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Gender stereotypes in the comic book series *Fables*

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Declaration of Authenticity

I confirm to have conceived and written the thesis in English all by myself. Quotations from other authors and any ideas borrowed and/or passages paraphrased from the works of other authors are all clearly marked within the text or in the footnotes and acknowledgements in the bibliographical references.

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1. Introduction

Fables can be regarded as a highly successful comic book series from the last ten years, reintroducing popular fairy tale or folklore characters within a new environment and new adventures. Winning several prizes and awards, this series can be seen as strikingly popular and acclaimed. It presents us with these characters in a modern setting, adapting to modern society and having to fight new battles. Unlike the original fairy tale characters the series is based on, these characters are "emotionally complex, sexually explicit, and physically present" (Zolkover 42). Since these characters were transformed and put into a new setting, one could assume that the messages and images this series convey would also be modernised and adapted to our modern society as well. Yet, gender stereotypes and norms are still present within this series.

Via a close reading and analysis of the language and pictures, this thesis aims at confirming that gender stereotypes and norms, even though not necessarily obvious at first glance, are still used in the comic book series *Fables*. In order to establish the stereotypes surfacing in the series, this thesis is divided in two parts.

The first part of the paper will discuss the theoretical background necessary to analyse the series in the second part. Initially a short introduction into the field of comics studies is given, highlighting several explanations why comics studies still get little recognition as a separate research field within the academic community. These reasons should illustrate that, even though much has changed throughout the last few years, comics are still struggling to be considered as an appropriate field of research, which also leads to the conclusion that distinct methods to analyse comics still need to be established. Later on, the most relevant definition of the medium as such is established, which together with the explanation of several key elements can be seen as a guiding tool for the later analysis of the comic book series *Fables*. After a distinction between graphic novels and comic books and a classification of *Fables*, the depiction of female characters in mainstream and independent comics can be found. This section illustrates the differences and motives of depicting women in a

stereotypical form and often in an objectified and sexualised way. The series *Fables* will also be classified as a mainstream comic book series in order to fully understand the traditions and typical depictions of women within the genre.

The second part of the thesis will focus on a close reading and analysis of the comic book series *Fables* in order to establish and confirm the hypothesis that gender stereotypes can still be found in mainstream comics today. In order to confirm this, two female characters will be analysed according to features such as fashion, body language, interaction with other characters, and their position at the workplace. The two characters chosen are the sisters Snow White and Rose Red, who can be considered as the two main female characters of the series. Even though both characters are depicted rather differently and embody different concepts of femininity, they both can be regarded as a confirmation of gender stereotypes and norms. This analysis will refer to the depiction of women in mainstream comics in the first part of the thesis.

2. Theoretical considerations

2.1 Comics as a field of scholarly research

On the one hand, comics can be regarded as vastly popular as far as readership is concerned, while they still lack legitimacy within the academic community. Tendencies of change can be found over the last few years but the research field of comics is still relatively small compared to other research areas.

One of the reasons for this lasting lack of interest is the little cultural acceptance and the dismissal of comics as light reading without any claim to be more than just entertainment. Therefore, researchers, for the longest time, also dismissed comics as an inappropriate field of study (Grünewald 67). Grünewald's explanation was published in the year 2000, which does not take the recent hype around comics and newly found great cultural acceptance into consideration. Comics nowadays can be considered as extremely popular with a relatively broad and diverse readership unlike second half of the 20th century, where comics were mostly published for a rather specific and small target group. Grünewald's explanation might not be valid for today's academic opinion of comics but surely explains why, comics were more or less customarily ignored by the academic community. More recently, other scholars also tried to identify reasons for the dismissal of comics as a field of scholarly research. Ndalianis (2011), for example, considers the rather specific audience of early comics, namely young boys, as a possible reason for the dismissal of comics studies as a research field (113).

Coming back to Grünewald, he additionally links the lack of scholarly interest with the lack of cultural acceptance. For the longest time and almost from their beginnings, comics were regarded as a medium which was supposed to entertain the masses. Due to this notion of comics as a mass medium, literary or art critics did not regard them as a form of sophisticated art. Therefore, neither cultural nor scientific acceptance was established but rather the impression of comics as something negative even inferior was created (79). According to the author, this lack of

acceptance and idea of inferiority slowly started to change within the 1980s with the publication of comics or rather graphic novels such as *Maus* (1986, 1991) which slowly started to change the beliefs that comics could not be of any literary or artistic value (80). This lack of acceptance and scientific neglect due to the mass media character of comics also led to the disregard of its influences on art, as Chute describes: "However, it is still largely unrecognized that the comics in the first decades of the twentieth century was both a mass-market product and one that influenced and was influenced by avant-garde practices, especially those of Dada and surrealism" (Chute, *Comics as literature* 455).

Not only can the mass media character of comics be seen as one possible reason for the lack of interest and cultural acceptance, but the hybrid form it takes can be another reason. According to Groensteen (2000) the very combination of words and pictures which creates its hybrid character is responsible for the dismissal of comics by a scientific community:

> The question is: why should two of the most respected forms of human expression, literature […] and drawing […] be dethroned and debased as soon as they are side by side in a mixed media…? Some will answer that comics have taken from literature and drawing their least noble parts: from the former stereotyped plots, and over-referenced genres, and from the latter caricature and schematization. Founded or not, these complaints seem to be secondary to the fundamental aesthetic question: is it not the very fact of using text and image together that reputedly taints and discredits both of them? (Groensteen, *Cultural legitimization* 9)

He continues this thought with the argument that hybrid forms such as comics and cinema contravene an "ideology of purity" which has dominated the West for several centuries. Therefore, comics never had a chance to be accepted as valuable art form and worthy of scholarly consideration. For Groensteen this ideology is the reason why the fracture between high culture and popular culture is increasing constantly (*Cultural legitimization* 9). Associated with the difference between popular and high culture is the popular culture's lack of narrative ambition:

> Comics are supposed to be easy literature because they are based on repetitions, and therefore more readable. They are also constantly being

assimilated with what is known as paraliterature, a badly defined set of popular genres that includes adventure stories, historical novels, fantasy and science-fiction, detective novels, erotica, and so on. (*Cultural legitimization* 9)

For Groensteen, this lack of ambition and the hybrid character are reasons why comics are still not fully accepted within western cultures and why they are not considered as a worthy field of research. Yet, the second point in particular, which is tackles the lack of narrative ambition, does not take graphic novels such as Spiegelman's *Maus* (1986,1991)*,* Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home (2006)* or Joe Sacco's *Palestine* (1996, 2001) into consideration. As far as superhero comics are concerned, repetition in order to make it more readable and entertainment might be of priority, which is definitely not the case in many graphic novels. Often autobiographical, such aforementioned graphic novels neither claim to be entertaining nor can be considered as a light read due to the complexity of the topic and the narrative style. Therefore, Groensteen's explanation can only be regarded as partly true, due to its ignorance of certain genres within the field of comics. The special form and distinctive qualities comics inherit can still be found as a reason for the lack of interest of the scientific community. Yet scholars like Smith (2011) link these distinctive qualities with the fact that due to them, it is harder for scholars to paraphrase and use them for their research:

> One specific reason comics are hard to study is that they are tough to paraphrase. The obvious answer here is to use illustrations, but Comics Studies is coming of age at a time when publishers are restricting the reproduction of images, partly because of expense, partly because of a stronger attention to obtaining image permission and an apparent unwillingness to test and to take advantage of fair-use principles. (111)

Since boundaries are established which hinder scholars in using and quoting comics in their work, a certain reservation towards this field is inevitable.

According to Scott McCloud (1994) this aforementioned hybrid quality of comics creates this lack of cultural acceptance but for very different reasons. McCloud argues that the general public perception of what constitutes 'great' art and writing has

not changed notably within the last 150 years. Therefore, any new form of literature or art will be judged according to these standards (*Understanding comics*, 150). Furthermore, as McCloud also states, writers and comics artists themselves will potentially and possibly subconsciously measure their creation according to these standards and moreover measure them according to different standards: "…because, deep down inside, many comics creators still measure art and writing by different standards and act on the faith that 'great' art and 'great' writing will combine harmoniously by virtue of quality alone" (*Understanding comics*, 150). He continues his argumentation with the notion that, even though comics is an art form that has existed for several hundred years, it is perceived as a rather recent invention, and therefore is suffering from the curse any new art form has to endure, namely being judged by the standards of the old. Therefore, many new media have been misunderstood despite the fact that usually, in its beginnings, any new medium will imitate its predecessors and what is already known. This also means that according to McCloud, too many comics artists are content with only imitating already existing achievements of other media and consider working in the media of comics as a temporary step on the ladder to success (151). This rather problematic attitude, as he goes on to explain, is again linked to the different standards comics can be measured against: "and again, as long as we view comics as a genre of writing or a style of graphic art this attitude may never change" (151).

Unlike Groensteen, McCloud sees this hybrid character of comics not as a disadvantage but as a chance to separate the medium from pre-existing standards and perceptions of writing and art. Rather than judging comics against already existing norms, artists and writers should embrace their unique character in order to change attitudes towards the medium. In order to achieve this, artists and writers would need to become more confident to experiment with the medium and to push towards new dimensions. Interestingly enough, McCloud does not seek the reasons for this attitude towards comics and the dismissal of the scientific community exclusively with the audience but also addresses the creators of the medium to change their own perceptions and to embrace comics' unique hybrid form.

This phenomenon of self-doubt and the feeling of inferiority which McCloud attributes to the writers and creators of comics can be found, according to Ecke (2011), within the field of comics studies as well: "[W]e might say that almost every critic producing work on comics still feels the need to apologise for his or her interest in a medium that was reviled by the so-called 'cultured classes' for the longest time. This particular discourse is impossible to escape" (71). This quote originates from an article written in 2011, therefore already acknowledges comics studies as a field of research, but nonetheless refers to its "inferiority" within the academic community. Even though comics studies have been established for several years, scholars working in this field will not be taken seriously and will, according to Ecke, feel the need to justify their interest in comics. In order to escape this stigma, as he develops, the process of forming a (new) comics studies' identity should be as drastic and thorough as possible, because only then could the research on comics be taken seriously. In order to achieve this, research methods should also be adapted thoroughly and not only borrowed from other disciplines such as literary studies: "But the actual analytical work has very little to gain from symbolic feats of nomenclature; rather, analysis tends to suffer for it, becoming polluted with theorising and critical focus lazily imported from literary studies and adapted to suit the new medium only on decidedly half-hearted terms" (73). Therefore, in order to establish a research field of comics studies which is not dismissed by scholars and by the academic community, it is essential to adapt and transform research methods and not just borrow them from other disciplines. This should help establishing confidence and a feeling of validity for the field of comics studies, but as Ecke stresses, this task has yet to be achieved.

2.2 Defining the medium and important features

> The definitions of comics that can be found in dictionaries and encyclopaedias, and also in the more specialized literature, are, as a general rule, unsatisfactory. […] These definitions are of two sorts. The first, often concise, participates in an essentialist approach and looks to lock up some synthetic form of the 'essence' of comics. This enterprise is no doubt doomed to failure if one considers that […] comics rest on a group of coordinating mechanisms that participate in the representation and the language, and that these

mechanisms govern in their movements numerous and disparate parameters, of which the dynamic interaction takes on extremely varied forms from one comic to another. (Groensteen, *Impossible definition* 124)

As Groensteen states in this quote, it is indeed a hard enterprise to define the medium 'comics' as such. Not only does the medium include many different aspects but it is in fact impossible to narrow the definition down to a few single features. He continues in his essay with the notion that any comic "only actualizes certain potentialities of the medium, to the detriment of others that are reduced or excluded" (*Impossible definition124*). The notion of variation of parameters in comics is a highly important one, since as Groensteen states correctly, the medium of comics is highly varied and diversified. Depending on the culture, the purpose, the artist and the writer, many features usually found in the medium could potentially be disregarded and still be affiliated with comics. Many definitions include the combination of speech and images, yet there are comics where not a single word is spoken or written. It is exactly this variation and flexibility which are inherent to the medium that can be regarded as two of the most significant strengths since they allow room for creativity but also complicate the process of finding a definition.

Despite the fact that such a definition seems hard to find, several characterisations of the medium 'comics' have been delineated over the years, including different features and highlighting different aspects. For Groensteen, the central element which is crucial to all comics is iconic solidarity. Interdependent images which are participating in a series represent the one characteristic which all comics have in common. Furthermore, Groensteen sees iconic solidarity as the only necessary condition for any given visual message to be understood within comics (*Impossible Definition* 128-130). This definition can be linked to Will Eisner's concept of Sequential Art even though Eisner does not formulate his definition as drastically. Eisner defines 'comics' as Sequential Art which he narrows down as "a means of creative expression, a distinct discipline, an art and literary form that deals with the arrangement of pictures or images and words to narrate a story or dramatize an idea" (*Comics* 5).

Even though this definition characterises comics as a distinct discipline, the term Sequential Art itself lacks precision. Such a definition can be held true for several different media and does not exclusively describe comics. Following that definition, picture books could also be regarded as Sequential Art since they are a distinct discipline, art and literary form which narrate a plotline with the help of arranged pictures, images and words. Yet as Scott McCloud states in his book *Understanding Comics,* Will Eisner's definition is a good starting point since it highlights one of the key elements of comics: the importance of sequence. If pictures are depicted individually one will see them as what they are, as pictures only, but if the element of sequence is added the art of image will be transformed into the art of comics (5). In addition to sequence, McCloud sees juxtaposition as another crucial element when it comes to defining comics. He defines the medium as "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (9). This definition, unlike Eisner's, does not explicitly include the notion of words, since according to McCloud comics do not necessarily include words as such (8). This definition opens many perspectives on how to understand comics or what to classify as comics if words are not necessarily a defining element. As soon as sequential juxtaposed art is portrayed, many things such as aircraft safety cards or stained glass windows in churches displaying biblical scenes could be regarded as comics (20). Even though McCloud's definition can be understood in a rather broad sense, it still highlights the most crucial features of comics, namely juxtaposed images in sequence. Since comics such as *Fables* rely on this juxtaposed position of images in sequence and do not necessarily feature words all the time, McCloud's definition appears to be the most appropriate for the purposes of this paper.

After establishing the most useful definition of the medium as such for the later analysis, several key elements of comics should be mentioned in order to understand the medium and its mechanisms. According to Knigge (14), one of the most essential features of comics is its hybrid form, since the ability to combine information gained from text and pictures is crucial for the medium. Speech bubbles, sounds or comments are absorbed in drawings or pictures, which requires the reader to simultaneously

perceive the conveyed information. McCloud also perceives words as crucial in order for comics to function, even though comics do not necessarily rely on words: the combination of words and pictures did have a vast influence on the growth of the medium. Due to the fact that unlimited combinations of words and pictures are in theory possible, new ways of storytelling could be established (*Understanding Comics* 152). This hybrid form can also be found in the comic book series *Fables* and the very combination of words and images offers twice the potential for analysis of gender stereotypes in the medium. Not only can the close reading be founded on pictures but the words accompanying them are also of uttermost importance.

Time is another crucial factor in comics since as McCloud argues that time is not only perceived spatially but actually is one and the same. This notion however also creates a problem since readers are only left with a vague sense of how much time actually passes within or between panels. Artists therefore often rely on different methods to emphasise time such as the content, the shape or the number of panels (100-101). Eisner also comments on the special form of time within the medium but he focuses on the importance of panels, since these lines signal transmission from one important aspect to the next (*Comics* 28). Panels are not the only technique to help the audience understand time within the medium. McCloud suggests that, just like films or television, comics are always in the present. The current panel the audience is focusing on always represent the present, whilst all the panels before display the past and all the following panels the future. But unlike other media, in comics, the past, the present and the future are all within reach at the same time. Only the reader decides on a panel which consequently becomes the present (McCloud, *Understanding Comics* 104). Therefore, direction, sequence and arrangement of panels have to follow a logical order to guide the audience (Knigge 15). Additionally, McCloud suggests that the concept of motion can aid depiction and perceiving time in comics. Even though sequential art relies on multiple images in progression in order to emphasise time, other methods can be more effective. Time can be represented within a single panel through the illusion of sound or through the concept of 'motion lines' (*Understanding Comics* 110). Such lines can be defined as lines which should "represent the paths of moving objects through space" (111). In order to analyse

actions, characters and especially character development within the comic book series *Fables*, understanding how time is created and perceived is needed since without it a close reading of the series, which depicts a rather long stretch of time and often includes flashbacks or visions of the future, would be hard to achieve.

Another important notion which plays a crucial part in the medium of comics is the concept of closure. Since "comic panels fracture both time and space, offering a jagged, staccato rhythm of unconnected moments" (McCloud, *Understanding Comics* 67) a concept is needed which allows the reader to connect such moments in order to "mentally construct a continuous, unified reality" (67). This process occurs not within panels but in an in-between place called 'the gutter'. According to McCloud this is the place where human imagination transforms two single images and perceives them as one idea. This process, unlike in other genres such as electronic media, is voluntary (66-68). This can be said due to the fact that artist and reader need to work together in order to decipher the meaning. Since every reader will interpret actions in a slightly different way due to cultural background, personal experience or opinions, every act committed in between the panels will be interpreted slightly differently; or as McCloud describes it: "to kill a man between the panels is to condemn him to a thousand deaths" (69). Not only can closure be applied between panels but also within one and the same if the artist only shows a small piece of the whole picture. Furthermore, due to the process of closure and the high participation of the audience, "comics can be maddeningly vague about what it shows us. By showing little or nothing of a given scene – and offering only clues to the reader – the artist can trigger any number of images in the reader's imagination" (86). Since readers are required to fill in many gaps, mostly due to the restrictions of the medium but sometimes also intentionally to establish a certain effect, the comics artist can only guide the audience until a certain point and has no guarantee about whether the intended message will be perceived. The audience will have to rely on prior knowledge in order to decipher the message and such interpretations will also potentially vary from culture to culture. This process of closure involving a strong participation of the audience in order to decode the message is one of the most important steps when analysing comics such as *Fables*. Since the intended message and the action happening between the panels in 'the

gutter' rely on the reader's imagination, familiar and sometimes even predictable concepts and portrayals of characters are not shown in great detail, but via the process of closure, the audience will still be able to decipher the intended meaning. *Fables* also heavily depends on this process because a character's action is often not depicted in detail but only small parts of the big picture are shown, which means that the audience needs to fill in the gaps. Therefore, while analysing comics, one has to rely on this process of closure in order to be able to interpret the depicted action and characters.

2.3 Graphic novels vs. comic books

After establishing the most suitable definition and several key characteristics of the medium as such, it is important to elaborate on the differences between graphic novels and comic books and which category the series *Fables* belongs to. Such a categorisation is important to establish, since both types of comics have different goals and requirements.

The term of graphic novel was established in the 1980s in order to mark a new understanding of certain comics:

> In 1986-7 the term 'graphic novel' entered common parlance with the success of the album versions of *Dark Knight*, *Watchmen* and *Maus*. Since then, it has become emblematic of the comics renaissance generally, and the 'adult revolution' in particular. Overnight, it was claimed, comics had developed from cheap throwaway children's fare to expensive album-form 'novels' for adults to keep on bookshelves. (Sabin 235)

Without providing a clear definition, Sabin already introduces one of the key elements of graphic novels, namely the distancing of the medium from children's literature towards a more valued readership.

Apart from this disassociation from the prior image, defining graphic novels is not easy to accomplish. John Hamilton focuses on the length and cover of these books, and place they can be bought: "A graphic novel is a long, single story told in comic-strip form. Unlike a comic book, a graphic novel's binding is usually more,

sturdy, like a softcover or hardcover book. Instead of being sold on newsstands, most graphic novels can be found in special comic book stores" (4). Apart from commenting on the fact that graphic novels are usually longer and have different covers and sturdiness, this definition does not offer any detail about the contents of graphic novels. Unlike John Hamilton, Harris includes the content in her definition of graphic novels: "It was meant for a more mature audience. It told a serious or complex story" (6). Their definition combined, both authors include the most important features of graphic novels: they are usually longer, bound in a sturdier material and include more serious and complex stories which are intended for a more mature audience.

Yet as Karczewski suggests, the term graphic of novel was and is still used as a marketing strategy: "The term is often considered to be just a marketing ploy to make comics more credible, as they were previously seen merely as a form of entertainment for teenagers" (49). Not only is the term often used to create more credibility, but it is often misused in order to reprint already existing comics under a new, more highly acclaimed format:

> The component 'novel' in the term 'graphic novel' connects comics explicitly to the larger category of literature. 'Literature' is often understood as denoting an example of high culture. When comics came increasingly to be considered as valuable cultural products, the connection to literature was a welcome one, and publishers and distributors of comics therefore quickly adopted the term 'graphic novel' […] [C]omics publishers have also started adopting the production modes of high culture by bringing out special editions of their most successful comics in an expensive hardback format, by keeping titles available in trade paperbacks and by collecting and republishing old stories in archive editions. (Kukkonen 85)

Keeping all these key elements in mind and additionally the rather common misuse of the term in order to sell more copies and to increase credibility, sorting the series *Fables* in the category of graphic novels appears to be impossible. Even though *Fables* is intended for a more mature audience since it features violence and sexuality, it cannot be categorised as including more demanding, complex or serious stories. The series were created for amusement with rather shallow characters and stories, with no ulterior motive or message in mind than pleasure. Even though it was reprinted

as an expensive special edition hardback, this process was started due to the vast popularity of the series and not due to its place within the sub-genre of graphic novels.

