

# **The Fairy Tale Inspirations of Andrzej Sapkowski's *The Witcher* Short Stories**

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## Abstract

This study looks at Andrzej Sapkowski's *The Witcher* short stories, and how they are inspired by fairy tales. It focuses on categorizing different kinds of fairy tale inspirations in the stories, as well as analysing if the stories themselves are fairy tales. The short stories looked at here are *A Grain of Truth*, *A Little Sacrifice*, and *The Last Wish*. The methodology behind the study is semiotics, and the study also uses Jones' (2002) definition of fairy tales as an important resource. The three stories looked at here show different levels of inspiration by fairy tales, and two of them seem to be fairy tales while *The Last Wish* is more clearly a fantasy story with some fairy-tale elements.

Keywords: fairy tale, semiotics, short story, fantasy,

## Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	1
1. Introduction .....	2
2. Research Material .....	3
2.1. A Grain of Truth.....	3
2.2. The Last Wish .....	4
2.3. A Little Sacrifice .....	5
2.4. Additional Material .....	6
3. Theory .....	7
3.1 Semiotic Approach .....	7
3.2 Other Theoretical Background .....	7
4. Analysis .....	10
4.1 How the stories are inspired by fairy tales.....	10
4.1.1 The stories as rewrites of classic fairy tales. ....	10
4.1.2. Characters aware of the original fairy tale.....	12
4.2 Arguments for the stories being fairy tales.....	15
5. Conclusion.....	18

## 1. Introduction

In this thesis, I will look at how *The Witcher* short stories by Andrzej Sapkowski use fairy tales as inspiration and analyze the different ways that the short stories do this. *The Witcher* books, while written in Polish in the 1990s, have only recently gained popularity on a wider scale due to them having been translated to English as well as a popular video game series having been based on the books. There is also a Netflix series in production at the time of the writing of this essay, so *The Witcher* series is a very relevant topic right now. There also seems to be quite little study on the series in English, so there is a lot left to study about the topic. A semiotic approach, as presented by Chandler (2004) in his book *Semiotics the Basics*, is used as the basis of the analysis in this thesis.

There seem to be a few different ways that *The Witcher* short stories use fairy tales as their inspiration. Some of the short stories seem to be rewritings of classic fairy tales, belonging to the fairy-tale genre themselves. Others are simply inspired by fairy tales without acting as rewritings of the originals, and instead make the characters aware of the original fairy tale, often making fun of some of the elements of those tales. There are also tales that do not seem to be fairy tales at all, despite being inspired by fairy tales by borrowing some of their elements or having the characters acknowledge the original stories. I will analyze the differences between three short stories from the series, *The Last Wish* and *A Grain of Truth* from the book *The Last Wish*, and *A Little Sacrifice* from *Sword of Destiny*. These stories portray the different inspiration styles clearly, as well as help me argue that it may be that the intertextuality of the short story between other short stories and novels in the series is what dictates the different kind of fairy-tale inspiration.

The research questions in this essay are: How *The Witcher* short stories use fairy tales as an inspiration? And are *The Witcher* short stories fairy tales themselves?

## 2. Research Material

The research material I use in this thesis consists of short stories from the two *The Witcher* series short-story collections, *The Last Wish* and *Sword of Destiny*, by Andrzej Sapkowski. *Sword of Destiny* was originally published in Polish in 1992, and later translated to English in 2015. *The Last Wish* was published in Polish in 1993, and the English translation came out in 2007. The stories are *A Grain of Truth* (*The Last Wish* p. 40-65), *The Last Wish* (*The Last Wish* p. 194-243) and *A Little Sacrifice* (*Sword of Destiny* p. 225-304). Some of these stories have also been previously published in various other places, such as Sapkowski's book *Wiedźmin*, but these sources are now out of print and were not available in English. These are not the only stories in the two short-story collections in the series that portray clear signs of fairy tales as inspiration or even belonging to the fairy-tale genre, but these are some of the clearer examples of the different ways the stories use fairy tales as their basis.

*The Witcher* series follows a man named Geralt of Rivia, who is a witcher by trade. Witchers are genetically mutated people who slay monsters for living. Some of the stories are little pieces of Geralt's personal history, while others act as a sort of epilogue to the series of novels known as *The Witcher Saga* that were written after the two short-story collections. The stories looked at here lean more towards being small looks into Geralt's life without larger significance to the later novels. However, it is not to say that the short stories do not have any connection to the bigger story, and *The Last Wish* serves as a first introduction to one of the series' more important characters, Yennefer.

