



The Heroine's Journey: An Archetypal Analysis of Grimms' *Mother Holle*

Homam Altabaa*

Dhiya Damia Zuhairul**

Abstract

Extensive literary studies have been conducted on the popular Grimms' Fairy Tales as they offer rich sociocultural and psychological insights. However, there is limited research on lesser-known fairy tales, such as *Mother Holle*. Thus, this study analyses the archetypal stages of the heroine's journey in the Grimms' *Mother Holle*. This is done by applying the structure proposed by Victoria Schmidt in her Heroine's Journey model. The narrative motifs and symbols encountered along the journey, such as the good mother vs. evil mother, spindle, well, home and the unknown, are analyzed to uncover the embedded thematic and psychological messages. The analysis reveals how *Mother Holle* serves as a psychological catalyst for girls to reach maturity through overcoming the challenges of life just like the industrious girl reaches her symbolic maturity by embracing the trials and tribulations of her journey.

Keywords: Heroine's journey, Victoria Schmidt, Mother Holle, archetype, Joseph Campbell.

Introduction

The Grimms have produced scores of short stories, including famous classics such as *Hansel and Gretel*, *Cinderella*, and *Little Red Riding Hood*. The collection of fairy tales by the Grimms is globally acknowledged as a literary classic. This collection has been translated into many languages to become an icon of world children's literature. Many of the Grimms' fairy tales are connected by the archetypal element, which gives them their popularity as literary classics that appeal to readers of all ages. Numerous studies have been conducted to explore and analyse these stories' characteristics and themes. These studies often explore their historical context, themes, and characters from different approaches, such as feminism and psychology. However, the role and significance of archetypes have not received enough attention, especially through the concept of the hero's journey. Additionally, there are fewer studies on the less famous stories. Therefore, more studies on archetypes from the Jungian perspective on less famous stories need to be conducted. Accordingly, this study seeks to explore the critical archetypes in the tale *Mother Holle* using the heroine's journey structural framework proposed by Joseph

* Assistant Professor at the Department of English Language & Literature, Abdul Hamid Abu Sulayman Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (AHAS IRKHS), International Islamic University Malaysia. drhomam@iium.edu.my

** Masters student at the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation (ISTAC), International Islamic University Malaysia. dhiazuhairul@gmail.com



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Campbell. This framework allows for the consideration of historical, religious, feminist, and psychological aspects of fairy tales, offering a more thorough critical appreciation of the thematic dimensions of the heroine's quest in *Mother Holle*. It aims to reveal their full thematic significance and overall contributions to the underlying lessons in the tales. This study contends that understanding and comparing the implication of the archetypal elements in the tale can lead to novel readings and a better understanding of the moral messages of the tale.

Background of The Grimm Brothers

Jacob Ludwig Carl Grimm and Wilhelm Carl Grimm were born in Germany in 1785 and 1786, respectively. The brothers were sons of Dorothea and Philip Wilhelm Grimm. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm were intelligent and diligent students. However, fate made their journey to the tertiary level different from anyone their age. They struggled financially to maintain a consistent payment to sustain their education. Their hard work paid off when these diligent brothers pursued their education in law and German history at the University of Marburg until the tertiary level. Of the brothers' massive interest in German law, history, and folklore, they started expanding their knowledge of German literature. They began the development of fairy-tale scholarship in Europe. In their fieldwork, the brothers were the first to conduct a systematic collection of fairy tales in the sense that they included several of their critical notes and information on narrators and sources in their collection.¹ The result of this systematic collection of Grimm's fairy tales sparked a need for compiling German culture through its inherited folk literature.²

Overview of Fairy Tales

The term 'fairy tale' was introduced into English vocabulary in 1750, and its definition has multiplied since then. Quinn³ defines fairy tales as a type of children's literature with brief and imaginative narratives. Fairy tales feature magical characters such as witches, dragons, evil mothers, and fairy godmothers. Fairy tales are also part of traditional literature, as they originate from oral tradition and folk stories. According to Gatricya⁴, fairy tales revolve around the story of the hero completing their quest or adventure through their fantastical journey. Silva⁵ defines fairy tales as psychological stories whose protagonist overcomes multiple hardships in order to become strong and gain victory. Silva also defines fairy tales as the first

¹ Jack Zipes, *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 169.

² *Ibid*, 169.

³ Edward Quinn, *A Dictionary of Literary and Thematic Terms* (Facts on File, 2006), 158.

⁴ Gatricya Rahman, *The Archetypes of Hero and Hero's Journey in Five Grimm's Fairy Tales* (Yogyakarta: Yogyakarta State University, 2014), 20.

⁵ Rafael Silveira Silva, "Fairy Tales and Moral Values: A Corpus-based Approach," in *BELT – Brazilian English Language Teaching Journal* 3, no. 1 (2012), 135.



