty” by Deirdre Sullivan.

You heard the story on your nurse's<sup>1</sup> lap<sup>2</sup>. It was an old, old story even then. As old as her. A lovely, cursed princess in a tower, inside the city walls. Through a mile at least of thick, dark growth, of stinging leaves and thorns<sup>3</sup>. Her loving parents. Fairies. A spell. Many tried, but none were man enough to set her free. She waits in stasis<sup>4</sup>, unaware<sup>5</sup> it's been a hundred years. Yours for the taking. She's waiting for a prince to break the spell. To carve a path to her, and wake her up and take her by the hand and rule her kingdom wisely and well. You could do those things. You have the skills. The hero that she needs, you carve your way through branch and briar<sup>6</sup>. The corpses<sup>7</sup> of old princes, bound<sup>8</sup> and gagged<sup>9</sup> by plants. You do not avoid their gaping<sup>10</sup> sockets<sup>11</sup>. A man does not fear death. He faces death. It's his to dodge<sup>12</sup> and deal. Those other princes weren't strong enough or quick enough. They weren't man enough. They weren't you. This girl who lives on tongues. Inside of books. And you are closing in<sup>13</sup>. Can almost taste her. You wear a special cloth<sup>14</sup> beneath your armour<sup>15</sup>. To ward off<sup>16</sup> poison. To protect your skin. Piercing is a woman's way to fail. You have been wounded on the battlefield. It didn't stop you. You didn't fall asleep. And in her stead<sup>17</sup>, you would have found a way to free yourself. On the threshold<sup>18</sup> of the hall, you see a rat. It's curled in on itself<sup>19</sup>. You crunch it underfoot<sup>20</sup>. It doesn't move; it *gives*<sup>21</sup>. And will she be the same, your soft princess? An easy conquest<sup>22</sup> in a silent place. Your boot-prints mingle<sup>23</sup> blood into the dust. You climbed through many stories to this moment. A second son needs to work harder, longer. Your brother got the kingdom when your father died. The first-born son. It isn't fair, but neither<sup>24</sup> is the world. And the way you feel is not for other people. You keep it to yourself. You are a man. You know what is expected. When your aging father looked at you he saw a mouth, full of sweet wine and roasted meat. You fought for him, you hunted by his side, worked in the castle gardens till sweat<sup>25</sup> poured down<sup>26</sup> your back. But that was not enough to make you both the same. He thought you soft, a boy who knew no want. You wanted his respect so very much. You put away your books and fought your battles. Grew up, learned skills. To survive inside a forest. To take the things you want and make them yours. You learned to be as much a man as he was, or almost. When your mother cried to see your scars<sup>27</sup>, you pushed her off. People do not coddle<sup>28</sup> men, the way they do with women. Men do not need it. Thrust into<sup>29</sup> the world, they swim, or else they sink. The door appears. You push it. The old wood gives like paper beneath your hands. And she is waiting. She's but a girl. A hundred-year-old girl. And she is lovely, younger than you thought. Maybe fourteen. A layer<sup>30</sup> of dust on her, a dove-grey<sup>31</sup> sheen<sup>32</sup>. You bring your hand to wipe<sup>33</sup>

it from her face. She flinches<sup>34</sup> just a little, in her sleep. It must have been so long since someone touched her. When you were a little boy, you liked to clamber up<sup>35</sup> the stairs and through the doors into your parents' chamber<sup>36</sup>. You would curl between the both of them, and your father would tousle<sup>37</sup> your hair and your mother would kiss you and hold you close. And you were all warm together. When you reach a certain age, that warmth stops. You'd like a wife to make you warm again. But first you need to make sure that she's yours (Sullivan, 2018, pp. 158-166).