### 2.1. A Grain of Truth

*A Grain of Truth* follows Geralt as he goes to a house owned by man-turned-beast Nivellen, who tells Geralt his life story of being cursed to be in the form of a beast. Nivellen's curse can only be broken by some form of true love, but despite him having had multiple merchants' daughters reside with him in his house, he has not been able to break the curse. Contemporarily however, Nivellen has not had more merchants' daughters to come live with him as he has found a new lady friend elsewhere. Geralt thinks that this new lady friend may be a *rusalka*, a water nymph, but decides to leave the two creatures alone. As he is riding away on his horse, the person Nivellen

was living with, Vereena, appears. It becomes clear to Geralt that Vereena is a *bruxa*, a type of female vampire in the world of *The Witcher*. During the fight Nivellen joins Geralt's side and helps him slay the vampire attacking him. However, on the moment of her death, Vereena proclaims her love to Nivellen, which breaks Nivellen's curse. The story ends with Geralt contemplating the nature of fairy tales and love:

"There is a grain of truth in every fairy tale," said the witcher quietly. "Love and blood. They both possess a mighty power. Wizards and learned men have been racking their brains over this for years, but they haven't arrived at anything, except that-  
 "Except what, Geralt?"  
 "It has to be true love." (66).

## 2.2. The Last Wish

*The Last Wish* tells the story of how one of Geralt's close friends, the bard Dandelion, finds a jar emblazoned with a wizard's sigil. He concludes that the jar must contain a djinn, and is convinced that should he open it, he will be granted three wishes. A djinn, also called a genie, is a wish-granting spirit creature that appears in a lot of Arabian and Islamic mythology. Despite Geralt's warnings, he opens the jar and releases the djinn. However, the djinn is not benevolent and attacks Dandelion and Geralt. Dandelion is seriously wounded in the throat before the witcher is able to banish the djinn. The rest of the story centers around Geralt's attempts to find a wizard or sorcerer to cure Dandelion. They find a sorceress called Yennefer in a nearby town and is able to persuade the sorceress to help him. However, after curing Dandelion, the sorceress uses her magic against the witcher. After this, Geralt finds himself waking up in a cell with thieves. The sorceress Yennefer had used her magic to cause Geralt to go on a rampage through the town as payment for her services. Later, the witcher is brought to a questioning by the town's mayor, and is saved by Dandelion who, by the command of Yennefer, comes to prove the witcher's story of being charmed. After this, everyone in the room notices that Yennefer has drawn the djinn from before into town and is attempting to capture it. Geralt uses the portal that Dandelion came through to go try and save the sorceress. During the fight against the djinn, Geralt realizes that he is the one whose wishes the djinn has been granting, and he still has one wish left. Thus, he decides to use this wish to set the djinn free, and the djinn leaves, destroying the house Geralt and Yennefer were fighting it in. The last wish is never directly shown to the reader, but the story ends with

Geralt and Yennefer intimate with each other in the rubble of the building, despite having been quite antagonistic towards each other just moments before.

### **2.3. A Little Sacrifice**

The story of *A Little Sacrifice* follows the protagonist Geralt as he is hired to act as a translator between a local duke and a mermaid that the duke has fallen in love with. The duke asks the mermaid to agree to being turned into a woman, while the mermaid counters with asking the duke to become a merman. Neither party is willing to make the change, and so the duke gets angry towards Geralt because the duke thinks Geralt's translation is to blame.

After his translation job, Geralt joins his friend Dandelion at a wedding where Dandelion is performing as a bard. There the two meet Dandelion's old friend Essi, a female bard. Geralt and Essi have a brief romantically charged encounter but Geralt ends up ruining it by bringing up his now ex-girlfriend Yennefer and accusing Essi of only being interested in him because of his different appearance due to him being a witcher. During the wedding the duke from before approaches Geralt with another job, this time investigating a killing of pearl divers by sea monsters. Geralt agrees due to his and Dandelion's lack of money. In the next morning Geralt and Essi investigate the place where the pearl divers were killed from land, but they are unable to venture out to the sea as everyone fears the unknown monster. Geralt decides to come back and walk on the ocean floor during low tide, and Dandelion comes with him in hopes of finding a pearl to give Essi as a birthday gift. While they are investigating the place of the killings, Geralt and Dandelion find a staircase that goes deep under the sea. Dandelion thinks that it leads to the legendary "Ys-beneath-the-sea" but Geralt is more skeptical. Then the pair is attacked by a group of marine humanoid creatures using weapons. Geralt kills a few of them but would have been killed if the Mermaid from before didn't come to his aid. Geralt meets Essi again after the incident, and the two put away their former differences and begin a vague romantic relationship.