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literature in which children construct their moral values based on their understanding of the good and bad characters in fairy tales.

J.R.R. Tolkien outlines four basic elements of traditional fairy tales. Fairy tales have “fantasy” elements that relate to imagining oneself to exist outside of reality. Next is the element of “escape,” which is the protagonist’s journey into another realm. This is followed by “recovery,” which is the return of the protagonist to their usual life and becoming a new person. Lastly, “eucatastrophe” which is a situation where the protagonist gains massive rewards in his or her life. These basic elements were used in many fairy tales across the globe in multiple countries, such as *The Arabian Nights*, *The Grimm’s Collection*, *Hans Christian Andersen*, and *Charles Perrault*. In connection with this, Bettelheim⁶ suggests including a fifth element in a fairy tale, which is a threat. He posits that every hero goes on an adventure because something triggers them. The protagonist should face a threat and be in danger psychologically or physically in order for them to depart from their usual surroundings. When the protagonist is put in danger, they will either cry and a fairy will lend some help, as seen in the fairy tale *Cinderella* or attempt to escape, as in *Snow White*. The fear of being deserted and isolated is one of humans' greatest threats. Bettelheim also defines the consolation part of the hero's journey as the restoration of justice and satisfaction of the readers’ psychological needs. The protagonist will be rewarded, and the antagonist will be punished. The element of consolation also harmoniously integrates—in psychoanalytical terms—the human’s id, ego, and superego.⁷

In *Fairy Tales and Art of Subversion*, Zipes (1983) opines that fairy tales reflect realistic social issues that occurred in societies in the past and warn humans about the consequent impact despite containing unrealistic elements. People believe in fairy tales much like they believe in religion and faith, as both have a metaphorical connection with reality. Fairy tales are deemed as the secular expressions of the beliefs of society through the portrayal of humans’ predictable behaviour. The quest in every fairy tale focuses on the struggle of the protagonist to find magical elements, animals, or people to help them become a better person in a better environment. Fairy tales exist over a vast period of time to motivate humans to face their conflicts and to remind them that they share similar universal struggles with each other.⁸ In other words, fairy tales transform psychic realities, such as fear of isolation, into concrete images, characters, and events. The successful quest of the protagonist to defeat the “nightmares” is a source of comfort and inspiration for readers to encounter their fears, as fairy tales are relatable to their daily challenges.⁹

⁶ Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment. The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (Vintage Books, 2010), 313.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 314.

⁸ Jack Zipes, “A Fairy Tale Is More Than Just a Fairy Tale,” in *Book 2 0 2*, no. 1 (2012), x.

⁹ Maria Tatar, *The Cambridge Companion to Fairy Tales* (Princeton University Press, 2019), 36-37.



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Mother Holle

In a small house in a small village, there was an industrious girl who lived with her stepmother and lazy stepsister. She spent her day doing house chores given by her stepmother. One day, she sat near a well to spin the spindle, and her fingers bled from spinning too much, so she washed it off, and the spindle accidentally slipped and fell into the deep well. Her mother scolded and demanded the industrious girl to jump into the well and fetch the spindle. She jumped and fell into a deep sleep in a meadow before she woke up and encountered the talking buns in the oven. The industrious girl walked and encountered the apples on a tree before helping the ripe apple to fall by shaking the tree upon the apples' request. She met Mother Holle and was asked to stay and help with house chores. She helped Mother Holle with house chores and shook Mother Holle's bed during her stay at Mother Holle's residence before deciding to return home. Mother Holle led her to a large gate and showered the industrious girl with gold, and returned back her spindle. The industrious girl returned home and recounted her journey to her stepmother and lazy stepsister before the stepsister was demanded to jump into the well by her stepmother. The lazy girl pricked her finger with the spindle, and it spilt some blood before she jumped into the well. The lazy girl met the loaves and the apple trees and did not help them. The lazy girl met Mother Holle and refused to help her with house chores. When she decided to go home, Mother Holle poured a bucket of black tar over her.

Mother Holle is about a hardworking girl who was granted many good rewards because of her good attitude towards people despite her challenging life of serving her fussy mother and lazy sister. This story gained popularity in 1812 and is the most well-known version collected by the Grimm brothers. This story is packed with a heavy dose of Christian morality, Protestant rulings, patriarchalism, and a reflection on social injustices and themes of self-determination, much like any other Grimms' fairy tales.¹⁰ The story's central theme is the reward of doing good deeds, an ingrained theme constantly circulating within the Grimm brothers' fairy tales collection since the early 19th century. Mother Holle is a "tale of kind and unkind girls".¹¹ This fairytale is rich with symbolism, such as the spindle, which represents a symbol of life and the temporal. According to Cirlot, a spindle symbolises the transition phase of life, much like a moon.¹² The blood that spills from the girl's cut on her hands symbolises the end of one's current fate.¹³ The loaves of bread encountered by the girls when they enter Mother Holle's world symbolise fertility and longevity¹⁴ and the apples symbolise an earthly desire such as materialistic desires. It is a warning against the glorification of materialistic lust

¹⁰ G. Ronald Murphy, *The Owl, the Raven, and the Dove: The Religious Meaning of the Grimms' Magic Fairy Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 27.