2.4 The depiction of female characters in mainstream comics

> The comics industry has typically been characterized as a masculine domain. The association of comic books with the dominant genre of superheroes, and the persistent stereotype of awkward adolescent male consumers, skews the public perception of the entire medium as simply 'fantasies about boys for boys' […] Certainly the comic book industry is, and always has been, dominated by men and masculine themes. (Brown, Loucks par.1)

Brown and Loucks base their statement that the comics industry can be considered as for the most part a masculine domain on the grounds of two different arguments. On the one hand, the majority of writers, artists and other branches involved in the creation and publication of comics is male, producing stories for a mostly male audience. On the other hand, the characters depicted within the publications are also usually men (par.1).

Linked to this phenomenon of a mainly male audience and the stereotypical depiction of female characters is Scott McCloud's conception of the two main goals comics aim to achieve:

> You want readers to understand what you have to tell them and you want them to care […] there are two paths you can take to get your readers to care. One relies on the intensity of your presentation while the other relies on the content of the story itself. The human beings that live within that story. The ideas expressed through them and between them. (*Making Comics*, 53)

If those are the two main goals of comic books, one can conclude that in order for the audience to understand and relate to the characters they need to be able to identify with them. Since comics have until recently been read by a mostly male audience, characters will therefore represent and try to appeal to such a specific audience and its phantasies and ideologies. As McCloud states, one way to achieve the reader's involvement and identification with the story and its characters is through the story itself, the humans portrayed and the ideas expressed. If ideas and the portrayal of

humans, adhere to the conceptions of this mostly male audience, the chances of actually evoking emotions and participation in a story will be increased.

Another concept that is crucially linked to the idea of identification with the characters is the concept of gender and performativity. The notion that gender is performed and contingent on various parameters such as time and place can help to explain why men, but also particularly women, are portrayed in a specific way and why gender stereotypes are constantly confirmed in this medium. If identification with these characters is a crucial factor, (re-) producing gender norms and stereotypes within comics might aid this process and furthermore, by repeating and reproducing gender norms and stereotypes in such a culturally defined medium, these gender acts will help to get norms and stereotypes confirmed, naturalised and stylised. Thus, by portraying women in a certain way, not only are certain stereotypes and norms confirmed, but they will also be consolidated and strengthened within a given culture. Only via constant reproduction will such norms be sustained.

Obviously, one other goal of artists, writers and publishers can be identified, which is the superordinate goal of the whole industry, namely selling copies and increasing revenue. In order to achieve this ultimate goal, all the above-mentioned factors will contribute to at least maintaining, but preferably enlarging the audience. They will confirm ideologies, portray ideas, stereotypes and popular themes since without these factors revenue would decline, which ultimately would lead to a discontinuation of certain comic books. Therefore, as Sabin states, the comic industry with its depiction of women and a certain readership can be regarded as stuck inside a vicious circle:

> [T]he laws of the market rule. Only a rise in the female readership of comics will result in women making more demands on material, and thus causing more comics of interest to women to be published. But, without such comics in the first place, the readership will not rise […] the mainstream still remains the 'male-stream'. (234)

Even though Sabin wrote this in the early 1990s, not much has changed since then. Mainstream comics may have opened the door towards more differentiated topics and depictions of women, but women in comics are essentially "either plot devices (there to be rescued) or sex symbols (all plunging necklines and endless legs)" (221). Since

women in mainstream comics are often objectified and reduced to their appearance in order to serve as sex symbols and to satisfy the male gaze, a woman's sexuality is defined by specific features: "The sexuality of women in mainstream comics is defined by accentuated legs, eyes, mouth, and breasts to connote beauty and allure" (Klein 62). Apart from the fact that women in mainstream comics usually serve one or both of the aforementioned purposes, their work life was also, historically speaking, depicted as rather one-sided: "Historically, women's work in mainstream comics has primarily centered around romance and domestic life. Women were seen in stereotypical work, in supporting roles to men" (62).

It is precisely due to this stereotypical depiction of women, the vast majority of male artists, writers, the specific (male) audience and the goals in mind that it is important to look at the depiction of female characters within mainstream comics in greater detail.

During the 1940s and 1950s, when Fredric Wertham and other members of the American society started to name potential dangers connected to reading comics, one of them was a perversion of sexuality which is nowadays linked to the concept of "Good Girl Art" (Hayton par. 2). This concept is related to pin-up art and has been used within comic book discourse for decades. It entered this field in the 1940s and portrays with a "mildly erotic flavour, beautiful females scantily-clad or attired in shape-revealing clothes, while the suggestion exists that the character is innocently unaware of the sexuality that is apparent to the reader" (par.5). Such a mild eroticised depiction of women on the one hand quite clearly refers back to the argumentation of the beginning of this section, namely that for the longest time comics were created by men for a mostly male audience. Therefore, portraying male images and phantasies of perfect female behaviour and appearance was a common practice. Yet there is one other aspect Hayton (par.2) links with the depiction of women in such a way, specifically an economical aspect, when he writes: "The use of sexuality in selling products is now not only commonplace but universally recognised. Those comic books that incorporated GGA used stereotypical objectification of females for visual enjoyment of the reader, with cognitive consequences". Thus, in objectifying and

sexualising female characters of comics men not only had a medium to express their fantasies but also exploit them in order to increase sales.

Even though women from the Golden Age of comic books onwards were depicted in a highly-sexualised way, one of the most important characteristics of "Good Girl Art", namely sexual passiveness was defined by Scott:

> The sexual energy in the illustration is obvious, but, interestingly enough, the woman herself is normally given no sexual identity, either artistically or through the plot. She is clearly sexual, but only in appearance. She does not act upon any of her own desires. She is sexually passive. All sexual overtones are created around her. Sexuality does imply power and it was necessary to make her powerless, more in need of salvation. Empowering sexuality was reserved for the savior. (25)

Linked to this sexualised innocence and the passiveness of "Good Girl Art" in comics which Scott refers to, is the importance of weakness and subversion. The depiction of women bound by ropes or chains can be commonly observed, especially in comics of the Golden Age. Yet as Hayton (par. 17) suggests, such bondage situations were by no means necessary, but only one way of presenting female inferiority. According to Hayton such depictions, regardless of being bondage-related or not, are however of great importance since "they do speak directly to the underlying patriarchal script, and deliver messages that potentially condition the reader in terms of a societal view of women" (par. 17).

Linked to the concept of "Good Girl Art" is the idea of "Bad Girl Art" which refers to the personalities of the characters rather than their depiction. This style dominated the comics scene in the 1990s and included objectification and seductive posing, just as "Good Girl Art" did, and was intended to satisfy the male gaze within the story as well as the readership (par.27). Yet unlike female characters depicted as good girls, "Bad Girl Art" emphasised characters with a conscious sexuality. This sexuality often included fetishist fantasies, including a common role of the woman as dominatrix which combined a feminine seductiveness with masculine toughness (par. 30). According to Hayton, such a depiction of women is however hard to interpret: "on the one hand, they feature powerful, assertive females. Then again, Bad Girl comics tend to undermine any progress towards sexual equality by maintaining, and indeed

intensifying the use of female bodies as sexual objects, despite the sexual power attributed to them" (par. 31). In addition to this objectification of Bad Girl characters, the depiction of their sexuality was, in itself, problematic:" Bad Girl characters were not only conscious of their own sexuality, they deliberately used it as a weapon" (par. 34).

Both "Good Girl Art" and "Bad Girl Art" tried to satisfy the heterosexual male gaze since objectification of the female body was achieved via posing and exposure of the body. Yet, there is a difference in how the nature of female sexuality is portrayed in both styles. While "Good Girl Art" makes women appear innocent and her sexual energy unintentional, "Bad Girl Art" features women with strong sexuality consciously choosing to use it as a form of power. Both of these images of women created in the two different styles can be seen as a form of undermining of gender equality since women are depicted as objects in order to please a male audience, as well as creating, preserving and advocating unrealistic expectations of how women should act and look (par. 37). Those are of course two extremes of depicting women which are not necessarily included in every issue of mainstream comic books today. Nevertheless, as will be argued in the later analysis of the comic book series *Fables*, the two main characters can be interpreted at least partly within the notions of "Good Girl" and "Bad Girl Art".

Disregarding the concepts of "Good Girl" and "Bad Girl Art" for a moment, a tendency to artistically exaggerate certain sexual characteristics of men and of women in particular can be observed in mainstream comics from the 1980s onwards. Men became more muscular while women were depicted with longer legs, bigger breasts and unrealistic or even incredible proportions (Robbins 10).

Graphic novels also opened the medium to experiments and non-mainstream topics, but hardly adapted the characterisation and depiction of women. Despite the fact that comics published from the second half of the 20th century onwards did offer some stronger female characters, most of them were still objectified, and depicted in a highly stylised and sexualised way in order to visually please a male audience and male creators. Additionally, strong and 'realistic' female characters, which artists portrayed from time to time, quite often crossed the line to violence towards other

women. Therefore, the strong superheroines of this time are quite often still portrayed in a very stereotypical and sexualised way which grants excuses for the depiction of girl fights and sexual fantasies (Kawa 169-170).

Another explanation as to why women are often objectified and depicted in a very stereotypical way and often in gender stereotypical clothing or occupations is the dependence of stereotypes and the necessity for them within the medium as such.

According to Eisner, comics would not be able to function without them, even though the term of stereotype is usually connoted negatively: "[T]he stereotype is a fact of life in the comics medium. It is an accursed necessity – a tool of communication that is an inescapable ingredient in most cartoons" (Eisner, *Graphic Storytelling*, 11). He links this need for stereotypes to the narrative function of the medium. Since the art of comics and especially the understanding of it depend on the audience's stored memory of certain experiences to visualise and process the message quickly, the use of certain symbols and simplification of images will be needed: "[E]rgo, stereotypes" (11). Furthermore, Eisner highlights that these stereotypical depictions of characters are culturally specific and may vary from culture to culture, even though some will be recognised universally (13). According to Eisner, since the usage of stereotypes is a necessity in order for the audience to quickly decode intended messages, the specific depiction of male and female characters can be at least partly explained. Eisner claims that, due to limited space within the medium and not enough time to develop characters thoroughly, such a specific depiction will be needed (12). The limited time and space to fully describe characters might be true for comic strips, but cannot be held true for long ongoing comics series like *Fables* or graphic novels where authors and artists would have enough time and space to not have to rely on stereotypical depictions of characters in order to establish their background story. Furthermore, the underlying message in those stereotypes which Eisner sees as a reason to use them in the first place can be regarded as problematic. If stereotypical depiction and characterisation is needed to convey a message, the message itself cannot be highly differentiated but will be made out of stereotypes on its own. Therefore, if a woman is drawn in a rather stereotypical way, affirming gender stereotypes in order to convey a

message quickly would mean that the message in itself can be regarded as an affirmation of stereotypes.

Consequently, one can conclude that the depiction of women in US mainstream comics is rather one-sided and often includes sexualised images of unrealistic female bodies in order to fulfil male phantasies. They confirm gender stereotypes and norms in order to not only simplify the audience's identification with the characters and to get them involved, but also to secure steady sales. Since certain ideologies and ideas realised in these comics and sex sell, as we know, the aforementioned mostly male audience will help to secure and maintain this specific depiction of women in mainstream comics. Since the comic book series *Fables* follows this portrayal of women, as will be shown in the next section of the thesis, and additionally since it is published by Vertigo Comics which is an imprint of DC Comics, it needs to be labelled as a mainstream comics series. Yet there is one branch of comics which offers a broad variety of depictions of female characters, namely independent or underground comics.

2.5 Underground comics and their representation of women

After the establishment of the Comics Code Authority which made it impossible to address certain topics within mainstream and commercial comics, an artistic movement that published comics free from commercial censorship emerged in the 1960s. This underground movement reformed ideas and notions about what comics could realise politically and formally (Chute, *Graphic women* 13-14).

This movement originated in American universities as part of the Free Speech movement, where artists could experiment in books and comic books printed by university presses. The Vietnam war, the assassination of John F. Kennedy and the resulting uprising of students all over America nourished the development of this underground comics movement (Knigge 291-292).

In 1965, the underground press appeared, since new technological developments in the offset printing process made it possible and advantageous to produce a smaller number of newspapers and comics inexpensively. Several

underground newspapers such as the *Los Angeles Free Press* or the *Berkeley Barb* together formed the *Underground Press Syndicate* all of them featuring these comics, free from the Comics Code Authority. Next to underground newspapers, comics such as *Zap Comix,* created by Robert Crump in 1968, which was originally sold on the street, grew rapidly. By the early 1970s, over a million issues of *Zap* were sold, and by the end of the 1970s around 300 different types of underground comics could be found (Chute, *Graphic Women* 16).

Apart from addressing topics which would not have been published in mainstream comics, underground comics also established a different policy of employing and portraying women. Even though prior to the establishment of underground comics, women did work in the comics business, it was considered a male domain. Due to this phenomenon, if women were working in the comics business it was mostly on issues which were severely conservative and helped to create and confirm normative gender roles. The growing underground comics movement opened the medium of comics to women and feministic ideas, which gave them a chance to express their ideas and experiment artistic impulses (20). Thanks to this newly found form of expression, early female comic artists on the one hand addressed their resentment of the male dominance within the field and the depiction of women, and on the other hand discussed topics urgent to a female audience such as children or housework, but also rape or abortion (Kainz 96).

Nevertheless, it is important to mention that women's comics, which soon became an integral part of the underground comics community, did not appear as members of it but rather as a reaction to the already existing underground comics. The reason for this was that attitudes towards women and feminist ideas were often as ignorant and uninformed as in mainstream comics. At the beginning, underground comics were as male-dominated as their mainstream counterpart. The male underground comics scene addressed topics such as Vietnam, ecology or drugs in their comics but "when it came to sexual politics there was often a surprising ignorance and insensitivity" (Sabin 224). As a result from this situation, feminist organisations such as feminist presses, theatres or comics emerged separately and sometimes even expressed hostility towards male dominated underground comics (224).

One of the first feminist comic books written and drawn by women was *It Ain't Me Babe* in 1970, which included the subtitle *Women's Liberation*. Two years later, the formation of *Wimmen's Comix* helped to establish feminist comics, aiming at a female audience even more (Knigge 297). Due to the increasing popularity of independent comics within the 1980s and 1990s and an expanding independent and alternative comics community, alternative female heroes started to develop. Such comics could depict everyday stories on the one hand but could also include non-fiction stories such as autobiographies (Kainz 97).

As far as the depiction of women in underground comics is concerned, Robbins highlights the similarity with which male and female characters are drawn:

> Whether the style is realistic or broadly cartoony, in the indies, both male and female characters tend to be drawn similarly, no matter the sex of the artist. Thus, if the males are drawn in a broad cartoon style […] the females will be as funny-looking as the men. […] As before, women comic creators are likely to depict males as equal human beings. But male indie cartoonists also now seem to depict women as equals. (par. 12)

As established in Robbin's quote above, regardless of the author's gender, within the underground comics genre, men and women are depicted similarly without relying and conforming to gender stereotypes and norms. Furthermore, not only female artists adhere to this equal depiction, but more importantly, men within the underground comics scene also follow this trend and do not fall back into stereotypical depictions of gender, unlike in mainstream comics.

The choice of topics and the different depiction also have an influence on the readership of independent or underground comics. While the female readership is small comparatively with male comics readers, women nonetheless tend to read more underground comics than men. Similar developments can still be found in the percentage of female artists. Even though more women are drawing and writing comics than ever before, the majority is still publishing within the genre of underground or independent comics, which leaves the impression that this field has become feminised. Within the field of mainstream comics and especially superhero comics,

female artists and also a female audience are still quite rare, which explains the ongoing stereotypical depiction of female characters (Robbins par. 13,14).

3. Analysis of female characters in *Fables*

3.1 Story synopsis

After a successful flight from the homelands due to a violent invasion of the Adversary, several fairy tale characters find themselves stranded in the so-called "mundy" world, where they decide to create a secret community hidden away from the mundane people inhabiting this world, or better said, our world. This fable community has its headquarters in New York City and additionally owns land in upstate New York for fairy tale characters who do not look like humans, which is also known as "the Farm". In the first few issues, we are introduced to the main characters such as Snow White, who is the mayor's deputy, Bigby Wolf, also known as the big bad wolf and now executing the function of sheriff, and Rose Red, who is the leader of the Farm and Snow White's sister. One of the most important themes of the comics is also introduced within the first few issues, namely the rivalry and complicated relationship between Snow White and her sister Rose Red.

At the beginning of the series, the overall goal of this secret and exiled community is recapturing of the lost homelands and gaining as much information as possible about the evil empire built by the Adversary, as well as identifying this mysterious character. Soon a war between the exiled fables and the Adversary and his empire starts, during which his identity is revealed. The exiled fables win this war and the empire is destroyed, which leads to several fables returning to the homelands. Although this fight between the imperial forces and the exiled fables can be regarded as the main theme of the first half of the series, topics such as love and relationships are also addressed. Not only are we introduced to several lovers of Rose Red, but also to Snow White's love story with Bigby Wolf, resulting in giving birth to seven children and in a wedding. Nonetheless, the war between these two sides can be regarded as the main theme and storyline, but soon after the defeat of the Adversary other evil forces start to threaten the fairy tale community of New York.

The second half of the series is initially concerned with the defeat of the mysterious Mr. Dark, the epitome of evil who is threatening to destroy everybody within the fable community. It is not only his defeat that is given importance, but also Snow White and Bigby's family, who has to endure hardships and who undergoes several adventures. Family and romantic relationships seem to be the leading themes of the second half of the comics series. Nevertheless, not only romantic relationships play an important role, but the complicated relationship and rivalry between Snow White and Rose Red heightens right at the end of the series, which almost leads to a war between sisters. This fight can only be prevented at the last minute, when both sisters decide to part and not to see each other again for a very long time. The series end with a family reunion of Snow White and Bigby Wolf's family, which grew extensively over the last few centuries, where Rose Red is also invited. Therefore, a happy ending with a possible reconciliation between sisters is indicated.

3.2 The author

Bill Willingham is the author of many acclaimed comic book series such as *Elementals* (1984), *Coventry* (1996-1997)*, Day of Vengeance* (2005) or *Fables* (2002-2015). He has written and sometimes drawn comics for over twenty years, publishing comics with almost every comics publisher in the business (Vertigo Comics 2016). Furthermore, Willingham's graphic novels appeared multiple times on the *New York Times* bestselling list, and he won several awards for his work. Willingham himself won seven Eisner Awards associated with the comics series *Fables,* and additionally won an Inkpot Award in 2008 for his career in comic books so far (Willingham, n.d.).

3.3 Vertigo Comics

Vertigo Comics was established in 1993 as one of the most popular imprints of DC Comics. Its origins can be traced back to the 1980s, when authors such as Alan Moore revitalised and reinvented popular DC characters in a more sinister and serious way. Nowadays Vertigo's comics, even though still connected to DC Comics, have

become less and less associated with the realm of superheroes. Although topics changed over time, most of the stories can still be considered off-kilter just as the name of the publishing house suggests (Misiroglu 384-386). Yet the rather sinister and mature choice of stories Vertigo has to offer, which is aiming at an adult audience, should not be associated with erotic themes. The term 'adult-oriented' which is often associated with Vertigo should only hint towards a more mature audience and topics, since Vertigo does not publish erotic comics (Dony 21). Rewriting and transforming pre-existing characters can be regarded as a trademark of the publishing house. Titles which were published in the 1990s such as *Sandman* (1989-1996) or *Hellblazer* (1988-2013) were transformations of characters already existing in the DC universe. Additionally, not only are characters rewritten, but genres are also revisited, which can be regarded as a highly successful technique for Vertigo. The series *Preacher* (1995-2000)*,* for example, reintroduces the Western genre and uses American frontier mythology while *Fables* reuses traditional fairy tale and folk characters (Dony 2-3).