## GLOSSARY

<sup>1</sup>**a nurse** – chůva

<sup>2</sup>**a lap** – klín

<sup>3</sup>**thorns** – trní

<sup>4</sup>**stasis** – nehybnost

<sup>5</sup>**unaware** – netušící

<sup>6</sup>**briar** – trnité keře

<sup>7</sup>**a corpse** – mrtvola

<sup>8</sup>**to bind** – spoutat

<sup>9</sup>**to gag** – zacpat ústa

<sup>10</sup>**gaping** – zející, doširoka otevřený

<sup>11</sup>**a socket** – oční důlek

<sup>12</sup>**to dodge** – vyhnout se

<sup>13</sup>**to close in** – blížít se

<sup>14</sup>**cloth** – látka, tkanina

<sup>15</sup>**armour** – brnění

<sup>16</sup>**to ward off** – chránit před

<sup>17</sup>**in her stead** – na jejím místě

<sup>18</sup>**a threshold** – práh

<sup>19</sup>**to curl in on oneself** – stočit se do klubička

<sup>20</sup>**to crunch underfoot** – rozšlapat, rozdupat

<sup>21</sup>**to give** – poddat se, podvolit se

<sup>22</sup>**a conquest** – úlovek, kořist

<sup>23</sup>**to mingle** – smíchat

<sup>24</sup>**neither** – ani

<sup>25</sup>**sweat** – pot

<sup>26</sup>**to pour down** – téct, řinout se

<sup>27</sup>**a scar** – jizva, šrám

<sup>28</sup>**to coddle** – hýčkat

<sup>29</sup>**to thrust into** – hodit do

<sup>30</sup>**a layer** – vrstva

<sup>31</sup>**dove-grey** – holubičí šed'

<sup>32</sup>**a sheen** – lesk

<sup>33</sup>**to wipe** – setřít

<sup>34</sup>**to flinch** – trhnout sebou

<sup>35</sup>**to clamber up** – vylézt

<sup>36</sup>**a chamber** – komnata

<sup>37</sup>**to tousle** – cuchat, čechrat

## Appendix 3 Illustrations accompanying the fairy tales



*Lesson 1 – Chris Riddell's illustration for the fairy tale book *The Sleeper and the Spindle* (2014)*



*Lesson 2 – Karen Vaughan's illustration for the fairy tale "You Shall Not Suffer..."*



*Lesson 4 – Karen Vaughan's illustration for the fairy tale "Doing Well"*



*Lesson 5 – Karen Vaughan's illustration for the fairy tale "Waking Beauty"*



## Appendix 4 Examples of reflective questionnaires completed by the learners

### Reflective Questionnaire

1. Which fairy tale(s) out of those that we discussed during the lessons did you like the most? Why?

The Sleeper and the Spindle You Shall Not Suffer... The Surface Breaks Doing Well  
Waking Beauty

I think this was the most interesting one and i remember it the most.

2. Which topic(s) out of those that we discussed during the lessons did you find the most interesting? Why?

Emancipation Body Image Consent Masculinity

Because it's a serious one (but all of them are), it just sticks out to me.

3. Would you like to discuss such stories and topics at school more often? Why or why not?

I don't really know, maybe in highschool, because im still trying to perfect my english and i don't understand some of the words. But overall its great to spread awareness. Just sometimes its a bit confusing (I'm refering to the second activity in Lesson 1). But thanks for the experience in these lessons.

## Reflective Questionnaire

1. Which fairy tale(s) out of those that we discussed during the lessons did you like the most? Why?

The Sleeper and the Spindle    You Shall Not Suffer...    The Surface Breaks    Doing Well  
Waking Beauty

The Surface Breaks - I've never heard about how exactly feels someone who is fat and who likes his body at the same time. Like, I've heard about it, like someone fat can love his body, but I've never heard about their true feelings.

2. Which topic(s) out of those that we discussed during the lessons did you find the most interesting? Why?

Emancipation                      Body Image                      Consent                      Masculinity

Body Image - because in my age it's the biggest topic. Especially girls are interested in body image so much. Sometimes it's not healthy.

3. Would you like to discuss such stories and topics at school more often? Why or why not?

Body Image - I think we should learn about how we can influence it (not because we eat something and don't eat something) by our minds. If we believe and hope we have an amazing body, we will.

## Reflective Questionnaire

1. Which fairy tale(s) out of those that we discussed during the lessons did you like the most? Why?

The Sleeper and the Spindle    You Shall Not Suffer...    The Surface Breaks    Doing Well  
Waking Beauty

*Because I felt empathy to the main character.*

2. Which topic(s) out of those that we discussed during the lessons did you find the most interesting? Why?

Emancipation

Body Image

Consent

Masculinity

*I feel like this is very close to me.*

3. Would you like to discuss such stories and topics at school more often? Why or why not?

I would like to discuss it more because it's interesting.

## Reflective Questionnaire

1. Which fairy tale(s) out of those that we discussed during the lessons did you like the most? Why?

The Sleeper and the Spindle    You Shall Not Suffer...    The Surface Breaks    Doing Well  
Waking Beauty

None of them, because I find the topics to be very left leaning.