¹¹ Maria Tatar, *The Cambridge Companion to Fairy Tales*, 128.

¹² Juan Eduardo Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols* (Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2001), 304.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 90.



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for those who are tempted to eat the forbidden apple. Since the shape is almost spherical, it can also be the intermediate zone between earthly desire and pure spirituality.

In *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales*, Zipes notes that the character of Mother Holle and her significance as a mythical creature is less emphasized in the fairy tale. The Grimms were not the first to undermine the mythical power of Mother Holle. In the two versions of *Mother Holle* before the Grimms, *Three Fairies* by Giambattista (1634-6) and *The Fairies* by Charles Perrault (1667), the main characters were always the two girls instead of Mother Holle. The subsequent literary narratives and adaptations after the Grimms' version follow this trend of shifting the focus on the two girls. Considering the small number of fairy tales that emphasize the significance of the character Mother Holle, Jacob Grimm wrote *Deutsche Mythology* to expose more about the character Mother Holle as a mythical creature who can be both kind and evil. More historical background was included about her, such as her habitat, which was at lakes and fountains, as accounted for by the people of Hessa and Thuringia, Germany.¹⁵

Historically, Mother Holle's extensive mythological legend is prominent among Germanic people as she is associated with the Germanic Earth Mother, Frija, also known as Freya. McCoppin, in her book *The Legacy of The Goddess*, mentions that a similarity between Mother Holle and the Germanic Earth Mother is the mystical habitat beneath the well. In the fairy tale, the girl finds herself in the nature of an alternate realm when she trips into the well. The Germanic people believe that the realm under the well is the ethereal habitat of the Germanic divine Earth Mother. Another aspect that highlights Mother Holle as the Earth Mother is the unusual elements found in the alternate realm: the anthropomorphic apple trees and loaves of bread. Mother Holle is also considered as the Earth Mother due to her divine ability to switch her prominent features and appearances in the tale. She greets the girl with peculiarly huge teeth, which is supposed to scare the girl when she arrives at Mother Holle's residence, and she can easily change her appearance into a nice-looking old woman. Mother Holle is associated with Earth Mother as she teaches the girls about the importance of helping others, similar to the Germanic Earth Mother's responsibility to guide girls to become good people. Mother Holle also resembles the Earth Mother's ability to control the weather. In the fairy tale, this weather-warping ability is presented when Mother Holle asks the diligent girl to shake her feather bed and pillow so the feathers would come down to earth like snow.¹⁶

From a psychological perspective, the book *The Matrix and Meaning of Character: An Archetypal and Developmental Approach*, *Mother Holle* presents the transformation of a girl from being a dependent narcissistic person who miserably seeks approval and love from her mother to an independent person who acknowledges her self-worth. The unfortunate girl portrays an obvious characteristic of a dependent person with an inferiority complex because

¹⁵ Zipes, *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales*, 326.

¹⁶ Rachel S. McCoppin, *The Legacy of the Goddess: Heroines, Warriors and Witches From World Mythology to Folktales and Fairy Tales*. (McFarland & Company Publishers, Inc, 2023), 1-6.



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she is deprived of affection from her mother. She even goes to the extent of hurting herself by jumping into the well to abide by her mother's demand to fetch the shuttle at the bottom of the well.¹⁷ From a psychological perspective, the girl's accident and her mother's treatment are the drives of the girl's inner self-transformation. Her psychological transformation towards becoming a person who acknowledges her self-worth is precipitated when she encounters the mystical elements in the mystical realm. For example, her response to the request for the pieces of bread and apples reveals her true self as a kind and helpful person. Her encounter with and her service to Mother Holle also brings a sense of calmness and a retreat from her previous self, who used to be desperate for affection from her mother. In addition, she learns to make a contribution without seeking validation from Mother Holle, which transforms her into a person who acknowledges her own self-values devoid of external validation.