3.4 Characterisation of protagonists

Before analysing two of the main female characters of the series on the topic of gender stereotypes and norms, it is important to name differences from the fairy tale characters on which they are originally based. Since Vertigo is publishing the series as an imprint to DC Comics, it was written for a more mature and adult audience and therefore the plot lines and characters are on the one hand more sinister, violent and complex, but more importantly also eroticised:

> [W]hereas fairy-tale characters tend to be flattened, stylized, stripped of all but the most essential references to be the sensual and the psychic, the characters in Fables are emotionally complex, sexually explicit, and physically present […] And further, as part of that same transition, they are eroticized. (Zolkover 42)

This more sensual and eroticised depiction of the well-known characters from fairy tales on the one hand fits with Vertigo's tradition of reinventing already established

characters, and on the other hand, has the potential to please the more mature and most likely male audience.

Both characters which will be analysed in the following section underwent this transformation from stylised and flat fairy-tale character to an emotionally complex, more sinister and physically present version. Even though the two characters, namely Snow White and Rose Red, could not be any more different from each other at first glance, they still incorporate these features, and furthermore, the depiction of both women adheres to gender stereotypes and gender norms. In order to establish these gender stereotypes and concepts of masculinity and femininity, one also needs to define what is stereotypically feminine and what is stereotypically associated with masculinity. In order to do this, Migdalek's definition seems most appropriate: "My definitions for 'feminine' are gentle, graceful, delicate, soft, pliant; and my definitions for 'masculine' are strong, forceful, powerful, unyielding" (7).

Such stereotypes and norms are linked with embodied gender performances which are highly influenced by hegemonic heteronormative ideologies of our western society. Such ideologies therefore also determine gender specific embodied performances in public spheres of popular culture such as television, advertising or other media, and in everyday life performances which are not staged or produced for a specific purpose (Migdalek 7). Furthermore, as Migdalek continues "many performance arts practitioners are guilty of unknowingly reinforcing and reinscribing inherent gendered ideologies in male and female bodies, and […] these practices have a forceful impact on our/their students' and audiences' understandings of gender" (7). Since such stereotypes are deeply rooted and ubiquitous within our society, and creators of art such as authors are unintentionally confirming and adhering to such gender specific embodied performances, it is almost impossible to evade these practices. Yet via constantly raising awareness of hidden gender stereotypes and norms within our private and public life, such phenomena could become more transparent.

In order to create more transparency and to display the techniques through which these stereotypes and norms are established and confirmed in the comics series *Fables*, a close reading of both text and panels and an analysis of certain

features such as body language, relationship with other characters, language, status within the community, and career will be conducted. In order to conduct such a close reading, secondary sources from the academic fields of sociolinguistic, fashion studies and gender studies will be used.

3.5 Analysis of Snow White

3.5.1 Fashion Choices

> Dress is a powerful means of communication and makes statements about the gender role of a newborn child soon after birth. Although newborn childrens' [sic] first dress may be gender-neutral, their sex soon prompts kin or other caretakers to provide them with dress considered gender-appropriate within their particular society. Further, specific types of dress, or assemblages of types and their properties, communicate gender differentiations that have consequences for their behaviour of females and males throughout their lives. (Eichler, Roach-Higgins 8)

As can be seen in the quote above, dress can have an enormous impact on not only the person's own perspective and identity but also on how society will perceive them. Dress not only has the potential to offer information on a person's profession, character or preferences but also helps to establish and confirm gender norms.

Within the first story arc of *Fables* called *Legends in Exile*, Snow White is instantly introduced as a business woman, holding an important role within the fable community. In the first scene we meet her, she is introduced as "director of operations", sitting in an office behind a desk which leads to the assumption that she upholds some sort of office job, which is often associated with a business woman. Yet, more importantly, the way she is dressed can also lead towards this assumption. Even though we can only see her torso in the first few panels, the top she is wearing, combined with the make-up, jewellery and nail polish, leaves the impression of a business women within her element (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe One* 14-18). Later on, within the same issue, Snow White's trademark outfit - a skirt, a blouse and either blazer or coat - is revealed and confirms the reader's assumption of a successful and powerful business woman. Such outfits, namely a coat and skirt combination, worn almost exclusively by Snow White, combine two attributes she should represent: tough business woman, and sexy and ultra-feminine woman at once. Although such attire is flattering and helps to stress Snow White's beauty and femininity, it is far from practical and is unsuitable for the field work and special tasks Snow White's job incorporates.

Even when preparing for battle and actual fights, Snow White quite often does not change into something more appropriate or comfortable but enters a single combat sword fight in a skirt, blazer and high heels (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Thirteen* 337,342-349). She also does not change into more suitable clothes to do housework tasks such as washing dishes (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Thirteen* 64-65) or after she was seriously injured, recovering and sitting in a wheelchair (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe One* 240-246). This stress on her appearance and femininity therefore suggests that the reader should constantly be reminded that, despite her job, which includes power and often makes her appear tough, she is a woman above all. Furthermore, such feminine clothes are often constricting and uncomfortable, and they hinder a woman's capability to act: "Nonetheless, clothes create a specific gendered habitus in that girls clothes are often restricting (e.g. skirts and frills) or prompt a performance […] while boys clothes tend to be more suitable for roughhousing and physical activity (Craik 140)". Since stereotypically feminine clothes can be considered as rather restrictive, it can be regarded as even more problematic that Snow White, who in theory upholds a powerful and rather active position in her community, is portrayed delegating work to other people and is depicted confined to her desk continuously. This behaviour can be noticed within the first scene the audience meets her, when she is drawn behind her desk, handling complaints from other community members. Later on, when she does leave her desk to accompany the sheriff Bigby Wolf to a crime scene, she still stands aside passively and lets others do the active part of work (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe One* 14, 28-29).

Not only the blouse and skirt combination Snow White wears most of the time but also her high heels can be seen as a trademark of hers. She is hardly seen without them, which, in combination with skirts ending at her knees, are just revealing enough to present her as professional but also sexy and feminine due to the emphasis on her long legs. Several times within the series, the focus is drawn to Snow White's legs and shoes in this way. Within the first story arc, Snow White accompanies Bigby Wolf on a mission to examine a crime scene in such an aforementioned outfit, which is not only unsuitable for such a job but also does not fail to highlight her legs and shoes. One panel particularly draws attention towards Snow White's high heels. In this panel,

we see Jack of Fables sitting on the floor waiting for Snow White and Bigby Wolf to arrive, which is announced via two pairs of legs drawn from behind walking towards Jack (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe One* 26). Even though this panel could have been drawn in another angle or would work without including the legs of Bigby Wolf and Snow White, they are there nonetheless. Another example can be found when Snow White is talking to Briar Rose after two of her children went missing. Even though she is clearly devastated and worried, her legs, high heels and skirt are highlighted (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Thirteen* 254): in one panel this focus becomes again most prominent due to the angle with which the scene is drawn. The audience is looking upwards which at the same time stresses Snow White's footwear and long legs.

Such a focus on high heels and small accessories can be linked to the idea of appearing professional and feminine at the same time as mentioned by Craik:

> [W]ith professional and career women constantly struggling to look professional (that is, playing down their femininity and playing up their professional attributes by wearing professional clothes such as suits and business shirts, known as power clothes) while at the same time introducing elements that signal their femininity and soften a too masculine look (e.g., scarves, jewelry, bouffant hairstyles, and high heels – or stilettos for the brave). (142-143)

Even though Snow White is still portrayed in a rather feminine way, since she is almost exclusively shown in skirts, she still appears to feel the urge to accessorise and highlight her femininity even further. She is wearing jewellery and scarves, but most importantly, her business outfits are always accompanied with high heels. Since such accessories are included to perfect the image of femininity, some special attention is given to these elements on several occasions throughout the series.

Another reason for depicting Snow White in elegant and feminine clothing is the notion that it individualises the woman who wears it, in contrast with fashion for men which often unites, especially when formal wear such as suits are regarded:

> When it started, the new look had considerable advantages: it united all its wearers in a single anonymous, international, and interacting commercial urban class - modern man […] Human males have a tendency to dress defensively.

Unlike women, they dress not so much to look fabulous as to look acceptable. (W. Hamilton 193)

Suits have the tendency to unite the people wearing them while feminine attire achieves the opposite. Therefore, Snow White's outfits can be regarded as a way to not only stress her femininity, but also to ensure the reader's attention and to ensure her prominence among the other characters. This can be said not only about her business outfits but also about the few occasions Snow White is depicted at black-tie events. Within the first story arc, an event takes place called 'Remembrance Day' which should commemorate the events in the homelands of the stranded fables prior to the beginning of the story. For this occasion, a grand ball is held once a year. As deputy mayor, Snow White has to attend such an event and dresses accordingly. She is depicted in a tight and low cut blue dress, jewellery and high heels. This dress is revealing almost as much as it is hiding, which lets her appear sexy and feminine but also allows her stand out among all the other characters and especially among all the other men depicted in black, uniform suits. Due to this choice of dress and the fact that elegant female dress individualises the woman wearing it, the author and artist ensure that all the attention is focused on Snow White since she is one of the most important characters within this story arc (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe One* 98-104).

However, as already mentioned, it will not only ensure the gaze of any audience but will also constrain the woman who wears it in any action (Craik 140). Such a consequence is also noticeable when analysing Snow White's behaviour and movements during the Remembrance ball. Within these panels, she is either depicted standing, being led to other places by Bigby Wolf or dancing with him. She is furthermore forced to take small steps due to the limitations of her dress. Additionally to small steps, she is also obliged to confine her arm movements and is never portrayed raising them (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe One* 85-86, 98-100). This behaviour becomes most obvious right at the end of the ball when a shocking secret is revealed. In one panel, Snow White's facial expression leads to the assumption that she is very agitated, upset, even shocked about the turnout of the events, but her body language is limited and restricted. Her arms are close to her torso and only her hands, which are spread, suggest surprise and excitement (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe One*

104). Here, the restriction of feminine dress and the inability to move freely are most prominent. If Snow White was to raise her hands, especially in an upwards direction, she would reveal more of herself than she would want people to see. Although due to such restrictions, a behaviour is enforced which is considered feminine, namely small gestures and movements, which are also regarded as passive, careful and elegant.

Another interesting tendency in Snow White's fashion choices is the shift towards less fashionable and feminine clothes as soon as she is unhappy and without her partner. Throughout the first few story arcs we meet Snow White the business woman, unofficially running the secret fable community; Snow White the private woman, dressing up for ball room events, or Snow White going out of town, dressing in trousers and hiking boots to fit the occasion. Even though we see a variety of outfits, all of them highlight her figure and body and her beauty. Yet as soon as her love interest Bigby Wolf is forced to leave town and thus to leave her for what seems at that time forever, her outfits seem to reflect her unhappiness. As soon as he is gone and she is forced to leave Fabletown to live on the Farm with her babies, her appearance starts to reflect her mood. From the moment she is banned from Fabletown, she is not as prominent anymore for a few story arcs, and when we meet her again, her style is still feminine due to the skirts she wears but not sexy anymore. She is depicted in loose clothing such as big cardigans, T-shirts, long skirts or big coats, leaving the impression of indifference and of neglecting her appearance. She seems to not care about her image and the effect she has on men anymore. Additionally, not only are her clothes different during that period of time but the high heels she usually wears are also set aside and exchanged for flat shoes (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Four* 134-137; *Fables Deluxe Five* 244-246).

Her appearance seems to reflect her inner struggle with the new situation she is forced into. She barely appears to adjust to motherhood, a new environment and the separation from her love interest. Furthermore, it can also be suggested that due to the fact that her companion is gone, she does not need to look appealing to any other potential partner. This behaviour changes rapidly as soon as Bigby Wolf is back, and they finally find their happy ending and are allowed to be together. This reunion is a surprise to Snow White and is arranged by other people. Snow White is clueless

about what is about to happen but even though she does not seem to know, she is once again depicted in a feminine sundress with high heels. Once more she is showing her cleavage and her legs, and even her hair seems to be styled and not as flat as before (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Six* 136-144). Even though this change in appearance is visible to the reader, her sister is commenting on her looks: "I wish you'd dressed better Snow" (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Six* 136). On the one hand, this sentence can hint towards a change in dress and a continuation of Snow White's previous tendency to dress up and appear sexy and feminine. Even though Snow White finally seems to be herself again, wearing feminine clothes, it appears not to be enough. On the other hand, this quote can be interpreted in a way which suggests that Snow White is not dressed appropriately for the surroundings she is in, since she is supposed to walk in wilderness for a while. Yet even if the latter interpretation is chosen, it still leaves the impression that Snow White wants to look appealing for her love interest. Additionally, this shift back towards feminine and sexy clothing can be considered as an end of her unhappiness and the return of her old self, which seem to be closely linked to the fulfilment of her love life. As soon as Bigby Wolf is back in her life and she (temporarily) finds her happiness, her looks change back.

Another change in Snow White's style can be noticed as soon as she finds her happy end and enters married life, namely the depiction of her in aprons. This addition to Snow White's wardrobe can be seen as connected with her new role as housewife and mother, who only occasionally gets actively involved in official business of the fable community. Therefore, she is often depicted in domestic situations such as washing the dishes (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Thirteen* 64-65) or preparing a picnic for her friends (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Ten* 26-29). In both scenes, Snow White is portrayed in her typical outfit, a skirt and a blouse, but on top of that she is wearing an apron to stress her new domestic lifestyle. Additionally, in both scenes, it is only her who is depicted doing chores even though she is surrounded with other people. During the picnic scene several other people are eating with her, but it is Snow White who is preparing food, and in the panels in which she is washing dishes she is surrounded with her children but does not receive any help.

The use of an apron to symbolise her new life is closely linked with the use of stereotypes in comics as part of the storytelling: "In comics, stereotypes are drawn from commonly accepted physical characteristics associated with an occupation. These become icons and are used as part of the language in graphic storytelling" (Eisner, *Graphic Storytelling* 12). Via the use of such stereotypical characteristics, in this case the apron standing for a housewife and mother, the audience immediately understands Snow White's newly found role in life and the tasks it includes, and does not need much further explanation.

For the most part of the comic series, Snow White is depicted in feminine outfits which often entail high heels, skirts and blouses but from Issue 142 onwards, one item of clothing is added to her wardrobe which is contradictory to the image created by the rest of her clothes: an armour. During the last few issues of the series, when the fight between sisters reaches its climax, Snow White's style also changes accordingly. To prepare for the fight between sisters, which seems inevitable, both sisters are depicted in armours to emphasise the potentially violent conflict between them. At first Snow White seems surprised by the sudden appearance of this outfit, but adjusts rather quickly to this new situation (Willingham, *Fables Issue* #142 13, 17-18). It seems to give her confidence to fight this pending battle not only with her sister but to also fight in order to get her husband back. Suddenly a change in her nature can be noticed, since before the appearance of this item of clothing Snow White often appeared as insecure and not confident about her own abilities. Now, while wearing the armour, she seems quite determined and energetic. Therefore, this change in her nature could be linked to the change in her wardrobe since the aggressive, determined and almost fearless nature Snow White shows can be correlated with the armour she wears. Historically, such armours as depicted in *Fables* were worn by men and would instantly remind the audience of knights being ready to fight wars or compete in tournaments. Thus, depicting Snow White in such an outfit does not correspond with the feminine image created before, and since a change in her nature towards rather stereotypically male attributes seems necessary to narrate the story, a drastic change in wardrobe which is connected to an aggressive and exclusively male domain seems appropriate. Furthermore, as already established, stereotypically feminine clothing

such as skirts, blouses or dresses would confine her and would not give her much room to act.

As soon as Snow White has to be more active than she usually is depicted, which often coincides with her leaving town, her home or her usual environment, she also exchanges her normal outfit for trousers or shorts. The second story arc called *Animal Farm* depicts Snow White in either long or short trousers and flat shoes (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe One* 131-224) in order to take care of business at the Farm. She also changes into something less feminine, namely shorts, a T-shirt and boots in order to go on a hiking trip (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Two* 111-175) or into black trousers and a pullover to go on a road trip in order to save the fable community (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Ten* 35-224). All these changes in her wardrobe are associated with her leaving her normal life and entering an adventure, and additionally, she also has to become active herself which includes tasks which are not usually associated with feminine behaviour. In Book One, she has to stop a rebellion by the fables living at the Farm which also includes shooting one of the community's members (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe One* 196). During her hiking trip with Bigby Wolf, Snow White is attempting to kill her pursuer Goldilocks with an axe (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Two* 162-166); and later, during a road trip it is Snow White who saves her husband from a falling car (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Ten* 109). This very active and often aggressive behaviour can be regarded as abnormal and unusual in contrast to her stereotypically feminine behaviour at home, where she mostly delegates and hardly intervenes. Therefore, to stress her unusual behaviour away from home, more masculine fashion choices are highlighted and coincide with these events.

Since Snow White is depicted most commonly in mildly revealing clothes and feminine outfits, she can also be regarded as a representation of "Good Girl Art" as it "depicts, with a mildly erotic flavour, beautiful females scantily-clad or attired in shape-revealing clothes, while the suggestion exists that the character is innocently unaware of the sexuality that is apparent to the reader" (Hayton, par.5). Snow White, as a business woman and later on housewife and mother, would not need to dress in a shape-revealing manner with a mild erotic flavour, yet she is depicted in this way.

More importantly, she also seems to be oblivious to the reaction and effect she creates, which helps to establish an aura of innocence around her.

Snow White's clothing usually does not offer much variation and generally includes restricting, stereotypically feminine items such as skirts, blouses and dresses. Since she cannot move freely in such outfits, she is mostly depicted as rather passive, delegating work or not participating. Additionally, her choice of clothing can also be closely linked to her emotional well-being since she appears to neglect herself and changes her appearance as soon as she is unhappy due to her separation from Bigby Wolf. Snow White is hardly ever depicted in trousers or any other item of clothing than dresses or skirts, but when she is, a change of scenery is usually linked to it. Therefore, when leaving her usual surroundings and to a certain extent her usual feminine self, her fashion choices change accordingly.

3.5.2 Body language and body image

"Just as faces express a lot of what's going on inside a character emotionally, their bodies can send some powerful messages of their own. And as with faces, they can send some those messages deliberately and send others without even realizing it. Body language can tell readers who your characters are before they even speak" (McCloud, *Making Comics*, 102). Taking McCloud's statement into consideration, Snow White`s body and facial expression already reveal potential traits of her personality on the first time we meet her. Even though we cannot see her whole body within the first few panels, her facial expressions and hand gestures are quite revealing. Initially, one hand is placed against her face while the other hand is revealing her palm, in order to emphasise her argument. Combined with a rather neutral facial expression, an impression of indifference or almost boredom is created. Snow White does not seem to care deeply about the task at hand that she is forced to fulfill. This expression changes rather radically a few panels later, when her facial expression turns from neutral to angry and her hand is not leaning against her face anymore but is clenched into a fist (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe One* 14-15). This mood shift from neutral to aggressive within a few panels makes Snow White appear rather

emotional and quick-tempered. She seems to react rather strongly, which conveys the impression of a rather sensitive character. Such a trait would of course be typical for a woman, while men are stereotypically depicted to be more even-tempered and calm.

This emotional trait of Snow White's temperament is depicted throughout the whole series in different ways. Within the first story arc only, she loses her temper on several occasions and additionally is also depicted crying, which could suggest weakness or fragility. When she is in the company of Bigby Wolf, her emotions seem to particularly overwhelm her. At the beginning of the story, she is depicted as rather hostile towards him, which is emphasised by her body language. Soon after she learned that her sister has disappeared, she forces Bigby Wolf to include her and to taker her on in his investigations in this particular case. Within three panels, the aggressive and emotional Snow White manages to wear Bigby Wolf down until he agrees to involve her in his investigations. She is initially depicted standing in a bent position in front of his desk, holding her clenched hand into a fist in front of her, which is accompanied by a rather grim facial expression. The second panel depicts her standing with spread legs, one hand on her back and the other pointing at Bigby, while she is depicted standing very close and eye to eye with Bigby, snarling at him (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe One* 23). Snow White shows an aggressive behaviour in this scene which can be seen as a violation of the feminine archetype. This archetype, as Greer defines it, constitutes women as "a doll: weeping, putting or smiling, running or reclining […] her value is solely attested by the demand she excites in others. […] [H]er virtue is assumed from her loveliness, and her passivity" (qtd. in Lockford 6). Even though these archetypes as defined in the 1970s have shifted a little over the years, the traces and foundations of them can still be found today. "They continue to render enactments that support an identifiable constitutive femininity, one that, in the view of many, constrains women's agency" (Lockford 6). Due to the fact that Snow White is violating these stereotypes in this scene, she has to be constricted in other ways and her femininity has to be highlighted via other features. This is achieved via the handbag she is holding in her fist. Her body language is also still rather minimalistic. At first she is depicted bending down and making herself smaller; while she still bends forward in the second panel with one hand behind her back, holding

her handbag while the hand gesture reminds the readership of a mother scolding her child. Furthermore, these outbursts of almost violent behaviour can be seen as a loss of control over her emotions, which would confirm another stereotype of femininity.