Nearing the end of the story Geralt goes to meet the duke with Dandelion and Essi. He informs the duke that he will not help in killing an intelligent race that lives below the sea, and advises the

duke to keep his pearl divers away from the spot they found the staircase under the sea. As Geralt is about to leave the duke's appointment, the mermaid the duke was infatuated with arrives, having been turned into a woman. She also is able to speak the same language as the duke now, and she notes that someone always has to make little sacrifices for love. At the end of the story Geralt, Essi and Dandelion leave the duke's village together and travel together for a while, during which Essi and Geralt are very close. However, at the end it is revealed to the reader that the two would soon separate and Geralt would go back to his ex-girlfriend Yennefer, while Essi would die from an epidemic only four years later.

#### **2.4. Additional Material**

In addition to *The Witcher* short stories, classic fairy tales are used to identify the intertextual references between them and *The Witcher* short stories. These stories are *Aladdin*, *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Little Mermaid*. *Beauty and the Beast* and *Aladdin* were found in Andrew Lang's *The Blue Fairy Book*, and *The Little Mermaid* is a translation by Jean Hersholt retrieved from the H.C. Andersen Centre of Denmark's website. It is considered one of the most commonly retold versions, as it is one of the oldest English translations of both of the stories, being from 1889. It is important to find relatively original versions of the stories, as contemporary versions of fairy tales such as those by Disney often leave the less child-friendly aspects out. Thus, there may be some differences or similarities between *The Witcher* short stories and the fairy tales that might be missed if a newer version was used. It is possible that Sapkowski may be more familiar with some contemporary version of the story than he is with the original, but as it is impossible to know if this is the case it is better to use the original versions.



### 3. Theory

#### 3.1 Semiotic Approach

As stated previously, I base my analysis on the theory of semiotics as described by Daniel Chandler in *Semiotics: The Basics*. Chandler shortens the definition of semiotics simply to “the study of signs” (1). What he means by this is that semiotics studies words, images, sounds, gestures and objects and the relations of these “as part of a semiotic ‘sign-systems’” (2). In doing so, the study concentrates on how meanings are made, and how those contribute to how reality is represented (ibid.). Semiotics, however, is not a unified field, but rather a collection of similar ideas, and even the most basic semiotic terms may have differing definitions among different semioticians (Chandler, 5).

The semiotic approach is relevant to this study as by identifying the signs present in fairy tales, the argument can be made that the short stories looked at here portray some elements of fairy tales. In addition to the semiotic approach, Chandler also introduces the concept of intertextuality. A weakness in past semiotic studies has been the lack of intertextuality (Chandler 194). According to Chandler, for a semiotic study it is useful to define intertextuality to not only refer to the influences of writers on each other, but also to place the text in question in relation to any works that came before it, as “every text and every reading depends on prior codes” (Chandler 194-195). Chandler states that, in doing so, intertextuality that may not be directly from the writer being inspired by a particular work is also taken into account (195). This study is especially interested in the intertextuality between *The Witcher* short stories and the fairy-tale genre, as well as the individual fairy tales the stories seem to be inspired by.

#### 3.2 Other Theoretical Background

In addition to the methodology and theory behind the study, it is important for the study to have a clear definition of a fairy tale and the aspects that make the genre of fairy tales. While fairy tales

evolved from the tales of folklore thousands of years ago, the concept of a fairy tale is rather new, only having become commonplace in English in the 1750s (Zipes 1,2). Before this, fairy tales were simply known as stories (Zipes 2). The term was introduced when many female writers started featuring fairies very prominently in their stories in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries (Zipes 2). This name became the norm for these tales of morality, despite many of the tales not featuring fairies like the original fairy tales did (ibid.). Nowadays, fairy tales are a relatively cross-cultural phenomenon with the same tale having different versions across different cultures around the globe (Jones 2).

The thematic core of fairy tales is, however, quite clear and consistent. Fairy tales attempt to address some problem or issue that their reader may be experiencing in their lives (Jones 2). According to Jones, "These issues can be roughly divided into three major categories of human experience: the psychology of the individual, the sociology of the community, and the cosmology of the universe." (2). The psychology of the individual refers to things like jealousy, oppression, or rejection (Jones 2). The sociology of the community refers to issues such as marriage, different social structures and roles regarding gender or age, as well as things like moral virtue (ibid.). Finally, the cosmology of the universe refers to the fairy tales guiding the reader with the spiritual side of being (Jones 2). In addition to being the definitional characteristic of fairy tales, the purpose of fairy tales seems to be helping the reader understand these issues and to cope with them in their own lives (Jones 2). Jones also divided fairy tales roughly into three groups according to the target audience of the fairy tale: fairy tales for young children, fairy tales for adolescents, and fairy tales for adults (2). The tales can be divided into these groups by the age of the protagonist, and the nature of the problem in the tale and the resolution offered for that problem (Jones 2).