Kay Turner, who wrote *The Queer Enticements of the Grimms' Frau Holle*, posits *Mother Holle* as a queer fairy tale. In this context, Turner redefines the term "queer" as something unusual, strange, or divergent from a standard fairy tale narrative rather than the idea of sexual orientation or gender identity. A traditional fairy tale usually involves a love that grows between a man and a woman. The fairy tale detaches itself from the portrayal of conventional love between a man and a woman by portraying the affectionate relationship between Mother Holle and the girl, which invokes a modernist interpretation of the fairy tale. Even though the fairy tale posits a modern interpretation, the traditional elements of the hero's journey archetype are present as the girl goes through her journey of maturity and personal growth without the presence of a man.¹⁸

The Archetypes of Hero's Journey in Fairy Tales

The Archetypes of Hero and Hero's Journey in Five Grimm's Fairy Tales (2014) presents five main types of the hero's journey in fairy tales. These are the journeys from virginity to maturity, the path to triumph from humiliation, the path to becoming monarchs, the path to find a heroic rebirth, and the path towards enlightenment and rescue.¹⁹ In general, the hero embarks on a long journey that takes them outside their everyday surroundings, frequently entering a world of water, darkness, eerie woodlands, or underground passageways. The peculiar elements of the journey symbolize humanity's unconsciousness and serve as a channel for suppressing it. Often, the manifestations of humans' unconscious reappear in parts of the fairy tale's narrative, or characters who are associated with darkness and evil acts that society views as normal, such as the act of killing done by one of the characters or the character having a romantic relationship with his or her blood-related person. Therefore, to

¹⁷ Dougherty, Nancy J. and Jacqueline J West, *The Matrix and Meaning of Character: An Archetypal and Developmental Approach* (Routledge, 2007), 143.

¹⁸ Kay Turner, "At Home in the Realm of Enchantment: The Queer Enticements of the Grimms' 'Frau Holle,'" *Marvels & Tales* 29, no. 1 (2015): 45, <https://doi.org/10.13110/marvelstales.29.1.0042>.

¹⁹ Gatricya, *The Archetypes of Hero and Hero's Journey in Five Grimm's Fairy Tales*, 90.



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succeed in his quest, the hero must overcome physical and psychological challenges to attain his ultimate goal.²⁰

Bruno Bettelheim believes that fairy tales aid children in the process of psychological maturity and in understanding the meaning of life. Psychological maturity is the adulthood phase that one would gain after facing multiple challenges in life. Fairy tales help children to solve their anxiety or unresolved emotions and gain confidence to face the challenges in society through the moral messages conveyed in the elements in fairy tales.²¹ Fairy tales can also be studied from a religious perspective. Tatar explores the religious perspective of the heroes' journey where she postulates that fairy tales conceive the remnants of ancient faith, which can be reflected through the bridge between the heroes' adventure and the influence of religion in the fairy tales. For example, the influence of faith in Grimm's fairy tales appears in the informal conversation between the characters in the narrative as they employ divine-related expressions. The heroic concept of the 'knight in shining armor' that comes from the unreal world is considered as the appearance of Jesus Christ saving the human.²²

The Girl's Journey in Mother Holle

Joseph Campbell, in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (2004), presents a universal pattern found in many myths and folktales. He describes a journey of growth and redemption that heroes undergo in three main stages: departure, initiation, and return. These stages are common across cultures because they represent fundamental aspects of human experience. Similarly, the Heroine's Journey, proposed by Victoria Lynn Schmidt, offers a complementary framework to Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey, specifically modified for the experiences of female protagonists, emphasising internal transformation in search of an authentic self. It consists of three main stages: containment, transformation, and emergence, which are divided into nine substages. Not all phases are applicable to every quest in every mythology or folklore. Some of the phases sometimes overlap, are missing, or are merged together due to various thematic and stylistic considerations.

In *Mother Holle*, the narrative unfolds in three distinct phases, echoing the structure outlined in Campbell's theory and Schmidt's model. Initially, the tale portrays the girl in her domestic sphere until her stepmother's cruel machination compels her into the well—a typical stage of departure or containment. Subsequently, she encounters the enchanted realm of Mother Holle, where she overcomes symbolic adversity in the stage of initiation or transformation. Finally, she returns home with the rewards she reaped in her journey in the return or emergence stage.

²⁰ Andrew Teverson, *The Fairy Tale World* (Routledge eBooks, 2019), 1.

²¹ Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment. The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, (1976):14-21.

²² *Ibid*, 19.



Act I: *Containment*

The first stage of Schmidt's model is the Containment stage, which has three substages: The Illusion of a Perfect World, The Betrayal or Realisation, and Preparing for the Journey. This stage is the initial stage where the heroine lives in her safe environment without realising that her destined journey is about to start. Below is the exploration of the Containment stage in *Mother Holle* based on the substages mentioned above.

I. Stage 1: *The Illusion of a Perfect World.*

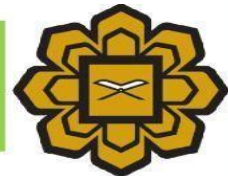
Stage 1 is about the heroine living in her illusion of a perfect world. She lives in a risk-free environment and is safe from any danger. She imagines that by repeating the same behaviour daily, she can maintain this eternal, perfect world, which gives her a false sense of security. However, this false sense of security prevents the heroine from transforming and becoming a new person.