Breaking into tears, on the other hand, confirms stereotypical feminine behaviour. Snow White is depicted in tears several times throughout the series, especially when she is in the company of Bigby Wolf. She cries in his company when Bigby reveals to her that her sister has been a "victim of violence" (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe One* 39), or when it is time to say goodbye to him when they are forced to live apart from each other for a long time (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Four* 94). Apart from appearing emotional, crying could also be interpreted as a sign of weakness.

As already established, comics rely on the use of stereotypes in order to convey messages quickly to the audience. Therefore, meaning can be conveyed just by the way characters are drawn, such as the dichotomies between weak and strong. A strong character might show "an alteration of the skeleton as well as differences in muscular and surface extremities […] A physically strong character should possess a bone structure larger than the average, muscles larger than average, and a posture that is either erect or slightly forward leaning" (Eisner *Expressive Anatomy*,146). These characteristics can be found in Bigby Wolf: he is tall, muscular, broad, and additionally, to underline his masculinity, he is depicted with a stubbly beard and a great amount of body hair. Snow White on the other hand, as a weak character, shows different characteristics. "The bone structure might then be smaller and thinner, making the muscles, neck and shoulder span smaller, causing a posture that might be depicted as a bit stooped with little round shoulders" (146). Compared to Bigby Wolf she is smaller, weaker, and not as broadly-built as him. Additionally, in order to highlight her physical inferiority she is depicted leaning on him and being supported by him several times. During their final conversation in Fabletown, before they are forced to live apart from one another, Snow White is depicted holding on to Bigby's arm as if she needed the support to walk, while she is literary leaning against him crying just a few panels later. Bigby on the other hand, compared to Snow White, seems almost stoic, looking down on her and not revealing his emotions, which leads to him walking away and leaving her behind (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Four* 93-94).

Also, during their reunion in Book Six (137-140) Snow White is portrayed as physically inferior compared to Bigby. She is forced to walk with a cane after an accident she had years before, which is a clear sign of physical weakness. As soon as she sees Bigby again she falls into his arms, and with his help she does not need her cane anymore since she can lean on him. Not only are they depicted walking away with each other, him supporting her and leaving her cane behind, but he actually says to her: "No, you won't need it. You can lean on me from now on" (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Six* 140). Bigby's (physical) superiority is not only portrayed via supporting Snow White but also via the role of a rescuer, for her and often for the fable community. During the battle of Fabletown which Snow White leads from afar with binoculars but does not actively attend, Bigby Wolf is absent at first and only appears at the last moment to save everybody. He does not appear in his human form, but as the big bad wolf into which form he can change at will. As soon as Snow White sees him, she runs towards him, leaving her cane behind, and she throws herself at him with the words: "I knew you'd come in time to save us! You always do!" (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Three* 210-211). This open sign of affection and holding on to Bigby combined with the massive size of the wolf compared to Snow White clearly indicates Bigby's strength and physical superiority. He definitely can be seen as the alpha dog. In order to emphasise his aggressiveness and toughness even further, his paw is raised in the air showing his claws, which a few panels later is followed by Bigby baring his teeth (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Three* 211-212).

Such a dominant/strong versus submissive/weak behaviour and body language as Snow White and Bigby show in this scene do adhere to stereotypical feminine and masculine roles of western society:

> [D]ominance is tolerated and even desired in men whereas submissiveness is preferred in women because these gender differences are consistent with traditional sex roles; moreover, because higher status individuals have more legitimacy as group leaders, dominance in women should be particularly ineffective with a male audience. (Carli, LaFleur, Loeber, 1030)

Since it is not acceptable for Snow White to behave aggressively and dominantly as a leader of the fable community and as a woman, her soft side and dependence on

Bigby as the dominant and masculine saviour is often highlighted. Furthermore, as defined by Carlie, LaFleur, and Loeber, dominant behaviour on a woman's part would not be regarded as appropriate and effective by a male audience. Thus, as the majority of mainstream comics such as *Fables* are targeting a male audience, depicting a dominant, active and aggressive woman would violate expectations of the target readership.

Another aspect of Snow White's passiveness is the fact that she is often the recipient of touch by other men which she does not prevent. According to Major, such behaviour seems to be based on gender stereotypes and culturally specific behaviour. Since men are expected to be active, aggressive, independent and not emotional, women are expected to be the opposite (32). Furthermore, different patterns for the frequency of touch can be noticed: "First, females from infancy on are touched more by others than males are. Second, men initiate touch to women much more frequently than women initiate touch to men" (31). This behaviour and frequency of touch can be noticed many times in the depiction of Snow White and Bigby Wolf. During the Remembrance Day celebrations, it is Bigby who takes Snow White's hand and leads her to and from the dance floor, which she does not object to (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe One* 98-99). When they meet again after their separation, it is Bigby who is grabbing Snow White by the shoulders in order to draw her closer so that he can kiss her (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Six* 143); and during depictions of domestic scenes such as the Christmas celebrations with their children, Bigby is standing behind Snow White, resting his arms on her shoulders (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Twelve* 282).

Even though Snow White does not seem to not mind most of the time when she is being touched by men, even in situations where she clearly minds, she does not manage to prevent the action in time. During the time Bigby Wolf is absent, searching for two of their children who went missing, an old love interest re-enters Snow White's life. Prince Brandish claims to be her husband and tries to get closer to her quite aggressively and violently. First, he grabs her, he then touches her thigh, and afterwards forces her to kiss him by leading her face towards his. Snow White on the other hand does not attempt to prevent this undesirable attention. At first, she throws her hands in the air which are instantly grabbed by Brandish, and afterwards,

while Brandish is putting his hand on Snow White's face, her hand is resting on his arm. Her facial expression appears to be the only powerful part of her: it shows disgust and panic (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Thirteen* 271-272). Snow White clearly appears to be weak and powerless in these few panels. Even her skin colour is drawn in a paler shade which makes her appear almost colourless and grey, and strengthens the impression of her being vulnerable and fragile. Snow White clearly does not have the upper hand in this interaction with Brandish, which is again linked with being the receiver of touch:

> Being the recipient of touch is not only associated with being female, however, it is also associated with being of lower status. Investigations of the meanings attributed to nonreciprocal touch indicate that being touched is perceived by others as submissive and powerless, whereas initiation touch is perceived as dominant and powerful. Furthermore, observational studies indicate that touch is a status privilege; lower status people are less likely to initiate touch to a higher status people than vice versa. Since women in our society (and most societies) have less status and power than men, it is not surprising that they are less likely to touch men than men are to touch them. (Major 32)

Since Snow White cannot prevent Brandish's touch even though she does not desire it, a clear power relationship is established here. She is not only portrayed as powerless and submissive when she is with her husband, but other men also have power over her. This indication of a lower status can be regarded as contradictory with her official status in the fable community. Initially, she is dealing with official business of Fable Town as deputy mayor, which would lead to the assumption that she holds a high position within this community. This notion of Snow White being powerful and of high status nonetheless is constantly undermined by different mechanisms. She is depicted as emotional and crying, which often leaves the reader with the impression of an almost hysterical woman. On numerous occasions, she is depicted physically weak, by depending on a cane to walk, holding onto her husband while walking, or leaning against him for support. Additionally, she does not prevent being touched by men, leaving the audience with the impression of being passive and submissive.

Apart from being physically submissive and portrayed as weak and passive, Snow White also adheres to "[c]ontemporary trends and images [which] clarify that

besides being small and slim, the ideal female form should have almost no body fat and be contoured with toned muscle" (Lockford 30). This image of her perfect body becomes most apparent in Book Twelve where she is depicted naked with her husband Bigby Wolf. After a longer separation, the couple is finally reunited once more, which leads to sexual intercourse. The act as such is not depicted in the comics, but husband and wife are depicted post-coitally lying naked in the woods where they celebrated their reunion. Bigby is lying on his back, half asleep, one arm behind his head and the other stretched in a right angle from his body. Snow White is lying on her side, her torso half-bent over Bigby, her legs bent and wrapped around Bigby while her arms are bent as well and covering her breasts (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Twelve* 55). In this panel, the audience gets the chance to admire Snow White's body which is representing the ideal body norm of Western society as described in Rice: "In Westernized cultures, people value thinness as vital to the body beautiful. The thin female body is associated with sexiness, self-discipline, and success. Fat […] is seen as unattractive, unhealthy, and lacking in body-and self-control" (241).

Additionally, according to Klein, the sexuality of women in comics is defined via their appearance: "The sexuality of women in mainstream comics is defined by accentuated legs, eyes, mouth, and breasts to connote beauty and allure" (62). Even though she confirms these stereotypes and norms of an ideal woman, her body language indicates that she is not comfortable with her body and with being naked, or with her sexuality. During the next few panels, she covers herself up by holding items of clothes against her chest area. Her arms are crossed in front of her upper body, and while getting dressed, she turns away from her husband, only revealing her back. What is more, the notion of other people being aware of her sexuality and being intimate with her husband embarrasses her and makes her blush. When Geppetto crosses their path after they have left the forest and comments on their sexual encounter, Snow White blushes and looks worried. She leans towards her husband who holds her by the shoulder reassuring her (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Twelve* 56-57).

This behaviour and feeling of shame which are portrayed after being shown as sexually active can be regarded as being within the tradition of "Good Girl Art".

Originally, female characters within this tradition did not engage in sexual relations since sexuality was reserved for the strong saviours, which usually were men: "[T]he woman herself is normally given no sexual identity, either artistically or through the plot. She is clearly sexual, but only in appearance. She does not act upon any of her own desires. She is sexually passive […] Sexuality does imply power and it was necessary to make her powerless, more in need of salvation" (Scott 29). Despite the fact that Snow White is engaging in sexual activities, she is still ashamed of it. One can assume from her reaction that she clearly does not want people to know that she is sexually active since it is shameful to her. Her husband on the other hand remains calm and seems not to care about people knowing that he acts upon his desires.

Additional to the notion of positioning Snow White within the traditions of "Good Girl Art", the concept of double standards in male and female sexuality could help to explain Snow White's sexual behaviour and her feeling of shame. For a long time, North American research has implied that gender specific norms exist when it comes to appropriate sexual behaviour and interest (Lai, Hynie 360). Such standards have changed over time and included in the earliest versions that women were expected to preserve their virginity until marriage, while extramarital sex was considered as a rite of passage. More contemporary versions predict women to focus their sexual behaviour on committed relationships while men do not need to channel their sexual energy in this way (361). Furthermore, a woman being obviously sexually active, usually but not necessarily with many men, is easily labelled as 'slut' while such terms do not adhere for men who are being sexually involved with many women. Men therefore "are socially rewarded and women socially derogated for sexual activity" (Marks, Fraley 175). Even though Snow White is only depicted as sexually active with her husband and does not engage in any other sexual relationship throughout the series, the double standard according to which women will be derogated for being sexually active while this is not held true for men could help to explain her behaviour. In order not to be regarded as a woman who enjoys sex and therefore easily mistaken for a 'slut', she is represented as being ashamed of it. Hurrying away from her momentary weakness and being terrified and embarrassed when people noticed that she acted upon her sexual desires seem to confirm such double standards.

Even though Snow White seems clearly uncomfortable when being portrayed naked, beauty, appearance and a perfect body still seem to be of uttermost importance to her. According to Snow White, beauty can be considered as more important than character, because a woman will get away with being mean as long as she is beautiful. She displays this attitude while talking to the only woman who is not depicted as beautiful or slim, not adhering to body norms, and on top of that appears rather mean throughout the series:

> SNOW: It's an irrefutable law of human nature – and I'm including fablekind here – that attractive people are always going to have advantages over those lacking physical beauty. Now, the best of all is to be both pleasant and lovely. I've been a bitch at times and nice other times. Believe me, nice is better. One can get away with being a bitch if she's also pretty. Not fair, but true just the same. Conversely, one can also get away with being ugly as a troll, if she's also pleasant. In some unknown but very real way, a good personality does add attractiveness points […] But one thing no one can ever get away with is being both ugly and mean.
> (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Eleven* 380)

As one can see from the quote above, Snow White places beauty over character since one can get away with being mean to others as long as one is also pretty. Additionally, it is also interesting to note who she is talking to in this particular scene. The woman being lectured here is the only woman in the whole series who is portrayed heavily obese and with a mean nature. She is behaving nastily towards other people and gives the impression of a very unappealing person. Apart from clear villains such as evil witches, she is the only female character who looks, and generally is, disagreeable. This could lead to the assumption that people who do not adhere to gender norms and stereotypical body images will automatically be less nice and agreeable compared to women confirming such norms. Additionally, such definitions, according to Snow White, also only include women since she is using the pronoun "she" several times. Men seem to be excluded from her definition of beauty and the importance it should uphold in one's life. Furthermore, such images and opinions portrayed in this particular scene can be linked to the notion that western society will rather judge women according to their beauty than according to their actions or other attributes. This

discrepancy not only affects a woman's self-esteem but also her social success and power:

> [P]hysical attractiveness positively correlates to social power both in terms of interpersonal prestige and financial reward […] Insofar as women are defined by their bodies, the social stakes for social advancement or censure are therefore particularly high for women. (Lockford 29)

What becomes most apparent in this particular scene is particularly the rejection of women not adhering to gender specific norms of beauty and the disadvantaged position they often find themselves in. Snow White is lecturing and rejecting Mrs. Sprat since she, according to Snow White, does not "get away with being ugly and mean" (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Eleven* 380).

Overall, Snow White's body language and behaviour play an important role in depicting and illustrating her character. She is often represented crying, emotional and almost hysterical. Apart from fulfilling the stereotype of the emotional woman, she is also depicted physically weak, not only via her using a cane but also leaning on her husband for support and being the recipient of touch rather than delivering it. Her body itself also adheres to stereotypical gender norms since she is depicted slim, with long legs, big breasts and smooth skin, as beauty and appearance can be considered highly important for women. Nonetheless, she is portrayed uncomfortable and ashamed when she is naked and terrified when people actually notice that she acts upon her sexual desires.

3.5.3 Language and interaction between male and female characters

> Many psychologists have argued that the locus of gender differences is in the eye of the beholder. We immediately recognize each participant in conversational interaction as a male or a female. To the extent that we hold stereotyped beliefs about men and women, these beliefs can lead us to form different expectations about what male and female participants are like and how they will behave. (Aries 163)

Taking Aries's considerations into account, analysing speech and conversation topics of male and female comic book characters must be seen in a different light. Since

comics are a product of popular culture usually written by men, they will most likely reflect stereotypes upheld by the author and by society. Therefore, conversational patterns and topics reflected in comics and more specifically in *Fables* will probably not reflect reality but perceptions, stereotypes and expectations of the creators of the comics. Even though it is hard to establish such stereotypes since according to Aries every individual will hold slightly different variations, one can establish certain patterns: "Men are described by a cluster of instrumental traits: as leaders, as dominant, aggressive, independent, objective, and competitive. Women are described by a cluster of affective traits: as emotional, subjective, tactful, aware of the feelings of others, and as having their feelings easily hurt" (164). These stereotypical traits of masculinity and femininity are furthermore reflected in stereotypical perceptions of men and women as communicators:

> Male speakers were believed to be loud, dominating, forceful, authoritarian, aggressive, straight to the point, blunt, militant, to show anger rather than conceal it, and to use slang and swears. Female speakers were believed to be gentle, friendly, open and self-revealing, enthusiastic, emotional, and polite, to talk a lot, to use many details and to show concern for the listener. Their speech was seen as gossip – talk about trivial topics and gibberish. (Aries 164)

These widely-held beliefs concerning stereotypical masculine and feminine speech patterns are partly represented in the comic book series *Fables*.

Even though feminine speech would stereotypically hardly include slang or taboo words since "the folklinguistic belief that men swear more than women and use more taboo words is widespread" (Coates 97), Snow White can partly be regarded as an exception of this belief. She is depicted several times using taboo language and swear words. During the first story arc, she is depicted insulting Jack of Fables: "Lay one hand on me, asshole, and you'll regret it" (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe One* 29); or later on, after she found out that she is pregnant and she is talking to Bigby about it: "Bigby? Get your traitorous ass up to my apartment in the next five minutes! I don't care if you're busy! Move it or lose it!" (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Two* 177).

At first glance, these situations do not confirm the stereotype about feminine language not using taboo or swear words, but examining these scenes in detail

another stereotype can be found. In both situations, Snow White is depicted using such language while being agitated or upset, which would adhere to the stereotype of women being more hysterical than men and using more emotional language to support this trait. Additionally, Snow White is mostly using slang, taboo and swear words in company of men. Such behaviour is not unusual given that men and women tend to adjust their language according to the established norms and expectations of the other sex:

> In mixed contexts, however, male and female speakers seem to accommodate to the perceived norms of the other gender: the narratives produced by male speakers in a mixed context contain far less taboo language than in a single-sex context, while the narratives produced by female speakers in a mixed setting contain far more. (Coates 98)

Snow White seems to adapt her language according to the expectations she has when talking to men around her. In comparison, when talking to women, she hardly uses any swear or taboo words. Even when she is agitated and annoyed by her sister and during the scenes in which their troubled relationship and rivalry are most striking, she does not rely on harsh language too much. During the rebellion at the Farm in which Rose Red actively participated and where Snow White is threatened with a gun by her own sister, her only comment is: "Rose, what the hell are you doing?" (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe One* 203). This comment and choice of language seems almost inappropriately understated for a situation like that. Later on, towards the end of the series, right before the big showdown between sisters when their old conflicts arise again, Snow White only swears mildly and in reference to a man. Rose Red rescues Prince Brandish who threatened Snow White and her children and additionally killed her husband. During the confrontation, she does not directly swear at Rose Red and only refers to Prince Brandish and his evil deeds using taboo language: "Once he's released, I expect him to carry out his evil shit, because that's what monsters do" (Willingham, *Fables Issue #133* 11). In both situations, one would expect Snow White to react harsher than she does, since she is depicted using explicit language many times before, but instead she only uses milder forms or only swears sporadically when in company of other women. Only when surrounded with other men does her language

hardens and include taboo words more frequently in order to fit in and establish her role within the group.

The notion that men and women will change their language depending on the participants of the conversation could also be linked to the idea of Snow White trying to establish power relations. According to Porter and Geis, gender stereotypes will influence recognition in leadership: "A woman presenting objective leadership and competence cues will not receive the same recognition as a man presenting the same evidence. The result is de facto discrimination against women, since becoming a leader depends on social recognition" (42). They continue their argument with an explanation on why women are less accepted in leadership positions: "Stereotypes of how men differ from women match almost exactly our cultural conceptions of how leaders differ from followers. Leadership is associated with high status, experience, dominance, independence, and assertiveness. These are the traits of the traditional male stereotype" (42). Since Snow White is a woman in a leadership position, her acceptance by other members of this society might be diminished due to her sex and the linked gender stereotypes. Therefore, especially when talking to men who are inferior in position and power, she feels the urge to rely on swear words and harsh language to remind them about her status of deputy mayor. This establishing of power and reminding men of their position, combined with swearing and harsh language, becomes most apparent when Snow White wants to be a part of Bigby Wolf's investigation concerning her sister:

> SNOW: Damned right I want to know. I'm going with you.
> BIGBY: I don't think that would be a good idea. Not until I've gotten a first-hand look at the situation.
> SNOW: I'm not much interested in what you think is and isn't a good idea. She's my sister, I'm your boss. I'm going with you.
> BIGBY: Boss or not, Snow, I'm not about to let you interfere with my work. I told you this as a courtesy, but I won't have an amateur stamping through a possible crime scene, destroying evidence.
> SNOW: Then we seem to be at an impasse. I suggest a compromise, and the compromise is this: I'm coming with you, and if you don't like it, clean out your office and get out of the building. How's that?
> (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe One* 23)

In this scene, Snow White manages in the end to establish her authority but only via aggressive language and behaviour, and via threats. As can be seen in Bigby's quotes, Snow's authority is not established without hesitation and doubt of her competence. She is diminished as an amateur, not possessing the right skills to come with him and help him. Additionally, the disrespectful way he delivers his message could lead to the assumption that he does not accept Snow as a leader and does not see her as an authoritative figure. Only by showing aggressive behaviour which is stereotypically masculine behaviour does Snow White manage to establish authority and gain her employee's respect.

As the deputy mayor of Fabletown and due to her position of power within the fable community, Snow White is often using commands and directives. Studies such as conducted by Goodwin (1980, 1990, 2011) established that women and men use different strategies to give commands. While men tend to be more straightforward and direct, women often use hedging and are less blunt in forming their commands and directives (qtd.in Coates 94-95). Such a behaviour can once again not be noticed when Snow White is giving direct orders of business. When she is shutting down the uprising on the Farm, she is giving clear orders to her forces:

> SNOW: "Everyone drop your guns and disperse! Your so-called revolution is over!
> […]
> You dumb bastards! I run Fabletown and I'm never outgunned! Kill the barn!
> […]
> If anything happens to me, burn the town, everyone in it, and anyone who tries to escape.
> (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe One* 218-219)

Here, via clear orders, Snow White is trying to establish the necessary authority to stop this rebellion. Untypical of female speech, she is not using strategies associated with female conversation strategies but straightforward commands which are even combined with swearing and insults. She is desperately trying to regain control over rebellious members of her community, and therefore uses speech patterns associated with masculinity to strengthen the impression of authority. Yet she has to try several

times to end this uprising: "Now, for the last time, drop your weapons and disperse! It's over! You lost! Go home!" (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe One* 220). Even though she finally manages to end this rebellion after requesting it several times, one member of the group still manages to gun her down and injure her severely. Thus, against all of Snow White's efforts, her authority was not established fully during the fight against the revolt since at least one member ignored her orders, did not take her threats seriously and managed to shoot her in the head.