Finally, some basic elements in addition to the thematic core can be found in most fairy tales:

"the incorporation of magic or fantasy in such a manner that its epistemological and ontological validity is affirmed; the incorporation of a quest, adventure, or problem, which entails interaction with the unknown or magical realm; the successful completion of that quest or problem, in such a manner that the moral propriety of the universe is affirmed; the incorporation of an ordinary protagonist with whom we are to identify unambiguously and

who is typically a young person; [and] the depiction of themes of basic interest to age-differentiated audiences about typical concerns of their lives”(Jones 2).

These elements are perhaps the most unambiguous and easiest to argue for when trying to argue for *The Witcher* short stories being fairy tales.

The inspirations of fairy tales on Sapkowski’s work are immediately apparent. The genre of fantasy literature owes much of its existence to fairy tales and folklore, and for example many contemporary works draw on J.R.R. Tolkien’s work which is heavily based on fairy tales and folklore (Pask 127-130; Jones 3). Jones went as far as calling Tolkien’s works as a whole fairy tales, while Pask considered them as being inspired by fairy tales (ibid.). Many of the elements of fairy tales such as the existence of magic as well as many of the creatures that appear in them also appear in fantasy literature (Pask 127-130). All in all, the divide between the genres of fantasy and fairy tale seems to be vague. Most fairy tales would likely also fill the requirements for being fantasy, however, not all fantasy would be considered a fairy tale according to the definition and restrictions introduced previously

## 4. Analysis

### 4.1 How the stories are inspired by fairy tales

*The Witcher* short stories seem to use fairy tales as an inspiration in two different ways. Some of the stories appear to be rewrites of the original fairy tales they use as inspiration. Meanwhile, some of the stories do not follow the original's story as closely, instead using the original story's elements as loose inspiration and having the characters be aware of the original story but regarding it either as history or as a fairy tale in their world as well. Thus, the stories can be divided into two categories by these two ways of inspiration. However, most of the stories lean heavily on one of the ways of inspiration, but still show a little bit of the other as well. Thus, while the divide can be made, every short story can be looked at from both angles.

#### 4.1.1 *The stories as rewrites of classic fairy tales.*

*A Grain of Truth* has a more direct inspiration than just what the genre of fantasy as a whole owes to fairy tales. By reading the story or even the brief plot description provided previously, it becomes clear that the story is based on the classic fairy tale *Beauty and the Beast*. Both stories include a man that has been cursed to become a beast, the house the beast lives in being enchanted in some way, and a merchant's daughter that lives with the beast. The story also follows the same steps: The man is cursed due to some wrong that he commits, he spends time living alone in his enchanted house, a woman who genuinely loves him comes along, and in the end, he is saved through the love of this woman.

Looking deeper into the cursed man, there are more similarities to the fairy tale. In both stories, the man has committed some wrong that causes them to be cursed, and in both it is the love of a maiden that can free the man from this curse. However, in the original fairy tale it is clear to the beast from the start that true love can break the curse, whereas in *A Grain of Truth* it is only revealed to the beast at the end of the story. The beast in *A Grain of Truth* is also interestingly

content with his current form and way of life, stating that he has gotten used to being confined to his home. In the original fairy tale, the beast actively wishes to end his curse. It is also interesting that in the original the beast is nearly dead when the beauty arrives and breaks the curse on him, whereas in the short story it is the beauty, now revealed as a vampire, who is dying when the beast becomes cured. In the original they both live happily ever after, but in Sapkowski's version the beauty does indeed die, leaving the former beast now turned man having achieved his human form but still feeling unhappy.

While the short story does stray from the original in various ways, but the base structure of the plot is the same. The story is rewriting of the classic fairy tale; a contemporary version set in the world of *The Witcher* from the point of view of Geralt of Rivia, but still the same tale with the same moral lesson. The moral lesson in both stories is that true love is something rare and valuable. The story does differ in some respects, most notably in the fact that in the original the beast did not have multiple different women visit him before finding the one to lift his curse, nor did the "beauty" die in the original or be revealed as a vampire. However, despite these differences due to the core of the story being the same, the story moves from being simply heavily inspired to be a retelling of the original.