The tale of *Mother Holle* begins with a familiar setting, which is home. The industrious girl lives in the same house as her stepmother and stepsister. Both girls perceive home as a safe place for them. The industrious girl is diligent and helpful, following every order from her stepmother, but does not take care of herself. Her hands bleed from excessive spinning. To cope with the unjust favouritism she receives from her stepmother, she ignores her feelings and continuously does house chores to please her. In reality, the way she is treated at home can lead to unhealthy psychological development for the industrious girl. For the other girl, her mother did not order her to do anything because she loves her own daughter. Due to the fact that she is not helpful at home, she grows to think she can get anything she wants without cost. She may feel physically lacking, and she does not have good looks like her stepsister, but her mother loves her regardless. This excessive love by her mother also leads the second girl to unhealthy psychological development, as she later fails in her quest. To conclude, safety at home is illusionary for both girls as their psychological growth is at risk.

In *Mother Holle*, the stepmother is the catalyst for both girls to develop a false sense of security at home. She embodies the evil stepmother archetype that is selfish and destructive through her relationship with both of the girls. To clarify, she is prejudiced against the industrious girl and neglects her well-being, while she gives extra affection to her daughter and does not ask to do any house chores. As a consequence of this, the industrious girl becomes overworked, and the lazy girl becomes spoilt. However, the industrious girl does not rebel against the widow, who is the only adult in the house and holds all the authority. She could be too afraid to challenge her stepmother.

II. Stage 2: *The Betrayal or Realisation.*

In this stage, the heroine's coping strategy becomes useless as she loses her weapon. To reclaim her life again, she must do something new. In *Mother Holle*, this stage occurs when the dynamic



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girl accidentally slips the spindle into the well. This happens after she cuts herself, and the blood spills from her hands. She cries to her stepmother, who scolds her and tells her to retrieve the spindle.

Schmidt explains that the heroine's weapon no longer works. With the loss of the weapon, the heroine becomes powerless as her coping mechanism would not work. In *Mother Holle*, the spindle is a weapon for the industrial girl as she uses it to do house chores, i.e., spinning beside the well to be useful for her stepmother. The girl's reaction to the incident, when she cried as she feared her stepmother's response, shows that the spindle is her weapon as a coping mechanism to maintain her perfect life. Thus, the loss of the spindle signifies the loss of a weapon for the girl, thus the shattering of her perfect world. This loss also reveals the stepmother's negligence towards the girl's safety when she was asked to risk her life and get the spindle. The betrayal in this sense is more like a realization of the industrious girl that her stepmother does not care about her well-being when she forces her to risk her life and retrieve the spindle.

The blunder in *Mother Holle* serves as a metaphorical symbol of the girl's inner conflict. The well where the blunder occurs holds multiple symbolic connotations in the heroine's journey. It represents the navel of the world and the axis mundi, a medium for accessing the sacred realm and exploring the inner self. In the story, the girl's hidden desires and conflicts surface, driven by the forces in the deep subconscious spiralling through the well, symbolizing the tale's earth navel. The industrious girl struggles to become an adult and experience adulthood due to her restricted life under her stepmother's control. The spindle and the well may metaphorically symbolize the maturation process that the girl wants but due to her fear of her stepmother, she allows herself to be exploited. The blunder caused by the evil psychological treatment by the stepmother and the girl's inner struggle then prompts the industrious girl to embark on an inward journey to discover her maturity. The industrious girl faces her fears and learns to become herself in this journey of finding a path to adulthood and self-discovery.

III. Stage 3: *Preparing for the Journey.*

In this stage, *Preparing for the Journey*, the heroine makes a decision to embark on her journey instead of resisting, unlike the hero in one stage of Campbell's Hero's Journey *Refusal to Call*. The heroine might ready herself for the adventure whether she realises it or not. Some "ogres and tyrants" will come upfront to make her doubt her ability to pursue this journey.²³

Although the industrious girl continues the journey, she lacks preparation because she is still too young. She cannot make her own decisions. Evidently, she cried when her stepmother forced her to jump into the well, showing that she was scared and reluctant to go,

²³ Victoria Lynn Schmidt, 45 *Master Characters: Mythic Models for Creating Original Characters* (Cincinnati, OH: Writer's Digest Books, 2001), 407.