Additionally, although Snow White appears to be quite active and aggressive during that scene, she still does not act herself and only delegates work to other people. She does not set the barn on fire herself but orders somebody else to do it, which ultimately gives her the role of a passive coordinator rather than an active fighter against the rebellion. This role is occupied by allied men surrounding Snow White. Similar behaviour can be noticed during the battle of Fabletown. Snow White is coordinating and commanding her forces from afar, observing the action through binoculars, which suggests that she is far away from the action. She does not even give the orders to the troops directly but asks her friend Flycatcher to deliver them: "Now, we can't let them have time to recover. Send in the big fighters. […] Now Fly, while they're occupied, pull everyone back inside the Woodland courtyard. And remind them: Make sure the enemy sees you retreat, and look panicked doing it" (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Three* 184, 187). Once again, she does not actively participate in the fight but stands aside passively giving orders. She represents the brains behind the operation, but relies on other members to carry out her orders. In the end, she does not manage to secure the situation and is in desperate need for rescue: "Oh dear God. I've killed us all" (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Three* 196). Due to one careless order, Snow White almost ruins the whole operation and even though she tries to save the situation she caused, she appears to be relieved when Bigby arrives and saves the day.

Later on, when Snow White and Bigby are married and have children, she still delegates work to her husband rather than doing tasks herself. When her children are in danger she hardly acts herself, handing over dangerous tasks to her husband which enforces the image of her being weak and passive versus Bigby being strong and

active even further. In Book Seven, Snow White's family visits Bigby's father, the North Wind, in his castle, when their children get into danger in the woods below the castle. Instead of trying to rescue her children herself, Snow White gets upset, runs towards the balustrade of the balcony asking her husband to save her children: "Bigby… you can save them" (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Seven* 176). This behaviour of always counting on her husband to save the day, or in some cases her children, does not change throughout the series. As soon as Snow White realises that two of her children have gone missing, she starts looking for her daughter and son but counts on her husband, at that point still absent, to find them: "Bigby would be able to pick up her scent in seconds. He needs to be here" (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Thirteen* 108). During this scene she is depicted active due to her looking for her daughter herself, but at the same time doubting and undermining her own competence in being successful at this task. When Bigby finally comes home, Snow White is clearly relieved:

> SNOW: Thank goodness you received my call.
> BIGBY: Winter's becoming pretty good at picking up when you want us. Now, what's the matter?
> SNOW: Therese is gone!
> (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Thirteen* 115)

Now that her husband and frequent rescuer has arrived, she can clearly give him the burden of actively searching for their daughter which he soon afterwards pursues. She can finally hand over a task she does not seem fit to undertake.

Another explanation for Snow White's unusual manner of communicating orders could be the fact that it was written by a man. Since according to Goodwin (1980, 1990, 2011) men and women use different strategies to command and to give orders, Snow White's tendency to use direct and straightforward language to supervise her employees and community members could be seen as a direct reflection of the author's own way of communication. After all, any piece of literature will always reflect the author's world view and perceptions up to a certain point.

Snow White's conversation patterns and choice of topics change drastically after a certain event in her life, namely becoming a mother. After she has given birth

to her seven children, the topics she addresses the most are family related. She appears to be most concerned about her children and later on her husband than anything else. She fully enters the stereotypical role of a full-time mother and housewife, only once in a while getting involved in official Fabletown business. Soon after giving birth she leaves work, since she is forced to live at the Farm with her children. This situation nonetheless does not seem to bother her since her only concern appears to be her newborn children. She is one last time depicted in her office talking to her successor Beauty, not about her role as deputy mayor but about her children: SNOW: "SHHHHHHH! Beauty…you'll wake the babies. I finally got them put down after their morning feeding" (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Four* 85). Only after a while do they start talking about business but even then, the babies are still depicted in the background of the panels as a constant reminder of her new and more important role. After moving to the Farm, her behaviour and language do not change much. She always seems to think about her children first, only participating in events and dealing with important issues reluctantly. At one point, there appears to be an emergency during which Rose Red and Snow White's assistance is required, but Snow White's first impulse is to talk about her children: ROSE: "What the hell's going on out here? SNOW: Quiet! I just put the kids down!" (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Four* 127). She seems to be fully absorbed by her new role as mother, which means that she hardly knows any other topics anymore. Smilarly, when Bigby Wolf returns to her life, she instantly asks about their seventh child whom she sent away to find his father: "Wait! There's something I need to – Bigby, did our son find you?" (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Six* 139). Just a few panels later, even before they decide to talk about their future, Snow White once again draws the attention to their children and gives Bigby a task to fulfill:

> SNOW: Okay that's a conversation we need to have real soon. But first things first. […] You have some work to do before I can let you see the kids – our other kids. First some reading. This box is full of all the letters they wrote to you. Each one has a copy of your reply paperclipped to it. Then you can unwrap all the gifts they sent you for Christmas, birthdays, and Father's Day. Make damn sure you memorize who gave you what. And finally we'll

go over the gifts you sent them, so it doesn't come as a complete surprise
to you when they mention them.
(Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Six* 142).

In this scene, Snow White puts once again her children's well-being and needs above her own. Even before anything has been discussed between Bigby and Snow White about their future together, she makes sure that the father of her children, who was absent for the first few years of his children's lives, will not disappoint them. Additionally, this scene also draws attention to the fact that Snow White pretended, for the sake of her children's happiness and faith in their father, that Bigby was not completely absent and ignoring them but sent them letters and presents under his name. This notion suggests that for Snow White, a traditional family consisting of a mother, a father and children, seems to be of uttermost importance, since without it her children could not be happy. It also appears that she does not have a lot of faith in her own parental skills since she thinks she has to make a father up because she does not seem to be enough for her children.

Additionally, when talking directly to her children, her language changes drastically, using reassuring, comforting and affectionate language and referring to herself as "mommy" to emphasise her new-found role even further: "Good, then I'll get out of your way. Darlings, stay with grandpa okay? […] No, sweetie, you stay with grandpa for now. Mommy will fetch you later" (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Four* 142). This change in language patterns towards "women's language", which includes over-polite forms, tag questions or special lexicons, can also be a reflection of her loss of power since women using such a language on a regular basis are more often housewives than business women (Aries 130).

Yet she appears not to suffer from this loss of her old life and power, at least not as soon as Bigby Wolf re-enters her life and she finally finds her happy ending. Even during his absence, she does not act upset when her loss of power is addressed. During a meeting of several important and powerful people including the North Wind, Rose Red and Frau Totenkinder, she is surprisingly included. At that point she does not uphold any official position anymore, which does not appear to distress her. Snow White herself refers to her current position within the community: "I'm not in

government anymore, and I don't talk to those people […] We were just beginning to discuss what Mr. North might do against a d'jinn" (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Five* 245). During this meeting, she calmly refers to her loss of position and to not being able to help about the most recent threat to her community. She instantly refers to the North Wind who has the power to fight this d'jinn which she cannot do anymore. Once more her priorities appear to have shifted, which also becomes apparent at the beginning of the meeting when she asks Rose Red, who just entered the scene, whether her children were behaving: "What was that commotion outside? Are my monsters being monstrous again?" (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Five* 244). Even when she is included in meetings concerning official business of the fable community, her thoughts seem to be with her family.

As soon as Bigby returned to her life and after they got married, Snow White is more and more depicted in domestic scenes, radiant and looking at peace when surrounded with her children and her husband. She finally got the whole, traditional family she always wanted: SNOW: "Our first Christmas together as a complete family." BIGBY: "Are you happy, Snow?" SNOW: "More so than I ever imagined possible. How about you?" BIGBY: "I'm at peace for the first time in ---- well, it's been some time." (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Seven* 117). By enjoying family life, being a housewife and mother, Snow White appears to be happy and completely fulfilled. This image of a happy wife and mother completely fulfilled by these tasks can be seen as a relic of the 19th century middle-class family model, which still has influences on how modern western societies depict families (Abrams 45). Furthermore, this notion sees the family as a woman's natural task: "The dominant belief that the family was the crucible of woman's natural role, a space where she might reveal and revel in her femininity, informed interpretations of the family that regarded it as a constraint on her opportunities" (46). This stereotypical notion of family life being the ultimate goal of every woman, being finally able to rejoice in her femininity and domestic tasks, and not seeing it as a restraint, can be still noticed today. Snow White is exactly depicted in this way; she does not see motherhood and family life as a constraint but appears to have found her calling. She appears to be freer and more satisfied than when depicted working and running Fabletown. This notion however is not apparent right at

the beginning of the series. When Snow White is initially introduced, she is a business woman who divorced her first husband many years ago: BEAUTY: "You divorced your prince centuries ago. You have no idea how hard it is to keep a marriage going so long" (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe One* 18). Only after becoming a mother, giving up her job and marrying again, do her true feelings surface. She finally reached the goal any woman is secretly wishing for, namely giving up the stressful working life and independence to finally be able to care for her family and husband full-time. Furthermore, her life and family were only completed by marrying the father of her children and reintroducing him into their lives. Without him, she would have felt incomplete.

Apart from adhering to gender stereotypes herself, Snow White also encourages them in their children. One Christmas, Snow White's daughter Therese gets a toy boat as a present which she does not appear to be happy about since such a toy is a 'boy present':

> THERESE: It's because of the toy boat I got for Chrissmiss [sic]. It's not a present for a girl.
> SNOW: No, I suppose not so much, but that's okay. With so many wildlings filling the house, someone probably just got mixed up on which toy went to which cub. You got lots of other gifts."
> (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Thirteen* 65)

Apart from encouraging her daughter in the belief that girls cannot play with toy boats, since stereotypically they would be intended rather for boys than girls, Snow White instantly assumes that there has been a mix-up which led to Therese receiving this gift. She tells her to play with other gifts since this one was clearly not intended for her. In other occasions, Snow White enforces gender stereotypes not as obviously but rather by omission. She does not correct her children when they enforce these stereotypes, but rather talks about something else, letting comments about gender norms and expectations pass by:

> DAUGHTHER OF SNOW: No, no, no! It's my turn to be King Flycatcher! You promised I was next!
> DARIAN (SON): That's insane! Girls can't be king!

> SNOW: It's official: Flycatcher's a phenom [sic]. He's heroic, magical … and spreading notions of personal freedom throughout the homelands like a virus.
> (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Eight* 184).

During this scene, her children are portrayed playing outside, all impersonating King Flycatcher who through recent deeds became rather famous in the fight against the empire, established in the homelands. Snow White's children are taking turns in playing the king when her son remarks that the king cannot be played by a girl, since kings are never girls. Snow White lets this comment pass, commenting on heroic way Flycatcher is behaving rather than lecturing her son that girls can take on roles like that.

Apart from enforcing gender stereotypes when talking to her children, she also adheres to gender stereotypical language and sticks to typical topics rather associated with female speech when talking to other women. According to Coats, men and women are addressing different topics when talking in same-sex groups: "Talk is central to women's friendships, and women typically choose to talk about people and feelings, rather than about things" (127-128). This rather limited choice of topics becomes most apparent when Snow White is depicted talking to her sister: the topics usually include their relationship and feelings for each other or men. Their complicated history in particular is addressed in depth on various occasions. Rose Red appears to be deeply hurt by her sister's abandonment and plotted revenge additionally to feelings of jealousy due to Snow White's popularity. Snow White on the other hand appears to be the forgiving part, wishing for a better relationship between them:

> SNOW: I hope not. At least I hope we can work through it someday, and maybe get back to the way we were so long ago.
> ROSE: Do you think that's likely? Or even possible?
> SNOW: Yes, I do. Because I forgave you long ago for what you did.
> ROSE: Oh? How perfectly noble of you. But what if I haven't forgiven you yet? […]
> ROSE: It used to be Snow White and Rose Red. Now it's just Snow White, period. All alone! No sister needed or desired, thank you so very much!
> (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe One* 243-245)

During this scene, Snow White and Rose Red talk about their problems in the past which still influence their current relationship, additionally to Rose Red being jealous of Snow White's fame and popularity. Snow on the other hand seems to wish for a reconciliation between sisters. She tries to establish peace between them, even after her sister's betrayal is addressed:

> ROSE: But the moment your pretty Prince Charming came along, you rode off with him without so much as a backward glance.
> SNOW: It wasn't like that. I sent for you to come live with us.
> ROSE: Eventually.
> SNOW: And that was my great crime? It took me too long to send for you? That's why you seduced him, and ruined my marriage – all to punish me?
> ROSE: Bingo.
> SNOW: Fine, then you had your revenge long ago. Why are the claws still out after all these years?
> (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe One* 245-246).

Snow White does not react very emotionally when talking about their issues in the past, unlike her sister: more than anything, she would like to resolve their issues. This forgiving nature can be seen as one feature of femininity, since rage and anger would be seen as aggressive and therefore rather male emotions and behaviour. Since femininity can be defined as gentle, delicate or soft (Migdalek 7), a forgiving nature would complete the image of a feminine Snow White. Via this stereotypical definition of femininity, an explanation as to why Snow White tries to mend the relationship with her sister even after such a grave betrayal can be found.

When the sisters are not portrayed talking about their feelings for each other and their complicated relationship, they often talk about the men in their lives. When Snow White first arrives at the Farm, a new mother and recently separated from Bigby, the first thing the sisters seem to talk about as soon as they are alone is Snow White's relationship:

> ROSE: So give me all the gossip. How did things go with Bigby? Did you have a romantic goodbye?

> SNOW: Far from it. We had a fight yesterday and he didn't even speak to me this morning. And now he's gone away to where no one will be able to find him.
> (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Four* 101)

The conversation of the two women instantly revolves around the relationship between Snow White and Bigby. Additionally, Rose Red mentions one choice of topic stereotypically associated with female speech, namely gossip. This choice of words and the topic these two women discuss, while depicted drinking a cup of tea, instantly lead the audience towards the assumption of a stereotypical female conversation.

On the rare occasions Snow White is depicted talking to another woman apart from her sister, the topics also revolve around stereotypical female subjects, especially after her children were born:

> SNOW: I finally got them put down after their morning feeding. Okay, not actually put down, but –
> BEAUTY: They're more adorable every day.
> SNOW: When they're sleeping, sure. But when they're awake, floating out of reach, pooping in their diapers, or screaming their heads off for dinner – I can only serve two at a time and the other raving beasts don't like having to wait for their turn.
> BEAUTY: Does wonders for your figure, though. You're so much more buxom now.
> (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Four* 85-86)

Shortly after the babies were born, Snow White is depicted talking to Beauty about her new life as a mother. They talk about typical chores all associated with child care. Additionally, Beauty compliments Snow White's figure since according to beauty standards and norms from society, it is rather important to gain back your figure as soon as possible after giving birth, additionally to enjoying the positive aspects of breastfeeding your children, namely a well-proportioned figure. Snow White is only depicted discussing such topics with other women; when talking to men, apart from the occasional conversation about their family with her husband, such topics as breastfeeding and changing diapers would never be addressed, not even when talking to Bigby. This leads to the assumption that such topics, according to the writer of the

series and his personal opinions, are exclusively female topics, reserved for moments when women are alone with each other. Additionally, the assumption that women instantly talk about issues like that when they are alone could be inferred.

Snow White's speech, especially at the beginning of the series, includes some features which are not stereotypically considered as part of female speech. She swears and gives orders on a regular basis, which could lead to the assumption that she is not depicted in a stereotypical way. At second glance however, these features can be seen as part of her desperate attempt to secure her position and convey power which is not granted to her instinctively. As soon as she enters motherhood, her topics and speech change drastically, revolving mostly around her family and children. The most crucial point however is the depiction of her inner desires, since they reflect stereotypical and traditional roles for women and men. She appears to be more than happy to leave her busy lifestyle behind to fully take care of her husband and children, feeling happier than ever before, not being repressed or restricted in any way. Such an understanding of the role of a mother and wife supports traditional and stereotypical perception of gender norms within our society.

3.5.4 Working life

> Women's place in society is the result of a complex of ideas about what they are capable of and should do, so that their work, its types, locations and structures are gendered. Similarly, gendered division of labour is historically specific and the relationship between workers is renegotiated as the context changes. But division of labour along sexual lines is not only about dividing work according to ability; it is about power, status, position, and gender. (Simonton 134)

This focus on power, position, and gender becomes especially apparent when looking at and analysing Snow White and her professional position within the fable community. At first glance, she appears to be powerful and in charge. She is unofficially running the whole fable community as deputy mayor dealing with all the business instead of the actual mayor who is focusing on the representative duties of the job. Snow White herself explains this arrangement right at the beginning of the series:

SNOW: I'm not really the mayor of Fabletown, only his deputy. And if you want to make an appointment to tell your tale of woe directly to King Cole, that's your prerogative. But I'll tell you right now what will happen. He'll listen to you and make all the right noises about how sorry he is for your plight – and his sympathy will be genuine because he's a wonderful, empathetic man. And then the moment you're out the door, he'll ask me what I want to do about it, because that's how we work. He does all the formal gladhanding. He makes the official appearances and hosts the ceremonial functions. And I do the real work of running our community.
(Willingham, *Fables Deluxe One* 17)

The question that arises instantly, if Snow White is unofficially running the community anyway, is why she does not get the recognition for it. According to her, she is doing the "real work" but not getting recognition for it. Officially, a man is in charge, while she appears to do all the work behind the scenes. She also comments on this moments before explaining how the relationship between the mayor and her works:

SNOW: There are only a handful of us working in the underground fable government. We're already seriously overworked and underpaid, and it's everything we can do to keep our exile community together.
(Willingham, *Fables Deluxe One* 16)

Those two statements instantly create the impression that, even though Snow White is doing all the work, she does not seem to be appreciated or given power and recognition. She is underpaid, overworked, does not have enough staff to handle all the business coming in, while the mayor is only dealing with official representative business of the community. Nonetheless, it seems necessary that a man is officially in charge as the head of the community since Snow White's official title is only deputy mayor and not mayor. Additionally, as can be seen from the first quote, he seems to not even admit to the division of labour which is unofficially in place. According to Snow White, he would listen to people's problems and would not refer them to Snow White, but would only ask her afterwards when everybody has left.

The notion of Snow White as the mayor's assistant officially not in power correlates with the traditional and historical notion of segregation in the workplace,

which is still to a certain extent influencing the stereotypical norms of women working today:

> The home was increasingly defined in terms of the female, while the workplace was increasingly constructed as male and shaped by definitions derived from escalating waged labour […] The significance of home and family on working woman has been to define her role in terms of status, hierarchy and tasks. […] Life cycle affected the place and kind of work that women did; young unmarried women were the most mobile, while mothers and wives were usually more tied to one location. The identity of woman as not worker derived from the married woman or mother, notionally with domestic responsibilities, whereas many working females were not married or mothers. The idea of a woman establishing her own working identity challenged social perceptions, because women were identified by marital and maternal status, not as workers. These factors meant that women were often seen as casual labourers, assistants, not as real workers, a flexible workforce, 'a reserve army of labour'. (Simonton 134-135)

This notion of a woman as the underappreciated assistant of a man becomes most apparent when looking at Snow White. This image of Snow White holding a lower, assistant-or secretary-like position is closely linked to the segregation into typical "female" and "male" occupations. According to Wetterer, the stereotypical division into gender-specific work has hardly changed over the last few decades. Certain branches of work are still associated with one gender even though they might have "changed gender" over time. One of the nowadays typically female occupations is being a secretary which, until the end of the 19th century, was associated with a male domain. What has nonetheless never happened is that a profession lost its gender-specific affiliation completely (65-66). Snow White therefore needs to be seen in this specific light. She appears to hold the job of a secretary or personal assistant with no official power even though she seems to be unofficially in charge. These jobs, unlike any leadership position, are stereotypically female jobs which would not be executed by men. Even though much has changed in the last century when it comes to the integration of women in the workplace, stereotypical beliefs can still be found:

> The difference between the historical occupational position of women and the current situation is that now there is less conscious exclusion of women from

senior, managerial and professional posts. […] What remains, though, is an approach to the selection and promotion of women that was developed in the context of a male-based workforce where most jobs were 'gendered'. This is aggravated by the belief, still tenaciously held in some quarters, that women are fundamentally ill-equipped for the more senior or traditionally male roles and are better equipped than men for the more menial and traditionally female roles. (Scott, Creighton 83)

Even though segregations into typical male and female spheres can be regarded as being less drastic than a few decades ago, the notions of stereotypical male and female jobs can still be found today and the prejudiced notion that women are less equipped for leadership positions still needs to be overcome.