2. Which topic(s) out of those that we discussed during the lessons did you find the most interesting? Why?

Emancipation                      Body Image                      Consent                      Masculinity

All of them intend to solve certain social problems, which are either somewhat important or not at all. I believe humans should solve far more important quests rather than these. Such as high gas prices, inflation and more. Economical problems are far more severe than social issues.

3. Would you like to discuss such stories and topics at school more often? Why or why not?

I mean some of these topics are useless to discuss, because most of us have moral standards and knowledge so we won't "rape", "threaten" or "hurt" someone. It is truly overexaggerated and outright creepy to ~~ask~~ discuss these things at school. I would rather learn about the American elections or something else.

However I <sup>still</sup> appreciate that you've <sup>found</sup> ~~some~~ time to come here and teach something "interesting" to others. Fortunately not to me.



Reflective Questionnaire

1. Which fairy tale(s) out of those that we discussed during the lessons did you like the most? Why?

The Sleeper and the Spindle    You Shall Not Suffer...    The Surface Breaks    Doing Well

Waking Beauty

I liked the most Waking Beauty because it was fairy tale that I <sup>little</sup> knew before.

2. Which topic(s) out of those that we discussed during the lessons did you find the most interesting? Why?

Emancipation

Body Image

Consent

Masculinity

Body Image was the <sup>most interesting</sup> ~~best~~ because <sup>i don't know</sup> ~~it was something that~~.

3. Would you like to discuss such stories and topics at school more often? Why or why not?

Well it's surely good thing but for me the topics was too hard but sometimes <sup>but when I understood it was cool, so</sup> I think sometimes ~~it would stay in school.~~  
we could do that in school.

## **Résumé**

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá využitím současných feministických převyprávění klasických pohádek ve výuce angličtiny. Tato převyprávění byla spolu s vybranými RWCT metodami použita v hodinách angličtiny se skupinou žákyň a žáků 9. třídy na základní škole s rozšířenou výukou cizích jazyků. Analýzou pracovních listů a reflektivních dotazníků vyplněných žáky a žákyněmi poté, co byly hodiny zrealizovány, a také pozorováním žákyň a žáků v průběhu daných hodin bylo zjištěno, že současná feministická převyprávění klasických pohádek mají potenciál přispět k rozvoji povědomí žáků a žákyň o problematice týkající se genderových stereotypů a také k rozvoji jejich kritického myšlení.

## Annotation

<b>Jméno a příjmení:</b>	Růžena Klučková
<b>Katedra nebo ústav:</b>	Ústav cizích jazyků PdF UP Olomouc
<b>Vedoucí práce:</b>	Mgr. Petr Anténe, M.A., Ph.D.
<b>Rok obhajoby:</b>	2023

<b>Název práce:</b>	Využití současných feministických převyprávění klasických pohádek ve výuce angličtiny
<b>Anotace práce:</b>	Teoretická část této práce obsahuje rozbor tří feministických revisionistických pohádkových knížek, které jsou analyzovány skrze koncepty postmoderní a poststrukturalistické kulturní a literární teorie. Dále teoretická část uvádí do souvislosti interdisciplinární přístup k pohádkám a program RWCT. Tato převyprávění jsou následně spolu s vybranými RWCT metodami využita k vytvoření pěti výukových hodin, které jsou poté použity k realizaci výzkumu v praktické části práce, jehož cílem je zjistit, zda tato převyprávění mohou přispět k rozvoji povědomí žáků a žákyň o problematice týkající se genderových stereotypů.
<b>Klíčová slova:</b>	pohádky, gender, intersekcionalní feminismus, výuka angličtiny, kritické myšlení, program RWCT, model E-U-R
<b>Název práce v angličtině:</b>	Using contemporary feminist retellings of classic fairy tales in ELT
<b>Anotace práce v angličtině:</b>	The theoretical part of this thesis provides an analysis of three feminist revisionist fairy tale books while employing the concepts of postmodern and poststructuralist literary and cultural theory. It also interconnects the cross-disciplinary approach to fairy tales with the RWCT Programme. These retellings together with a variety of selected RWCT methods are then utilised for creating five lesson plans which are used in the research conducted for the practical part of this thesis with the aim of finding out whether the feminist retellings of classic fairy tales can help develop learners' awareness of gender stereotyping.
<b>Klíčová slova v angličtině:</b>	fairy tales, gender, intersectional feminism, ELT, critical thinking, the RWCT Programme, the ERR Framework
<b>Přílohy vázané v práci:</b>	Ilustrace, plány
<b>Rozsah práce:</b>	126 stran
<b>Jazyk práce:</b>	Angličtina