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yet she was unable to refuse. Despite her lack of preparation, she possessed a good moral attitude. She was trained to do many house chores every day, and her hardworking and diligent attitude unconsciously prepared her to face future challenges. As for the lazy girl, she is immature and morally deficient. Besides her desire for wealth, she does not possess anything that may benefit her when she faces the tests of the journey. The spills of blood from the industrious girl's hand support her preparation for the journey. It signifies the transition from adolescent life into mature life and a chance for her to break free from the constraints of her past life controlled by her stepmother.

Act II: Transformation

The second stage of Schmidt's model is the Transformation Stage, and there are three substages: The Descent, Passing the Gates of Judgment, The Eye of the Storm, and Death, All is Lost. These substages are when the heroine encounters her mini-trials and the biggest trial before she thinks that her journey ends as she passes through them. Below is the exploration of the Transformation stage in the tale based on the substages mentioned above.

I. Stage 4: Passing the Gates of Judgement.

In this stage, the heroine is presented with multiple trials that are seemingly simple and small. The trials may be in the form of elements or events the heroine encounters in her journey. As the heroine encounters the trials, her true self will be revealed as she progresses through her individuation journey. The girl's actions in these mini-trials also foreshadow her performance in the ultimate trial in the next stage.

In the tale, the industrious girl sleeps and wakes up in a beautiful meadow. Sleep may signify multiple things. Sleep can be interpreted as the symbolic death of the girl, where a new life with full self-authority is unlocked through her rebirth. Like in the tale of *Sleeping Beauty*, sleep is a threshold of female maturity. She falls into a period of deep sleep where she is passive and innocent, freezing her true potential before she can wake up and is ready to mature.²⁴ Similar to the industrious girl, her passive adolescent dies before she awakens into a mature woman and faces the major trial. Sleep may also indicate the heroine's coping mechanism to her fear of being alone. After being scolded and separated from her stepmother, she might feel scared and anxious as she is alone for the first time in an unknown world. She heals herself by sleeping and wakes up to start her individuation journey.

This stage portrays the meadow as a "beautiful" land and Campbell commented that this unknown land can be "both treasure and danger."²⁵ For the industrious girl, this meadow may be a sort of escape from her stepmother and stepsister who always mistreats her.

²⁴ Murphy, *The Owl, the Raven, and the Dove: The Religious Meaning of the Grimms' Magic Fairy Tales*, 133-134.

²⁵ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton University Press, 2004), 53.



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Paradoxically, the meadow also serves as the battlefield for the girl's individuation journey, where she faces her trials and encounters the mystical elements, i.e., the talking buns in the oven and the apple tree. The buns and the apple tree are the mini tests of maturity for the girl's individuation journey before she faces the ultimate challenge. Bun symbolizes life and hard work. The act of taking the buns out of the oven tests the girl's readiness for significant life changes from youth to adulthood or motherhood, such as conceiving a child. The girl is perceived to be ready for her transformation thus, she helps the buns out of the oven. The buns symbolise life and the result of hard work²⁶ which could imply the meaning that the girl feels contented and is collecting her gains from hard work when she collects the buns and piles them together on the soil. The apples are symbolic of knowledge, including knowledge of good and evil and sexuality.²⁷ In this story, the apple may symbolise the themes of hard work, diligence, and the reward that comes from these qualities. The tree's ripe apples, which fall like rain when the protagonist shakes them, represent the abundance and fertility that result from her hard work and dedication. It is also worth noting that the industrious girl compiles the ripe apples together and does not eat them, similar to the hot buns, which shows her resistance to temptation.

Although the trials seem small and the girl would not be harmed if she fails to follow the request from the buns and the apple tree, the outcomes of the mini trials are as impactful as the biggest trial in the journey and are meant to test her true personality and ability to make vital decisions independently during her individuation process. These mini-trials foreshadow her overall fate in successfully conquering her final test. It is important to note that through this heroine's journey, the girls have to face their biggest fear in maturing; for the industrious girl, it is asserting her independence and authority without the influence of her stepmother. As for the lazy girl, she ignores the buns and the apples' request for help, which reveals her true characteristics that is lazy and selfish thus she does not pass the test in the heroine's journey, thus there is no fruits of her hard work.

II. Stages 5, 6, 7: *The Eye of the Storm, Death: All is Lost, Support.*

In Schmidt's framework, Stage 5: The Eye of the Storm, is where the heroine gains a sense of security because she successfully encounters past trials with triumph. This sense of security is false as the danger is still lurking but the heroine does not realize it. Stage 6: Death: All is Lost, is where the heroine faces her ultimate conflict and feels that she has lost everything, and stage 7: Support, is about the heroine making a connection with a group that supports her to continue her journey. The heroine embraces her strength and is ready for the next stage.

The industrious girl encounters Mother Holle after the buns and the apples and Mother Holle requests her to stay and do house chores for her. According to Schmidt, stage 5 of the heroine's journey is about the heroine gaining a sense of security that is false and does not

²⁶ Lois Tyson, *Using Critical Theory: How to Read and Write about Literature*, 2011: 73.