Another observation concerning Snow White's occupation is the fact that she only works for the fable community while being single and childless, moving and most importantly mostly staying at the Farm as soon as she becomes a mother. Even though she is officially forced to leave the city due to her children not looking like humans, she does not seek a new position after moving to the Farm. She concentrates fully on raising her children. After she married Bigby, her transition from business woman to housewife and mother becomes especially apparent. The stereotypical notion that women are primarily associated with housework and family care, as already established, derives from the family model of the 19th century which still influences our notions of a traditional family today. Snow White is adhering to these stereotypes by giving up her busy city life associated with her work in order to move to the peaceful countryside to raise her children. Even though concepts of families within the 20th century changed rapidly and are nowadays more diverse than ever, the traditional notion that women are almost exclusively associated with childcare at home still influences our perceptions:

> If the modern family as we imagine it was conceived in the nineteenth century, it achieved maturity in the first half of the twentieth century […] After the Second World War, however, the structure of the family changed markedly, so that what individuals recognised as family began to include multiple and various formations of kin and non-kin […] However, for most of the century, the state continued to recognise and legitimise family in its nineteenth-century middle-class guise: the nuclear family with the conjugal relationship at its core. (Abrams 38)

Even though this traditional notion of family is not the standard anymore within the 20th or 21st century, it still lives on to function as the prototype of a happy family in the perception of many people. This notion includes the appraisal of the woman being able to stay at home since the husband is financially stable as the breadwinner and can manage to support the whole family. It is often considered a privilege for the wife to be able to stay at home away from the busy and stressful workspace to care for the children and the household. This perception of such an ideal family seems to correspond with the vision of the author on this topic. He appears to share these conceptions, holding on to a concept which is no longer realistic and often exchanged for a more diverse layout. This stereotypical depiction of the perfect family life may partly be due to wishful thinking and nostalgia for a simpler time, or just due to a reminder of traditional values and perceptions.

Snow White, even though appearing like a modern business woman at first glance, rather adheres to the stereotypical position of a secretary or assistant to the man in charge: she unofficially does all the work behind the scenes but holds no actual power. Additionally, as soon as her children are born, she settles for a life in the countryside rather than staying in the city and continuing to work. She also seems to not want to work from the moment her children are born, given that she does not look for a new position in her new environment, rather focusing on her children and later on her husband. Therefore, she adheres to the traditional, normative and ideal notion of a family, fully embracing her stereotypically-depicted feminine and mothering side by focusing on childcare and the household rather than on her career.

3.6 Analysis of Rose Red

3.6.1 Fashion choices

If clothes play an important role in defining characters and establishing roles, Rose Red, unlike her sister Snow White, does not follow the tradition of a stereotypical feminine woman within the tradition of "Good Girl Art", but needs to be seen as more diverse and fulfilling several stereotypes via her choice of clothing throughout the comic book series. She can definitely be seen as a contrast to Snow White, which is also signaled via her fashion choices. When we initially meet Rose Red within the first story, her clothing is quite revealing. She is wearing a cropped top with the word 'Rock' written on it and trousers which, together with her short red hair, give the impression of a party girl, fully aware of her sexuality and provoking people, men in particular, to look at her (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe One* 23). Just with this first glance at Rose Red, the difference between the two sisters could not be more obvious: Rose Red is wearing trousers and a rather revealing shirt while her sister is almost exclusively depicted in dresses or skirts. Furthermore, Rose Red seems to enjoy her sexuality or at least seems to provoke the male gaze, while Snow White is sexy on a subtler level. The impression of a highly-sexualised character is enforced throughout the first story arc alone. Rose Red is depicted in lingerie, barely concealing anything (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe One* 56), in a slip and a short top (114) or in mini-dresses combined with high-heeled boots (118). These outfits clearly intend to capture the gaze of the mostly male audience and suggest that Rose Red should be seen as a sexual object: "In their traditional exhibitionist role, women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. Woman displayed as sexual object is the leitmotif of erotic spectacle: from pin-ups to striptease […] she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire" (Mulvey 27). Due to the suggestion that Rose Red should embody male desire and play with it, and additionally is depicted highly eroticised in rather revealing outfits, she can also be seen within the tradition of "Bad Girl Art" which derived from the "Good Girl Art" of the 1940s and the decades to follow: "the label of

Bad Girls primarily refers to the highly sexualized nature of these female characters" (Brown qtd, in Hayton par. 27). Additionally, both art forms have several features in common but "Bad Girl Art" appears to be more direct when addressing female sexuality: "Features of GGA retained by Bad Girl Art include objectification, satisfaction of the male gaze (both of the reader and of story characters), and posing, although this was more seductive than just 'alluring'" (Hayton par.27). Via posing in her exposing clothes which do not leave much to the imagination, the impression of sexual agency and readiness is created, which has the potential to satisfy the male gaze.

This impression of a highly-sexualised character is strengthened by the depiction of Rose Red changing clothes, undressing or wearing only underwear on several occasions throughout the series. She is depicted in a red slip and a cropped T-Shirt when getting ready for bed. This outfit, focusing the attention of the reader on her legs and her bottom, can once again be seen in contrast to Snow White's outfit in this scene: she is   portrayed in a loose pyjama consisting of long trousers and a shirt not revealing her body too much (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe One* 150-151). Via the depiction of both women in their nightdress which could not be any more different from each other, the impression of good girl vs. bad girl is intensified and the differences and rivalry between sisters strengthened.

Similarly, during the time Rose Red is feeling low and depressed due to the death of her love interest Boy Blue, when she locks herself up in her bedroom, she is depicted in a short top and a slip in order to highlight her body (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Ten* 85-88, Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Eleven* 286-289). Even though she is depicted grieving which creates the impression of not caring about her looks, she still wears rather revealing clothes. This choice of clothes and the emphasis on her body can be seen as in contrast to the rest of her appearance in these panels which create the impression of neglect and which do not coincide with the image of the highly-sexualised character she usually embodies. Obviously, a grieving woman neglecting her appearance would not satisfy the gaze of the male audience, which could explain why Rose Red is still dressed in a rather revealing way: to emphasise that despite her despair she is still has a desirable body and figure. Additionally, Rose Red being

depicted almost naked or in underwear does not only create the impression of sexual energy and readiness, but it sometimes also leads to sexual activities directly. While she is lying half-naked in bed, grieving Boy Blue's death, she still engages in intercourse with her ex-boyfriend Jack of Fables (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Ten* 88); or even when she only fantasies about being with men, such as Bigby Wolf, she is wearing pink underwear (Willingham, *Fables Issue* #149 18). Clearly, via depicting Rose Red in underwear or almost naked, the impression of constant sexual readiness is created, which is often confirmed due to her numerous sexual encounters throughout the series.

While Snow White is constantly depicted wearing skirts or dresses, which, on top of creating the impression of a very feminine character, restricts her and does not allow her to act, Rose Red is rarely depicted in such an attire and is mostly wearing trousers. Such an item of clothing could be interpreted as a symbol of empowerment and a sign of masculinity since it enables her to be active:

> [M]asculinity invokes the opposite attributes: strength, aggression, dominance, control, and toughness. These attributes have been codified into the basic elements of the modern man's wardrobe – namely, shirt, trousers, and jacket. (Craik 144)

Rose Red is almost exclusively depicted in trousers or jeans which she later on combines with shirts. On top of being able to act and being aggressive, her style also allows her to appear rather masculine than feminine.

Rose Red is definitely more active than her sister since she actively participates in the rebellion at the Farm. She is depicted picking up and carrying guns in order to help the fables rebel against the establishment (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe One* 179-180). Even though these actions seem rather masculine at first glance, a few small details in the way she is depicted and her attire still stress the fact that she is a woman. Initially, there are six panels which depict a close-up of Rose Red's hands and waist area in order to stress the guns and weapons she picks up or stores in her belt (179). These panels could either feature a man or a woman since they do not include a depiction of a whole human being, were it not for one detail. The hand depicted appears to be wearing pink nail polish in order to highlight the fact that a woman is

handling these weapons. After these six panels featuring Rose's waist and hands, she is depicted as a whole from a low angle, looking upwards in order to stress her long legs and silhouette. She is still carrying the previously selected weapons but in order to stress her gender, she is wearing high heels, tight trousers, jewellery and a headscarf. Her T-shirt, for once not revealing her belly, also seems to be rather tight in order to stress her chest (180). These features seem to be of uttermost importance in this panel because additionally to Rose Red carrying weapons, she stands in front of several canons and other types of heavy weaponry, which indicates aggressive behaviour and war that are stereotypically associated to be a male domain. Apart from actively participating in the rebellion on the Farm, Rose Red also is depicted fighting in the battle of Fabletown which Snow White, in comparison, only witnesses from afar. Once again, she is standing in front of a weapon commanding other members of the fable community, and once again she is depicted wearing a tight pink top, jewellery and a little scarf to let her appear sexy and even slightly feminine despite the tasks she is performing (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Three* 193). Even if such a behaviour would suggest a strong female character, open about her sexuality, which breaks away with the stereotype of a passive damsel in distress, at second glance interpreting characters following the tradition of "Bad Girl Art" such as Rose Red appears to be more difficult. Even though such characters appear to be powerful at the beginning, the objectification and focus on their bodies still remains:

> Interpretation of Bad Girl comics is difficult, however, because, on the one hand, they feature powerful, assertive females. Then again, Bad Girl comics tend to undermine any progress towards sexual equality by maintaining, and indeed intensifying the use of female bodies as sexual objects, despite the sexual power attributed to them. (Hayton par.31)

Although, Rose Red's outfits enable her to be physically more active, she is still often depicted in sexy outfits in order to put the focus rather on her body than on her deeds. Even though she does not behave in a stereotypically feminine way, she is still objectified via her outfits which emphasise her body.

What makes Rose Red's fashion choices particularly interesting is the fact that her style and way of dress shifts completely within the series. Unlike Snow White, who

is mostly constant in her fashion choices, Rose Red undergoes a complete transformation changing from sexy outfits to rather masculine, butch attire. Even before her change in clothes, which made her already quite masculine behaviour even more obvious, she did not act like a feminine woman. After her make-over, her female masculinity or butch-self becomes even more apparent. Since "[b]utch women in their state of being [are] 'pseudo-men' through behaving like men, dressing like men" (Nguyen 669), Rose Red could be seen within this category. Before her transformation, she already did not behave in a very feminine way, which only left her sexy and revealing clothes highlighting her female identity. After her change in clothes this factor is taken away, which leaves her with stereotypically perceived masculine behaviour and clothes. This transition is initiated by the tragic death of Rose Red's love interest Boy Blue, who she grieves for in bed for a long time previous to this change in clothes. After realising that she cannot spend the rest of her life in bed and after talking to her mother who encourages her to change her life, she is initially depicted undressing and showering, and then in a towel and changing into her new clothes which feature a red flannel shirt, jeans and a belt with a knife and gun in a holster (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Eleven* 290-298). She no longer wears revealing, tight clothing or accessories in order to stress her gender but appears rather masculine due to the new style combined with her short hair. This transformation is depicted in several panels and in a sequence, in order to stress her leaving and literally washing off her old life and lifestyle and putting on not only new clothes but also a new attitude. She tries to be 'good' from now on, all linked to the promise she made to herself after Boy Blue's funeral: "When he returns I'm going to spend as long as it takes making it up to him – becoming worthy of him" (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Nine* 321). This quote reveals that she is loathing herself for her lifestyle of being sexually active and sleeping with numerous men, which is strengthened by the change in style. She now leaves that life behind and tries to do good, which clearly indicates the establishment of double standards as far as sexuality is concerned. Rose Red signals, via changing from sexy clothing which could indicate sexual readiness, that she condemns this lifestyle from now on and that it was all just an expression of self-loathing. Additionally, as Barash and Lipton established, sexual willingness and

readiness are not something women will be honoured for by society: "[A] man who is successful with many women is likely to be seen as just that – successful […] a woman known to have 'success' with men is […] likely to be known as a 'slut'" (qtd. in Marks and Fraley, 175).

Apart from trying hard to clear her image of the sexually active woman or 'slutty' image which she no longer wants to embody since a 'good girl' would never embrace her sexuality openly, another explanation for her change in attire could be the increasing stereotypically masculine tasks Rose Red has to fulfill within the rest of the story. As mentioned before, she is frequently depicted carrying and handling weapons, also doing this for official fable community business. Since she was elected the leader of the Farm, she is also frequently involved in official fable business but unlike her passive sister, who only delegates, she actively executes tasks given to her. On one occasion, Rose, together with several of her animal subordinates, returns to the Farm in order to check whether the evil Mr. Dark, who threatens the whole community, has left this world. In order to fulfill this duty accordingly, she is depicted in baggy capri pants, a T-Shirt, trainers and a jacket. Again, she is not wearing any jewellery but instead is carrying a gun and a sword (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Twelve* 166). She is also wearing the same outfit when she, and not Snow White, hunts down Prince Brandish, who killed Snow's husband and imprisoned her, in order to avenge her sister. She is depicted kicking down the door with a gun in her hand and firing this gun at Brandish in the next panel (Willingham, *Fables Issue* #132 16-17). Such tasks would be hard to fulfill in feminine outfits since they can be regarded as restricting, and additionally, she would not be taken seriously if she were to appear that aggressive in feminine dress since aggressiveness is stereotypically associated with masculine behaviour rather than feminine.

When analysing Rose Red's style and fashion choices, one always needs to keep Snow White in mind. Rose can be seen as contrast and opposition to her sister who is steadily depicted in feminine attire throughout the series. Rose on the other hand does not have only one fashion style throughout the series, but changes from very sexy to very masculine. Both types emphasise qualities Snow White does not represent and can be seen as an accentuation of these differences. Additionally, Rose

Red's change and make-over also hints towards sexual double standards between female and male characters within the series. She does not change her style accidentally or over time, but does it drastically in order to make a statement: She is going to leave her 'wicked' – that is to say, promiscuous - days behind her in order to do the right thing and be 'good', to one day be worthy of a man like Boy Blue. Additionally, depicting her in stereotypical masculine attire also enables her to behave more aggressively and actively than female clothes would allow her. Since she is constantly depicted fulfilling rather masculine tasks which often involve violence as well, a rather masculine style appears to be more appropriate than a pretty and feminine dress.

3.6.2 Body language and body image

Just as Rose Red's fashion choices, her body language is also not as consistent as Snow White's. One the one hand, via her outfits or sometimes even the absence of any, but also via her body language and behaviour, Rose Red signals sexual awareness and readiness strongly associated with "Bad Girl Art"; on the other hand, she is also depicted doing tasks strongly associated with masculinity, which also reflects in her body language and behaviour. During the early parts of the series, when we get to know the promiscuous Rose Red, she uses her sexuality and body language in one specific way which needs to be seen as part of the "Bad Girl Art" legacy: "In Bad Girl comics the characters have strong sexuality, of which they are conscious, and which they wield as a form of power" (Hayton par. 37). Within the first story we already see Rose Red using her sexuality as a weapon, not only seducing Prince Charming, Snow White's first husband, but also Bluebeard for financial benefits. Both times she used her sexual energy in order to reach her personal goals. When depicted in bed with Prince Charming, at first glance she does not appear to be powerful since her facial expression reflects surprise, almost fear, and she is depicted holding the sheets up in order to cover herself (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe One* 44). Yet together with the words spoken by Prince Charming "The minx seduced me" (44) and Snow White entering the scene and catching them in bed, this situation is in need of

reinterpretation. Rose Red rather used her sexual energy to get revenge since it appears to be her plan to get caught in bed with Snow White's former husband. More clearly, Rose Red's sexuality and seduction skills are revealed when depicted in bed with Bluebeard within the same story arc (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe One* 56). In this panel, Rose Red is wearing lingerie, more precisely a tight black chemise which is highlighting her breasts and bottom. She is depicted kneeling with slightly spread legs and leaning forward while taking off one of the straps of her chemise. She is leaning towards Bluebeard who is depicted from the side wearing nothing apart from a sheet, biting her lip in order to emphasise her seducing him. Apart from the context provided by the surroundings (a half-naked man, a bed, a bottle of champagne), the image of Rose Red seducing Bluebeard is created via cues related to her body language. Spread legs for example can be seen as one indication: "The positioning of the legs (crossed, close together, held apart) can convey relaxation, tension, modesty, seduction, and so on" (Lewis 166). Additionally, the leaning position of the upper body can also be interpreted as a sign of seduction or intimacy: "Positive involvement behaviour includes a myriad of specific cues, such as direct body orientation, smiling, vocal animation, and forward lean" (Guerrero, Wiedmaier 605).

Within the first story arc alone, Rose Red is depicted twice with two different men engaging in sexual relations. Both times it appears that she was the one seducing and initiating intercourse. At first glance, one could assume that the stereotype of the sexually passive woman is broken since Rose Red is clearly the active part in both scenes. Yet by following the traditions of "Bad Girl Art", an interpretation of such a depiction can be seen as problematic since this intense focus on her body and sexuality can be seen as an attempt to satisfy the gaze of the male audience: "Bad Girls in comics generally reinstate the heteronormative script that says women exist ultimately for the pleasure of the male. Women may become powerful, but in the final analysis they are there for men to enjoy, at the very least as eye candy" (Hayton par. 33). A second characteristic that is instated via following the tradition of "Bad Girl Art" and linked to the satisfaction of the male gaze, which can also be found in the depiction of Rose Red, is the exploitation of her own sexuality as a weapon: "Bad Girl characters were not only conscious of their own sexuality, they deliberately used it as a weapon"

(Hayton par. 34). Rose Red uses her sexuality not only as a form of power but actually as a weapon. She is well aware of the effect she has on men and uses it frequently to get what she wants. In order to get revenge on her sister, she seduces her first husband, which led to a divorce and a complicated relationship between sisters. Likewise, when she and her boyfriend Jack of Fables are in financial trouble, she seduces Bluebeard in order to get some of his money. This image of women being able to use their sexuality as a weapon in order to get what they want is not only creating a rather dubious, unrealistic and problematic image of female sexuality but also normalises it to a certain extent. Since Rose Red is fully aware of her actions and the consequences they entail and acts accordingly, it almost appears to be expected standard behaviour for women.

This depiction of Rose Red's sexuality also leads to yet another difference between her and Snow White. Snow is only depicted naked once throughout the series, not relaxed about the situation, and desperately trying to escape it. Rose Red on the other hand is depicted naked several times, not feeling ashamed about her body. Similarly to Snow White's depiction of her naked body, Rose Red is also covering up her breasts and genital area, but unlike her sister she is depicted relaxed and comfortable. After engaging in intercourse with her short-term husband Sinbad, both are depicted lying in bed covering their lower body with sheets. They both are turned to the side, Rose Red lying in front of Sinbad and turning her back towards him. Her legs are slightly bent and drawn towards her upper body, while one arm is resting on a pillow and the other one is used to cover her breasts and to touch her shoulder. The body language on its own would not suggest comfort and a state of relaxation, but the facial expression appears to be crucial here. She is depicted with closed eyes and a weak smile, giving the impression of slowly falling asleep while being happy and content about the situation (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Nine* 220). Unlike her sister, she does not seek to escape this state and situation but is so relaxed about it that she falls asleep. Similarly, when she is depicted naked without the context of sexuality, she does not appear uncomfortable at all. When revisiting her childhood home in a vision in order to teach Rose Red a lesson, she is depicted in several scenarios and outfits in order to lead her back to the right path and not fight against her sister. One

of these scenarios is her being the leader of the animals and the forest. During this scenario, Rose Red is completely naked but without fear or any sign of uneasiness. On the first time she is depicted naked, she is standing, legs lightly apart, arms stretched slightly behind her body, holding her head upwards and pushing her shoulders somewhat backwards. Her breasts and genital area are covered up by a lion's head and a branch of a tree (Willingham, *Fables Issue* #147 14). This panel alone already emphasises Rose Red's feelings towards being naked. Her legs are slightly spread and firmly on the ground, and the drawn shoulders in particular indicate a strong feeling of power: "Pushing the shoulders back forces the chest out and exposes the torso to potential attack. This posture is thus used when the person does not fear attack and may be used as a taunt to demonstrate power" (Lewis 105). Later on, when depicted walking through the forest (Willingham, *Fables Issue* #147 16) she keeps holding her body up straight, which can be interpreted as a sign of confidence since she does not try to make herself smaller in any way or tries to hide herself (Lewis 163). Clearly Rose Red does not feel any shame or discomfort while being naked in the forest, as suggested by her upright posture and by having no inclination to cover herself up. She does not feel ashamed of her body and sexuality unlike her sister who is depicted clearly uncomfortable when in a similar scenario, namely also being naked in a forest. Yet, even though Rose Red's body image appears to be positive since she is comfortable with her naked body, she still adheres to stereotypical body norms set by society: "Appropriate female embodiment is mandated by the dominant culture's expectations: […] In order to escape social and cultural stigmatization, women's bodies are generally required to be small, delicate, attractive, and slim" (Lockford 28). Additionally, depicting her naked, only covering up the least amount of her body, can be seen as an attempt to satisfy the needs and expectations of the largely male audience.