²⁷ Juan Eduardo Cirlot. *A Dictionary of Symbols*, (Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2001): 14.



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realize that she is being tested²⁸, which can be seen when the industrious girl lives happily with Mother Holle, the old lady who lives in the meadow. She embodies the archetype of a good mother who is nurturing when she speaks nicely with the girl, feeds her with good food, and provides her shelter; “no angry words, and boiled or roast meat every day”. Consequently, the industrious girl feels pleasant and comfortable staying with Mother Holle while doing house chores for her. However, this sense of security is false as the girl is still in the meadow, where it is the field of testing the girl's maturity, thus, the request to do the house chores is one of the trials for the girl, even though she may not realize it. Through the test by Mother Holle, the girl's true characteristics will reveal themselves. She may decide not to do the house chores, and that will lead to severe punishment and lack of inner growth.

The industrious girl religiously does house chores for Mother Holle as she would like to repay the kindness. This might be stemming from the girl feeling valued and appreciated that Mother Holle cares for her. She passes the house chores test with ease without realizing it, and this marks her growth and maturity journey. One of the specific activities that Mother Holle taught the industrious girl is to “shake the feathers off the bed so they could fly like snowflakes on Earth.” Mother Holle may represent this mythical creature named Frau Holle in German mythology. This ancient German earth goddess is best known as a nourishing, protecting, and fertility figure.²⁹ In this tale, she shows her ability to control the weather by metaphorically signifying the feathers as snowflakes, which shows her responsibility in delivering the winter season on the earth. In this maturity journey, Mother Holle teaches the girls to develop their sense of duty and responsibility in order to grow and mature.

The industrious girl feels homesick and tells Mother Holle about her desire to return home. Mother Holle leads her to a large gate before she showers the girl with gold and returns her lost spindle. It is important to note that despite the industrious girl aced all the challenges and trials with ease because she has an excellent moral attitude, her weakness has been poked in this maturity journey thus, she still has her own hardships to encounter.

The industrious girl often struggles to prioritise herself. Throughout her life as an obedient stepdaughter, she follows the detrimental orders of her stepmother. She does house chores to please her stepmother until her hands hurt and bleed, and she jumps into the well and disregards her safety. Her homesickness, which comes unpredicted, will challenge the industrious girl to overcome her meekness in order to be mature. She must decide to prioritise herself in order to heal her homesickness despite the gratitude she has for Mother Holle.

With the help of Mother Hole in fostering this healthy relationship with the industrious girl, the girl overcomes her fear of expressing and prioritizing herself. Mother Holle supports the girl's decision by accepting the girl's request to leave the house, and the girl is finally able

²⁸ Schmidt, 45 Master Characters: Mythic Models for Creating Original Characters, 250-251.

²⁹ McCoppin, The Legacy of the Goddess: Heroines, Warriors and Witches From World Mythology to Folktales and Fairy Tales, 1-6.



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to overcome her flaw, which is aligned with stage 7's central idea about the support from the other character helping the heroine to overcome her fear.³⁰ The girl is finally able to speak her thoughts, prioritize herself, and express her inner desire to leave Mother Holle's house as she feels homesick. This inner growth aligns with Schmidt's idea that the heroine is finally able to externalize her emotions,³¹ indicating growth from her past trials coupled with support from other characters. Plus, her self-awareness in recognizing that she feels homesick reflects her consciousness towards her inner self as a result of being mature. The gold given by Mother Holle indicates the industrious girl's successful psychological development and completes her goals in the maturity journey.

In comparison, the lazy stepsister also meets Mother Holle and decides to stay in her house to get the gold like her stepsister. She does house chores only for a day before becoming increasingly lazy and stops doing house chores. She tells Mother Holle her desire to come home and expects Mother Holle to give her gold, but she returns home with black tar instead. The lazy girl did not pass the test, and thus, she receives punishment, that is, the pitch, rather than gets the reward because of her immaturity during the journey.

Act III: Emergence

The Emergence stage of Schmidt's model in this tale applies to Stage 8: Rebirth- The Moment of Truth and Stage 9: Full Circle- Return to the Perfect World. Stage 8 is where the heroine becomes a renewed person, has found her strength and confidence and wants to complete her journey. In stage 9, she returns home and attains her goal, and she may convey her experience to a person close to her. Below is the exploration of the Emergence stage.

1. Stage 8 & 9: Rebirth – The Moment of Truth, Full Circle – Return to the Perfect World.

In stage 8, the heroine transforms and becomes confident after she passes previous all the tests from the stages with triumph. When the industrious girl decides to return home independently without others' influence, she shows her assertiveness as she has become a mature person after successfully encountering all trials without struggling with herself. The industrious girl also learnt to conquer her fear, prioritise herself, and be independent enough to abandon her old coping mechanism. The gold is the joyful reward for the triumphant completion of her journey and it functions as a marker of her successful psychological growth.