As already mentioned Rose Red is not only depicted sexy and seductive, but also does not adhere to the stereotype of feminine passivity. She can be regarded as a stereotypical rather masculine butch character due to her toughness, her activeness, her body language and later on also her style: "She wears the wrong clothes, expresses aberrant desires, and is very often associated with clear markers of a

distinctly phallic power. She may carry a gun, smoke a cigar, wear leather, ride a motorbike; she may swagger, strut, boast, flirt with younger and more obviously feminine women" (Halberstam 186). Rose Red's body language is often associated with masculine behaviour rather than with feminine. Not only is she depicted aggressive numerous times, but smaller clues like the way she walks or sits can also be seen as indicators. When in an official meeting at the Farm, she is depicted at first sitting with her legs not crossed or close together which would be stereotypical feminine body language, but with her legs spread apart (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Five* 244). Such a posture on the one hand is only possible thanks to the clothes she is wearing because unlike her sister, who is also at this meeting, she is wearing trousers and a jacket and not a skirt or dress; and on the other hand it can be seen as a sign of confidence and power since more space is required, which also makes her more prominent to the environment (Lewis 171). A similar demonstration of confidence and power can also be noticed when Rose Red is standing and talking to the new Sheriff Beast about his duties. Apart from the fact that she has the upper hand in the conversation, her posture also demonstrates it. Again, she is not behaving in a very feminine but rather a masculine way. She is standing with her legs far apart, one hand on her side and the other raised, her fingers almost pointing at Beast. (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Four* 144). This posture can again be interpreted as a sign of power and confidence: "A wide stance takes up more territory and makes the body appear wider and bigger, a signal of power and dominance. It indicates that the person feels grounded and confident" (Lewis 166).

Another indication which speaks against Rose Red as a feminine but rather butch and masculine character is the fact that she rescues and protects her sister on several occasions. During the rebellion at the farm which Rose Red actively joins, Snow White is captured and about to be executed when Rose Red protects her. Again, the difference between the sisters could not be more evident. Rose Red is depicted standing in front of Snow White, one arm raised in front of her to gain distance between herself and the rebels and one arm stretched in front of Snow White to protect her from any harm. Snow White is depicted in the back with a slightly crouched posture, a sunken head, a sad and scared look, and her arms not raised, which leads to the

assumption that she would not even try to defend herself (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe One* 204). Rose Red also has to rescue her sister from the chambers of Prince Brandish after he takes her as his prisoner. Snow White tries to escape several times but is unsuccessful until her sister rescues her with a magic carpet. Rose Red is the only one showing initiative apart from Snow's failed attempts to free herself. When approaching the window Snow White climbs out of, Rose is depicted standing on her knees, legs spread apart and not closed. In the next panel, she is depicted kneeling with one leg slightly raised and reaching for her sister's hand in order to help her get on the magic carpet (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Thirteen* 329). The open leg position can again be interpreted as a sign of power, activeness and confidence since it makes her appear more prominent. The impression of power and aggression is additionally strengthened by the gun lying behind Rose which can be seen as a common accessory for her. The fact that she aids Snow White on the carpet also highlights her confidence and strength, as well as Snow's passive and mostly intimidated nature.

As described by Halberstam, one other feature of a female butch character is the flirting with other, often feminine, women (186). This notion relates to the common characterisation of butch women as lesbian women. Even though Rose Red is not exclusively depicted as a lesbian, she at least flirts with women and alludes to previous sexual encounters with them, which will be discussed in detail within the next section. Apart from talking about her past relationships with women, during one scene, rather at the end of the series, Rose Red is depicted interacting with Leigh, former Nurse Spratt. Even though Rose Red shows up in Leigh's quarters to kill her, during their conversation which leads up to the act of killing, sexual undertones can be found. Now transformed by the evil Mr. Dark, Leigh holds powers herself which she tries to hide from everybody else. Additionally, she now also adheres to common body stereotypes since Mr. Dark also transformed her into a beautiful, young and thin woman. Only Rose Red appears to look through her glamour, and seeks her out to confront her and ultimately kill her. During the four panels showing this interaction, Rose Red is initially depicted raising her hand towards Leigh's face, who is depicted with her arms on her side and her shoulders pushed back to emphasise her chest and to reduce the space between them. In the second and third panel, Rose Red is

depicted touching Leigh's hair in order to draw her closer, and the last panel depicts Rose whispering something in Leigh's ear (Willingham, *Fables Issue #146* 10). Without the speech bubbles, which focus on the conflict between these women, one could assume that they were lovers. Just the act of drawing Leigh closer and whispering in her ear could be interpreted as a sign of flirting, of attraction or even seduction. During that scene, Rose Red can once again be interpreted as the active and masculine counterpart to the rather feminine Leigh with her long hair, low-cut dress and jewellery. Additionally, as already established when discussing Snow White, Rose Red is the one initiating touch and not Leigh, which is not only associated with masculine behaviour but also establishes power relations (Major 32). In order to strengthen this impression of her being in power and having the upper hand in this situation, Rose Red is wearing her armour and sword, which can be seen as a contrast with Leigh's appearance. Even though Rose Red is not depicted in romantic situations with women often, this scene clearly has the potential to be interpreted in this way, disregarding Rose Red killing Leigh in the end. Again, this would also fit the "Bad Girl Art" stereotype since she uses her sexual energy as a weapon, Leigh not being able to resist her; and the butch stereotype, since she is depicted violent but also flirting with another rather feminine woman.

Since Rose Red is depicted with several men but also talks about being with women in the past, and is at least depicted flirting with them, she can be seen as a character outside the heterosexual norm linked to monogamy that is often established by American media: "On top of drawing clear distinctions between heterosexuality and homosexuality, the American media also tend to characterize the very nature of these categories by linking heterosexuality to monogamy and homosexuality to promiscuity" (Ott, Mack 201). When analysing Rose Red however, there is no clear distinction between hetero- and homosexuality since she interacts with both genders, but there can be a clear tendency towards promiscuity. Again, one needs to also look at Snow White to establish the difference here. Snow does fulfill this stereotype of the monogamous heterosexual feminine female since she does not have sexual relations with anybody apart from her husband. Rose Red on the other hand, even though not distinctly labelled as a lesbian, does not restrict her sexual energy towards just one

person. She is portrayed sleeping with several men and at least flirting with women, which needs to be seen as an opposite and potentially even a negation and rejection of her sister's lifestyle.

Nonetheless, Rose Red is represented as a very active and independent character with stereotypically rather masculine traits. She is still depicted emotional quite often, mostly fighting with her sister, and additionally almost loses everything over the grief for her love interest Boy Blue. Her grieving process lasts over several issues (81-97) where she is depicted lying in bed, crying and neglecting her personal hygiene as well as her duties as a leader of the fable community at the Farm. She is portrayed hiding herself under the sheets with her legs pulled in direction of her torso (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Ten* 103), covering her face either with her hands or with her hair, and crying (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Eleven* 287). All of these postures and facial expressions can be interpreted as a sign of despair and vulnerability, but especially the process of hiding herself and making herself smaller as well as lowering her head and covering her face indicates sadness and vulnerability: "Head lowering is a sign of loss, defeat, shame, and so on. Head down also tends to cause shoulders and upper back to slump, increasing the signs of weakness at that moment" (Lewis 94). During these scenes, Rose Red is depicted vulnerable and heartbroken, which does not fit her usual appearance of the active and strong character usually depicted within this series. Here, another stereotype surfaces which is underlying in both the butch and the sexy bad girl: underneath all that she is still depicted as a stereotypical vulnerable woman, falling apart completely, not controlling her emotions, over a lost love. Masculinity within our society defines itself through the opposite, namely via containing emotions and strength: [D]ominant masculinities have […] learnt to disavow bodies, sexualities and emotional lives as elements of an 'animal' nature that needs to be controlled. […] Through a widespread identification of masculinity with self-control, men learn to relate to emotions as threats to their male identities" (Seidler 95). Rose Red does not show this self-control but rather completely loses it, and gives in to emotions usually associated with femininity, namely delicateness or softness and sensibility. During her grieving period, she gives in to her emotions, completely unveiling the mask of masculine behaviour she puts on, and reveals her true identity.

Under all that toughness, she is still a vulnerable woman unable to control her emotions, even to the extent that her career is at stake since she neglects all her duties over her heartache. All the male characters within the series do grieve for Boy Blue as well, such as Flycatcher, also known as King Ambrose, Boy Blue's best friend (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Nine* 311); but he, unlike Rose Red, returns to his kingdom to continue ruling his lands. Only Rose, as the only female character in a leading position at that time, is depicted in such a weak state, overwhelmed with her emotions and incapable to act rationally. Therefore, one can assume that the stereotypical depiction of women as emotional and irrational surfaces within these scenes.

Since Rose Red does not only embody one stereotype but several, reaching from sexy bad girl to masculine butch, she can be considered a much more complex character than her sister Snow White. Yet, when analysing Rose, it is essential to see her as a contradiction and opposition to her sister. Initially she is depicted as a sexy bad girl, exposing her body and seducing men following the traditions of "Bad Girl Art". Almost simultaneously, her body language and behaviour also include stereotypically masculine attributes since she is depicted active, fighting, protecting and rescuing other characters. These characteristics cannot be found in Snow White since she can be seen as a stereotypical feminine woman. Such a fierce distinction can be considered as vital and most effective to create the impression of difference and to highlight the competition and rivalry between sisters.

3.6.3 Language and interaction between male and female characters

As established in the section about Snow White's language, stereotypes in speech patterns have the potential to express society's, but more importantly the author's own perception, opinions and expectations of how men and women should interact. Stereotypes generally are held by individuals, which means they bear a capacity for variation, even though gender stereotypes (generally and not exclusively in speech) have hardly changed over the last few decades (Aries 163-166). One stereotype or norm, namely Rose Red's open sexuality labelling her as a 'slut', is surfacing several

times throughout the series when analysing Rose Red's speech or other characters talking about her. Her active sex life and the judgement and shame linked to it are the topic of several conversations.

Within the first story, shortly after meeting everybody for the first time, Bigby Wolf already comments on Rose's sexual encounters and general behaviour as an embarrassment for Snow White: "Rose seems to have dedicated her life to doing whatever will cause you the most pain and embarrassment" (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe One* 26). According to this statement, Rose Red does not enjoy her sexuality for her own pleasure but only to spite her sister. This statement hints towards the conception that the only reason a woman enjoys an active sex life would be due to a self-constructive motive and not out of pleasure. Additionally, such a behaviour is not only shameful for herself but also for her immediate environment since Snow White feels embarrassed for her sister. Bigby Wolf is not the only one to judge Rose Red, but even her own sister is disgusted by her lifestyle. When both of them arrive at the Farm, shortly before the rebellion starts, both sisters talk to each other before going to sleep. Rose Red comments on sleeping in one bed with her sister and adds that she slept with girls in one bed before, which appears repulsive to Snow White:

> ROSE: That was in days long past, and I've since grown out of the habit of sleeping with girls – except for once every year or so, as a special Birthday present for Jack.
> SNOW: Please spare me the sordid details of your social life.
> ROSE: Relax, Sis. You're safe from me. Even if I could get beyond the incest thing, you're not my type.
> SNOW: Are you purposely trying to be disgusting now?
> (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe One* 150)

Snow White obviously does not value her sister's life choices and believes them to be disreputable and abnormal. Apart from sleeping with a lot of men, the illusion of Rose Red as a lesbian also appears abnormal to Snow White since she asks Rose Red to stop talking about it. She obviously cannot stand the thought of her sister being with other women on top of sleeping with numerous men, since she exemplifies heteronormative, heterosexual and monogamous standards. Therefore, she not only finds this behaviour repulsive, but she also judges her sister accordingly.

Yet the one person who Rose Red hoped would not judge her according to her sexual behaviour, but ultimately does, is her love interest Boy Blue. Her hopes are crushed during their final conversation, when his true feelings about her and her choices surface and he expresses that he thinks he deserves better. On his deathbed, he rejects Rose Red since she, according to him, does not really love him and is not capable of it since she was broken at a very young age, which could be the only explanation for this self-destructive behaviour:

> ROSE: I made a mistake, but it's not too late. We should be together for whatever time you have left. We should get married right now and –
> BOY: Rose, stop it. You're talking nonsense. […] You gravitate towards whoever adds the most excitement to your life – for good or for bad. You slept with Prince Charming because it was so wrong, and you knew it would destroy your sister. […] You were with Jack for substantially the same reasons […] Do you see the pattern, Rose? When I showed up here again, bravely dying, Sinbad didn't stand a chance. I was once again the most interesting man in the room. […] Except that it's too late, because I've realized that I deserve better. I don't know the particular incident, but somehow you were broken when you were young, in a way that you never recovered. I'm terribly sorry about that, but I can't fix it. I can't fix you. I hope that someday, someone else can. I truly do.
> (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Nine* 306-308)

Boy Blue not only criticises Rose's lifestyle but, just like Snow White or Bigby Wolf, finds it abnormal and beneath him. He judges her and more importantly delivers the only explanation for Rose Red's 'wicked' ways: she must have suffered a terrible tragedy in the past which makes her act up like that now, since the only explanation for an active sex life outside of wedlock and with changing partners can only be a trauma in the past. Rose Red reacts by crying and not saying anything to Boy Blue anymore, leaving without even looking at him, which can be interpreted as defeat or acceptance of the truth that apparently lies behind her deeds. This notion of Rose Red accepting her bad behaviour and feeling the need to change, but first and foremost to punish herself for her evil deeds, consequently surfaces. After Boy Blue's death, she loses all her self-confidence and has no self-esteem. While she is grieving, she gives

in to temptation one last time when Jack of Fables shows up again. She explains her relapse into her old ways in the following way:

> ROSE: You aren't my true love, Jack. You're just the final, most disgusting stage in my fall into the gutter. The fact that I let you back into my bed is the proof that I've hit rock bottom, at long last. Don't you get it, genius? You're the man I deserve, poor you.
> (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Ten* 102)

Not only does Rose herself finally believe that she has fallen and that her previous lifestyle needs to be considered repulsive since she does not uphold standards (which for example her sister Snow White personifies, since she does not engage in intercourse with several men and women), but she also thinks that she does not deserve a hero character such as Boy Blue and has to settle for a fool such as Jack of Fables. Clearly, she thinks only a well-behaved woman on the rightful path deserves a good man, while a 'fallen' woman will have to settle for a disappointing and disastrous boyfriend such as Jack of Fables.

Apart from this vulnerable time, Rose Red's speech cannot always be associated with stereotypically feminine speech patterns. Like her sister, she swears a lot and is often depicted giving orders as well, but unlike Snow White, Rose Red's orders are not combined with passiveness and are not linked to questioning her authority. She usually has no problem establishing her authority or confirming her role as a leader. Stereotypically, qualities associated with leadership are associated with rather masculine traits: "Research shows that men and women behave similarly when they are assigned to roles that require stereotypically masculine behaviour such as assertiveness, dominance, or autocratic leadership" (Aries 69). Since Rose Red already incorporates several stereotypically masculine traits such as aggression or activeness and additionally adapts her style of clothing to it later on in the story, other characters seem not to question her authority and accept her as a leader figure. Even after spending a long time in her bedroom, neglecting all her duties, she quickly regains her authoritative status as the leader of the Farm. Shortly after she reclaimed power, she establishes new rules in order to solve the newly arisen problems threatening the community:

> ROSE: You folks from the old Fabletown administration are welcome to send one – and only one – representative to sit in on our meetings from time to time. But make no mistake about it. Your selection will be an ambassador, not an insider. This isn't Fabletown. It's the Farm. The quicker you learn that, the quicker we'll all begin to get along.
> (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Eleven* 318-319)

During that scene, Rose Red establishes rules on how life at the Farm will be from now on since the old Fabletown has ceased to exist. She defines herself as the person making the rules and does not leave any room for anybody to question her authority, which nobody even seems to be trying. She clearly has no problem expressing leadership, unlike her sister. Snow White does not embody the traits making her suitable for any leadership position, since she is depicted as a stereotypical passive and very feminine woman, which could help to explain why her authority is not accepted as easily and is often questioned by other members of their society.

Rose Red is frequently depicted as a leader and her authority is rarely questioned but especially towards the end of the series, after she has established her own Camelot, her authority and power peak. This becomes apparent on several occasions, one of them being the task to kill Bigby Wolf, after he has returned from the dead as an evil zombie-like figure and is controlled by an evil witch. Several people before her have tried and failed when Rose Red decides to try herself. Her abilities to do so are not questioned by any other authoritative figure, only by her own sister which Rose quickly dismisses: "Sorry, Sis. You may be dressed up like me, but I'm the king of New Camelot, while you're… well, you're not. For once you're the one superfluous to our needs" (Willingham, *Fables Issue* #145 6). Rose Red manages quite quickly and effectively to dismiss her sister's doubt about her abilities and emphasises the fact that she has more power than Snow White since she was made king, not queen, of Camelot. Rose Red is associated with power and was made king since stereotypically power, authority and activeness are associated as masculine traits. In order to support the notion of Rose Red being depicted with stereotypical masculine traits even further, she is also almost exclusively wearing an armour throughout the last few issues of the series.

Rose Red not only establishes her power and authority within the fable community, but also gathers and leads an army right at the end of the series with the purpose to fight her sister. She is the sole leader and is depicted giving them orders:

> ROSE: You died hoping for rescue. Here it is. You died hoping for the power to overcome your tribulations? Here is power. Drink deep. Take as much as you want – you can't empty me […] Now, pitch your tents. Light your campfires. Spread out in your multitudes to surround the yonder hills. That's our objective. Those hills enclose Wolf Valley, which will be ours come the dawn.
> (Willingham, *Fables Issue* #150 57)

During this scene, she is talking to her newly-assembled army, giving them orders and telling them their next steps. She is using direct commands without any form of hedging to establish her authority. This use of language can be regarded as rather masculine, since women also give commands but typically use different strategies such as hedging and other forms to soften directives (Coates 94-96). Clearly, by adopting a rather masculine speech style, Rose Red manages to establish authority which potentially would not have been possible when relying on stereotypically feminine speech patterns. This leads to the assumption that a woman depicted in a field that is stereotypically associated as masculine such as the military, she has to adopt masculine qualities since traits associated with femininity would hinder her success. Not only does she give commands during that scene, she evidently also plans on attacking Wolf Manor, the residence of her sister, when she points out that it will be theirs in the morning. She uses masculine speech patterns and also appears rather hostile and aggressive, which are stereotypically masculine traits.

In defiance of all her initial intentions of starting a war against her sister, in the end it is Rose Red who decides to walk away from confrontation. During one final meeting between her and Snow White, she decides not to start a war but rather keep her distance from her sister:

> ROSE: We don't fight. We disband our forces and leave the mundy world forever. You go wherever in the worlds you want. I'll go in the other direction […] Goodbye Snow. I may not have always loved you. You know more than

most how I drop the ball – a lot. But I always tried. I'll clean up my things and be gone from the mundy world by midmorning. Maybe in a thousand years or so, if things work out, we can try another face-to-face.
(Willingham, *Fables Issue* #150 74-76)

In the end, Rose Red does not go through with the war against her sister and rather decides to keep her distance from her. During the last confrontation between sisters, up until this last conversation, Rose Red is depicted with stereotypically masculine traits, but in the end her true gender identity surfaces. Since women are stereotypically associated with passive and emotional traits and not active or aggressive ones (Aries 164), this final 'confrontation' fits well into a stereotypical depiction of women. Rose Red talks about her feelings for her sister and opts for a peaceful dissolving of the situation rather than fighting or killing her. Such actions as the latter would not have been appropriate for a female character, especially because she would have fought her own sister, and potentially killed her, instead of an evil force threatening her.

Even though Rose Red has no trouble establishing her own authority, she does not truly believe in herself since she is depicted undermining herself even after giving speeches. After founding her own Camelot with herself as the leader and after her welcoming speech, she appears to not truly have faith in her abilities:

ROSE: My god, but that was a crappy-assed speech. I started out with poetry and finished with a bunch of lame housekeeping announcements.
AMBROSE: It wasn't so bad.
WEYLAND: King Ambrose speaks true.
(Willingham, *Fables Issue* #135 14)

This conversation illustrates that she still lacks self-confidence and even though she has experience in a leadership position, she does not truly believe in her own competences. She needs the assurance of other members to give her confirmation that her speech was not as terrible as she thinks herself. Rose Red shows similar behaviour when she meets Hope, who explains to her how important her role as a leader is:

ROSE: But I didn't do much of anything. Once again I was on the sidelines.

> HOPE: Do you really think so, Rose? If you'd not stepped in when you did, and taken charge, the Farm would never have come together in time to evacuate to Haven. The Dark One would have caught all of you there, helpless. You see? Yours was the important link in the chain of events that saved everyone.
> ROSE: Maybe so. But it still doesn't seem like much.
> (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Twelve* 136)

Even though others realise how important her status is and how well her leadership qualities influence her surroundings, she is undermining herself. This self-doubt could be linked to the discrimination against women in leadership positions. Different standards are held against women and men in leadership positions: "A woman presenting objective leadership and competence cues will not receive the same recognition as a man presenting the same evidence. The result is defacto discrimination against women, since becoming a leader depends on social recognition" (Porter, Geis 42). Although society seems to recognise her as a leader, she does not give herself any recognition, which could be interpreted as a deep belief in gender stereotypes and in women not being as competent to rule since leadership is traditionally associated with very masculine behaviour (42). Rose Red is depicted with several traditionally masculine traits such as dominance or activeness, but deep down she still believes that she is unfit for this task, potentially due to her gender and the inferior status it entails when thinking of leadership positions.

Even though Rose Red's career and leadership position are more prominent in her speech than in Snow White's, whose speech after having given birth is mostly concerned with her family and domestic issues, Rose Red's speech also includes family and topics stereotypically associated with female talk such as other people or emotions (Coates 128). Additionally, she is quite often depicted talking about and with her nephews and nieces, especially during the first few years of their lives during which their father Bigby Wolf was absent. After Snow White's arrival at the farm shortly after giving birth, she is even depicted using baby-talk and is referring to herself as "Auntie Rose": "Auntie Rose has got to get a look at her nieces and nephews! […] Oh, look at all of you, you darlings! How you've grown since I saw you! Gootchie Gootchie Goo! Gootchie Gootchie Goo!" (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Four* 99). Rose Red is depicted

talking affectionately to her nieces and nephews, not only calling them "darlings" but also engaging in baby-talk which stereotypically is rather associated with feminine talk than masculine. Even though Rose Red is depicted with rather masculine traits, she behaves in a stereotypically feminine way when talking to children. No man within the series is showing similar behaviour when portrayed around small children. Only the women engage in talk about the children and are depicted praising them, using pet names and baby-talk, and are referring to themselves as either "Mommy" or "Aunt Rosie". Since women are traditionally and stereotypically associated with childcare, their talk also reflects these tasks: "Women talk more about family matters because it is women who have been assigned primary responsibility for family affairs. Their talk reflects their place in society" (Aries 162). Apparently, even the masculine-depicted Rose Red cannot resist her primal instinct to be mothering and taking care of children, which would reflect her true place in society. This depiction of her caring that much for her nieces and nephews despite her masculine traits could be interpreted as a confirmation of the stereotypical and often described natural link between women and childcaring. She is depicted loving and caring, talking affectionately to the children, not hiding away her true self anymore. This behaviour can be interpreted as the belief that any women, whether masculine or feminine, will fall back to traditional feminine speech and mothering behaviour as soon as surrounded with children.

Not only does Rose Red use stereotypically feminine language, but she is also depicted taking care of the children, especially when their father is absent during the first few years of their lives. She is raising the children together with Snow White and is spending a lot of time with them, which is also reflected in her language:

> ROSE: Too bad, Hellions. You all heard the deal: None of you can leave the Farm until you prove you can go a whole month without flying or changing from human form. So far your record is three days.
> DARIEN: But you cheated!
> ROSE: Nope. Testing's part of the deal. You're stuck here with me until you don't automatically wolfout or fly away anytime you're startled.
> (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Six* 69)

During this scene, Rose Red is depicted playing with her nieces and nephews and trying to teach them a lesson. More interestingly, she uses the words "stuck here with me" which indicate which important role she appears to have in the children's lives. This dialogue does not reference their mother Snow White in any way, which hints towards a really close relationship between aunt, nieces and nephews. This close relationship is also observed by other characters within the story. On Christmas Eve, Rose Red and Boy Blue are spending the evening with Snow White and Bigby Wolf. While the other three adults are talking in the kitchen, Rose Red is depicted telling the children a story (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Seven* 126). When the question arises whether Boy Blue and Rose Red should stay for the night, Snow White argues that there is no chance of Rose leaving the children: "We've got scads of room. Besides, just try tearing my sister away from the kids" (125). Even Snow White, who usually is depicted as the caring and mothering type, chooses to stay in the kitchen and to talk with the other adults, while Rose Red seems to prefer the company of the children. Even though she otherwise embodies several stereotypically masculine traits, the importance of family and the bliss of childcare seem to override these traits.

Apart from her family and topics related to childcare, Rose Red is depicted talking about emotions several times, especially when talking to another woman such as her sister Snow White. On several occasions, their complicated relationship surfaces throughout the story. The sisters are often depicted talking about their feelings for each other and their relationship, which relates to the observation that women often center their speech around feelings and other humans (Coates 128). One particular emotional conversation about their feelings for each other can be found rather at the end of the series, when Rose Red decides to give Prince Brandish, who imprisoned Snow and killed Bigby Wolf, a second chance:

> ROSE: So you don't trust me? Really?
> SNOW: I did. I trusted you with my life and the lives of my children. Right up until you had the crazy idea of turning loose the most dangerous threat to my cubs.
> […]
> ROSE: Weirdly enough, this isn't me being typically irresponsible. This is me being responsible for the first time in forever.
> […]

> SNOW: Go through with this and we're through. You have him. I have my children. And the two will never be allowed to coexist.
>   (Willingham, *Fables Issue* #133 10-11)

During this conversation, their true feelings for each other are addressed and Snow White additionally issues an ultimatum which forces Rose to pick sides, and by doing so restarts the fight which almost leads into a war between sisters. Even though both sisters are depicted rather calm during this conversation, neither one is crying or appears to be agitated; their language is still full of disappointment, rejection and hurt feelings, and due to this highly emotional content would probably not have happened between men.

Generally speaking, Rose Red's language is not as typically feminine as her sister's; she appears authoritarian and often aggressive, repeatedly portrayed giving commands and even as a leader of an army. But at second glance, stereotypically feminine language and features can be found. Even though she appears confident, she is also constantly doubting herself and undermining her deeds. Far more problematic are the values and opinions of other members of the fable community and Rose Red herself when it comes to her sexuality. A lot of judgement and rejection are linked to the notion that Rose Red appears to have a rather active sex life with frequently changing partners. Her sister, her love interest and also herself in the end are disgusted by her choices, which leads to a phase of self-doubt and punishment. Additionally, Rose Red is also depicted using baby-talk and affectionate language when interacting with her nieces and nephews, which does not agree with her usual rather masculine speech. Her speech also often includes emotions, especially when talking to her sister Snow White, which is stereotypically associated with feminine speech. All these features of Rose's speech could be interpreted as a sign of femininity hidden away underneath her masculine behaviour, occasionally surfacing and reminding the reader that she is still a woman hidden away under that tough act, masculine speech, and appearance.

3.6.4 Working life

Rose Red, similarly to her sister, is also upholding an important profession within the fable community, but unlike Snow White, Rose is the official leader of the Farm while Snow White is only unofficially running the business of Fabletown as deputy mayor. Rose Red is officially in charge, first of the Farm and later on even becomes king of the newly established Camelot. As mentioned already when discussing her speech patterns, she has no trouble establishing her authority and does it frequently, just like when talking to the mayor of Fabletown:

> MAYOR: And that's the other thing, Rose Red. You took it upon yourself to invite a host of new fables to the fam without consulting anyone? I'm the mayor of Fabletown, and you didn't think to ask me?
> ROSE: And I run the Farm your honor. Aren't our relative positions supposed to be about equal? Do you consult me about every decision you make? No, and that's ok. I don't expect you to. We should each run our own shop. (Willingham, *Fables Issue* #135 3)

As Rose Red reminds the mayor during this conversation, their positions, he as mayor of Fabletown and she as leader of the Farm, can be considered of equal status. She does not let anybody undermine her position within the community and makes it perfectly clear how much power she holds. By upholding equal status to the mayor of Fabletown, she gets the recognition of a leadership position Snow White never got, since she only was running business unofficially as deputy mayor.

She not only holds as much power as the leader of Fabletown, but she also takes the liberty of changing the rules and leading the Farm in a different style from Fabletown. When Boy Blue gets sent to the Farm as a punishment because he broke the law, he was supposed to do hard labour but Rose Red does not follow the instructions from Fabletown and establishes her own rules:

> BOY BLUE: But I'm supposed to be doing hard labor here.
>   [...]
> ROSE: Here's the thing. The folks down at Fabletown have their agenda and I have mine. They want you to work up here and you will – but I'm the one

who decides what needs doing and by whom. You're a bona fide hero, Boy Blue, and not just to the cubs. When the indignitaries from down in the city come up here to poke their noses where they don't belong, we'll put on a show for them. We'll send you out to sweat in the fields for as long as they're here. Otherwise don't worry so much. Now come in and join Snow and me for lunch.
(Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Five* 282)

Rose Red apparently holds enough power to not worry about breaking the rules and to change them according to her own agenda and will. The people from Fabletown obviously do not have any influence on the business of the Farm since Rose Red is not worried that they would get in the way.

At first glance, it appears that Rose Red embodies a successful and powerful woman in a leadership position. She does not only run the Farm, but later on is also made King of the newly established Camelot. Yet when looking at her role in the community, especially in comparison to her sister, one explanation for her position can be found. Rose Red, unlike her sister, did not have children and was only married for a short period of time before getting a divorce. She does not have a family to take care of, which enables her to work. As can be seen when looking at Snow White, as soon as there are children to raise, a woman's place is at home and not at work. During the last century, women often used to work until children were born, and if they returned to work, it was only after the children were starting school or even when they were grown (Simonton 167). This stereotypical link between women, childcare, and domestic life, and the idea of only working until marriage or the first children being born can also be found in *Fables*. Rose Red, who never had a family of her own, can allow herself to work but potentially would have stayed at home if the situation ever changed.

Even though Rose Red does not have a family of her own that she has to take care of and which she should choose over her career, she still gives up power in the end in order to save her sister. Rose Red might not have children whom she chooses over power, but she still chooses family and love for her sister over an even more powerful position than she upholds at that time, and even walks away from the Farm and New Camelot as well. During their last meeting, immediately before the battle was

scheduled, Rose Red surrenders and walks away from her old life in order to save her sister and her nieces and nephews: ROSE: "But my terms of battle are these. We don't fight. We disband our forces and leave the mundy world forever. You go wherever in the worlds you want. I'll go the other direction" (Willingham, *Fables Issue #150* 74). This scene depicts Rose Red's feelings for her sister and her priorities quite clearly: she chooses family over her career and power, since she chooses to walk away from the confrontation. Ultimately, she also sacrifices her career for her family. Interestingly enough, only women are depicted giving up their position for their families, since male characters of the series change careers or are forced to give up their position but never to take care of their children or to protect their families. Even Bigby Wolf, who also leaves his position of sheriff of Fabletown after his children were born, does not do it for his family but due to the fact that Snow White and his children are forced to move to the Farm, where he is not allowed (Willingham, *Fables Deluxe Four* 93). He feels hurt and betrayed and quits out of spite, but not in order to spend more time with his family.

Another explanation for the depiction of Rose Red as a rather active, sometimes aggressive, and powerful leader could be linked to the characterisation of Rose Red as rather masculine. She talks, dresses and acts masculine for most of the storyline, as already described in the previous sections. Since leadership is usually linked to masculine traits such as assertiveness or dominance (Aries 69), Rose Red's leadership would not be as believable if she looked and acted in a feminine way. Additionally, her masculine appearance and behaviour make her appear believable because femininity is still often linked to the domestic sphere: "Masculinity is tied up with men's work, while women's femininity is still tied to her domestic role" (Simonton 167). If Rose Red also appeared feminine, just like her sister Snow White, her career would be at stake and she would probably not be as successful and credible as a leader. Since Rose Red appears and acts masculine, she is seen fit for this role and her authority is hardly ever questioned; her feminine-appearing sister on the other hand is frequently undermined, doubted, and in the end leaves the working sphere, or masculine sphere, for a domestic life.

Rose Red, mostly due to her rather masculine appearance, has no problem establishing and maintaining power and a leadership position. She, unlike her feminine sister, upholds a true position of power, while Snow White only runs business unofficially. Additionally, Rose Red never had children of her own, which potentially could have led to her giving up her career to tend to her family. Even though at first glance Rose Red does not act stereotypically feminine, in the end she sacrifices her career and power for her sister and her nieces and nephews.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, I tried to show that even though *Fables* appears to dismiss gender stereotypes and norms at first glance, they can still be found via a close reading and deeper analysis of the panels and language of this comic book. In order to achieve this, two main characters of the series, namely Snow White and Rose Red, were analysed under the aspects of fashion, body language and body image, language and interaction with other characters, and their work life and status in their community.

Snow White and Rose Red depict two different stereotypes of femininity, which is made visible via their choice of clothing. Snow White appears to be a feminine business woman, often depicted in skirts, dresses or blouses combined with high heels, only rarely depicted wearing trousers. She follows the tradition of "Good Girl Art" since she is portrayed in mildly revealing and sexy clothes which highlight her femininity, and on top of that restrain her movements, which leads to a second trait of femininity, namely passivity and the incapability to act. Additionally, her outfits also reflect the roles she has in society. Initially, she appears as a tough business woman, which changes as soon as she becomes a mother and gives up her job in the city. From that point onwards, her outfits also reflect her motherly values and domestic duties, featuring aprons in order to highlight this transition and this new role. Rose Red, on the other hand, is not depicted in one constant style throughout the series but rather embodies several stereotypes. First, she is wearing ultra-sexualised outfits, following the tradition of "Bad Girl Art" since she is sexually explicit and rather active which also needs to be reflected in her style. After a while, her outfits change drastically towards a rather masculine, even butch attire. She is not depicted particularly feminine, which could be linked to the fact that she, unlike her sister, does not have a family of her own and can be regarded as the successful business woman. Her masculine style enables her to be more active and powerful since those traits are stereotypically associated with masculinity and not femininity.

When looking at the body language of both characters, these stereotypes of ultra-feminine, passive Snow White, and active, masculine, even butch Rose Red

surface again. Snow White is often depicted emotional, crying or even hysterical, which are all associated with stereotypical feminine behaviour. She is also depicted leaning against other male characters for support, and hardly ever becomes active in a fight or battle, often just witnessing from afar. These qualities can also be associated with stereotypical feminine practices on the one side and "Good Girl Art" on the other side, since both highlight passivity and weakness. Rose Red, as already mentioned, is on the one hand depicted sexually active and seducing men, which lets her appear as a character following the traditions of "Bad Girl Art" since she is sexually explicit and active and is depicted using her sexuality as a weapon to achieve her goals. Additionally, she is also portrayed active, participating in battles, using weapons, and flirting with other women, which suggests that she can be regarded as a stereotypical butch character. Both characters can also be regarded under the light of double standards when it comes to their sexuality. Snow White appears to be monogamous and uncomfortable when depicted naked, and also is embarrassed when caught being sexually active. Rose Red is not ashamed of her sexuality but ultimately disgusts several characters with her active sex life and bisexuality, which ultimately leads to her changing completely and leaving her bad life-choices behind. Both characters, even though in different ways, hint towards the assumption that women are not supposed to be sexually active, or at least just in a monogamous relationship which should not be apparent to others. Also, both women adhere to stereotypical body images since both women are depicted thin, busty with long legs and a small waist.

As far as language is concerned, both women show untypical features such as swearing and taboo words, and also straightforward commands which traditionally would not be associated with feminine language. Yet, when looking at Snow White in more detail, one can conclude that she uses these features when surrounded with men or in order to establish her often questioned authority. Later on, as soon as her children are born, her language changes and includes domestic topics and her family more often. She is also depicted using pet names and affectionate language when she is surrounded with her children. Rose Red, due to her masculine butch depiction, also uses untypical language features, but since she herself is portrayed rather masculine these features do not seem out of place. Even though her language and

appearance can be linked to masculinity, she is still depicted very affectionate towards her nieces and nephews which can lead to the assumption that, deep down under all that masculine behaviour, she is still a feminine woman.

When discussing Snow White's and Rose Red's work life and position within their society, they initially seem to have equal positions. Snow White is depicted as the unofficial leader of Fabletown while her sister is the leader of the Farm. But at second glance, one can establish differences. Snow White is only unofficially in charge since the mayor of Fabletown is still a man. Therefore, she shows more resemblance with a secretary or an assistant than with a woman in a leadership position. What is more, as soon as she has her children, she gives up work and is forced to move to the Farm. Even though she is not willingly giving up her old position at first, she is not depicted seeking another occupation but rather focusing fully on her children and later also on her husband. She appears fully fulfilled with this task, not missing her old lifestyle, which leads to the assumption that a stereotypical depiction of family with clear gender roles is advocated within this series. Rose Red does hold a leadership position since she is the official leader of the Farm and later on also of Camelot. Again, since leadership qualities such as activeness and dominance are stereotypically associated with masculinity, Rose Red through her masculine behaviour and appearance is not seen unfit for this position. However, since she does not have children of her own, she is not forced to choose between work and family, as combining both seems impossible in this series.

Relating to these findings, I conclude that gender stereotypes and norms are still apparent in today's mainstream comic book series *Fables*. Women are still depicted in a stereotypical way and adhere to norms concerning their bodies and behaviour.

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6. Index

7. Appendix

German Abstract/Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Diese vorliegende Arbeit beschäftigt sich mit der Comicbuchreihe *Fables* und ihren zwei weiblichen Hauptcharakteren. Diese Comicbuchreihe handelt von Märchencharakteren, die in unserer Welt gestrandet sind und nun in einer Parallelgesellschaft unter Menschen leben. Das Ziel dieser Diplomarbeit ist es, Genderstereotype, die in diesem Comic vorkommen, aufzuzeigen und zu bestätigen, dass solche Stereotype trotz Öffnung des Mediums für ein breiteres Publikum und nicht mehr exklusiv männliche Leser, vorzufinden sind.

Der erste Teil der Arbeit ist dem theoretischen Gerüst gewidmet, auf welches sich die spätere Analyse der Charaktere bezieht. Nach einer Einführung in die potentiellen Gründe, warum Comics bis heute kaum als Forschungsgebiet berücksichtig werden, und einer Begriffsdefinition des Mediums inklusive wichtiger Eigenschaften werden Darstellungen von Frauen in unterschiedlichen Comicgenres besprochen. Gerade diese Unterschiede und Tendenzen in der Darstellung von weiblichen Charakteren stellen eine wichtige Hilfestellung für die spätere Analyse dar. Des Weiteren wird auf den Unterschied zwischen Comicromanen (graphic novels) und herkömmlichen Comics und deren wichtigste Eigenschaften eingegangen, um die untersuchte Comicbuchreihe *Fables* in den richtigen Kontext einbetten zu können.

Der zweite Teil der Arbeit ist der Analyse der zwei weiblichen Hauptcharaktere des Comics gewidmet: Snow White und Rose Red. Um zugrundeliegende Genderstereotype aufzuzeigen werden jeweils vier Gebiete, nämlich Kleidung und Mode, Körper und Körpersprache, Sprache und Interaktion mit anderen Charakteren und Beruf untersucht. Um dies durchführen zu können, wurden sowohl Text als auch Bilder des Comics für die Analyse herangezogen. Trotzdem beide Charaktere sehr unterschiedlichen Stereotypen entsprechen, Snow White wird als besonders femininer und weiblicher Typ definiert, während ihre Schwester eher maskulin dargestellt wird, sind Parallelen und ähnliche zugrundeliegende Stereotype von Weiblichkeit und Geschlecht auffindbar.

English Abstract

The following paper is analysing two female characters of the comic book series *Fables* in order to proof that, even though the medium has changed drastically over the years, gender stereotypes can still be found in main stream comics today.

The first part of the paper is introducing key concepts, which will aid the later analysis of the female characters. After naming several reasons for the dismissal of comics as a field of academic research, key characteristics and a definition of the medium are given. Additionally, the differences in depictions of female characters in mainstream and underground comics will be given in order to aid the later analysis.

The second part of the thesis includes the analysis of the two female characters Snow White and Rose Red. Even though both characters appear to represent different gender stereotypes, Snow White can be regarded as very feminine, while Rose Red can be defined as a masculine, butch character, parallels, and similar underlying stereotypes of femininity and gender are detectable. In order to find gender stereotypes four different areas will be considered: fashion, body image and body language, language and interaction between other characters and their working life. Both, panels and language will be analysed in order to accomplish this task.