Upon her return, the industrious girl becomes the master of two worlds as she overcomes the challenges of the underworld and is now ready to face the real world. She moves out of the meadow and enters her world with ease through a large gate led by Mother Holle. She is guided by Mother Holle's support "by the hand" to the gate and easily returns

³⁰ Schmidt, 45 Master Characters: Mythic Models for Creating Original Characters, 256.

³¹ Ibid., 249.



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home with gold and her spindle. As the industrious girl's psychological perspective changes, she realises her life purpose and gains maturity that enables her to “go straight to the lion's den”³² In other words, she is not afraid to go back to the torturous duties given by her stepmother. In the tale, the industrious girl goes straight home and recounts her journey to her stepmother as she has become brave, confident and assertive from her trials in the meadow.

In stage 9, the heroine returns to her reality and may choose someone to embark on a similar journey to have the same experience as her³³. This stage is apparent in *Mother Holle*, where the industrious girl returns home and tells her stepmother and stepsister about the journey; then, the stepsister repeats the industrious girl's quest to get the gold, starting by bleeding her hands and jumping into the well. However, the lazy girl fails to obtain the gold like the industrious girl because she fails the tests in the meadow. Aside from not helping the buns as she refuses to get “dirty”, the lazy girl also refuses to take the risk of falling apples on her head, causing her decision not to shake the apple tree, too. Although the lazy girl replicates her stepsisters's occurrence in the meadow, her decisions show that she cannot replicate her stepsister's morality as she possesses a deficient moral attitude, unlike her industrious stepsister. Thus, she returns home with different outcomes.

Conclusion

The Brothers Grimm produced scores of widely known fairy tales packed with moral values and heroic quests. Their famous works such as *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, and *Hansel and Gretel*, were studied extensively in the literature field. This study analysed Grimm's lesser-known fairy tale *Mother Holle*, through an archetypal approach to the heroine's journey.

The fairy tale *Mother Holle* follows the structure of the hero's journey or heroine's journey in three main stages: Departure, Transformation, and Emergence. The first stage extends from where the heroine and other characters are introduced, and the heroine lives in her world until she is forced into the well. The second stage is where the heroine is in an unknown world and encounters trials and challenges. The third stage is when the heroine returns home and shows the journey's outcome. This journey is repeated twice with a different heroine to convey different or contrasting moral lessons and consequences driven by the actions of the industrious girl and her lazy stepsister.

Archetypal criticism is one of the approaches to studying fairy tales in literature, and it is used to analyse *Mother Holle* and achieve the study's objective, where it examines recurrent myths or symbols that appear in the story through the framework of the heroine's journey. Similar to Campbell's hero's journey, Schmidt's heroine's journey is about the heroine departing from her world to an unknown world and facing trials and tribulations before she gains self-transformation and returns home. The heroine's journey is a maturity

³² Ibid., 260.

³³ Ibid.



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journey as the heroine encounters her fears and gains internal growth and transformation. Aside from that, symbols and settings appear to aid the heroine's journey of maturity and convey the moral messages in this tale, such as the buns and the apples, the meadow and the girl's home, the spindle and the well, the snowflakes, and the gold and the large gate.

In analysing *Mother Holle*, the key archetypes in this tale are examined, consequently delivering the thematic significance to the heroine's journey framework. The archetypes found are the industrious girl and the lazy girl, the evil stepmother, and Mother Holle.

The girls in *Mother Holle* are named after their defining main trait; "the industrious girl" and "the lazy girl", to make the characters identifiable from the start so readers can enjoy the simple yet adventurous plot. These dichotomous characteristics cause the results of the girls' journeys, where the industrious girl receives good outcomes of her quest, and the lazy girl ends up with a miserable punishment. These outcomes convey a moral lesson about the great impact of small actions that deliver big results.

The difference between Mother Holle and the stepmother also subtly invokes the reader's realisation of the consequences of good and bad parenting that affect children's psychological growth. Mother Holle through her nurturing treatment as a good mother fosters psychological maturation in the girls. Meanwhile, even though the stepmother is the primary caretaker for the girls, she fails to nurture the girls in a positive environment, thus hindering their inner growth. The stepmother's mistreatment of her industrious stepdaughter also conveys moral messages that bad parents practise double standards between their children of different blood relations.

In conclusion, this study analysed the heroine's journey in one of Grimm's lesser-known fairy tale, *Mother Holle*. More fairy tales should be analyzed through this archetypal analysis so readers can derive moral values that help humans find their sense of purpose in life.

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