*The Last Wish* also shows clear inspiration from a classic fairy tale, *Aladdin*. However, it does not have as strong a connection to *Aladdin's* story as *A Grain of Truth* shows to its inspiration. In *The Last Wish*, the characters do not get their djinn or genie from a mysterious cave, nor is there a clear antagonist to the story like the sorcerer in *Aladdin*. While both stories include a sorcerer, in *The Last Wish* this sorcerer is closer to the role of the princess in *Aladdin* than to the role of the sorcerer. In fact, apart from a few character roles in the stories, the stories follow a completely different structure with barely any similarities. The few similarities that exist, such as the existence of a djinn, or the female character both aiding and harming the protagonist, point more strongly towards simply being inspired by some elements in the fairy tale. This will be further investigated in the next chapter.

As stated before, *A Little Sacrifice* is the most ambiguous of the three short stories looked at here. It portrays many of the elements found in both categories of fairy tale inspirations identified here. As for being a rewriting of a classic fairy tale, it does not really act as a rewriting but rather borrows very heavily from its inspiration. It is clear that it was inspired by the classic story *The Little Mermaid*, as both stories feature a relationship between a mermaid and a man of high birth: the duke in *A Little Sacrifice*, and the prince in *The Little Mermaid*. Even the name of the story seems to borrow from the fairy tale that inspired it. Both stories have the mermaid save someone, although in *The Witcher* short story it is Geralt who the mermaid saves, and not the duke, or prince, like in the original. Interestingly, *A Little Sacrifice* seems to take *The Little Mermaid's* story and rearrange the story beats, as in *The Little Mermaid* the saving of the prince happens near the beginning, whereas in *A Little Sacrifice* the act happens closer to the end of the story. The happy ending may also be considered borrowed from *The Little Mermaid*, although in the original the mermaid and the prince did not end up together. This has been changed for some contemporary versions, so it is possible that Sapkowski simply used them as his inspiration. Some other aspects of the story, such as there being a wedding, or the common theme in both stories that love requires some sacrifice, are also present both in the short story and in the fairy tale.

In a way, while *A Little Sacrifice* does tell a twist of the tale of *The Little Mermaid*, it is much more focused on telling its own tale about Geralt's relationship with Essi. The mermaid's and the duke's story is more of a background for Geralt's and Essi's relationship to develop, and the story takes much more time exploring their relationship than it does showing the mermaid's and duke's. Thus, the story can't be considered to be a rewriting of the story, although in a way it does retell the story as a part of the larger narrative.

#### 4.1.2. Characters aware of the original fairy tale

*The Last Wish* shows a different kind of inspiration of fairy tales. It portrays the elements of magic and an adventure or a quest to be completed that fairy tales include, but as stated earlier, instead of being a retelling of another fairy tale like *A Grain of Truth*, *The Last Wish* has its own storyline that I did not find any connections with to any classic fairy tale. However, the story portrays the characters having knowledge of fairy tales similar to those we have in real life. In the story,

Geralt's friend Dandelion seems to be familiar with the story of *Aladdin*, or at least some similar story. This is how he immediately figures that the old amphora he fishes up might contain a djinn and that a djinn owes three wishes to the person who releases it. However, rather than being benevolent like the genie or djinn in *Aladdin*, the djinn in *The Last Wish* attacks Geralt and Dandelion, and Geralt must stave it off. The rest of the story also follows a different kind of path to that of the story of the original fairy tale.

There are some similarities in the story, however. Firstly, in *Aladdin* the princess that the protagonist marries both gets him into trouble and helps him get out of it. A similar role is played by the character of Yennefer, although she first helps heal Dandelion, and then later gets Geralt and Dandelion into trouble again. The djinn also does really owe three wishes to Geralt, although the wishes being limited to three does not appear in all versions of the fairy tale *Aladdin*. Both stories also end with the protagonist getting the benefit of the wishes, in both cases a woman's heart. However, there are many things in between these mentioned occasions where the short story and the classic fairy tale do not match up. Instead, the stories are almost completely different, and rather than calling the story a retelling it is more credible to say that it has taken some inspiration from *Aladdin*.

In the tale, in addition to many of the characters being familiar with the existence of djinns and the notion of three wishes, there are other ways it shows familiarity to the fairy tale *Aladdin*. Geralt tells Dandelion not to touch the amphora because he considers the notion of an all-powerful djinn being benevolent a stupid idea. This seems to be parodying *Aladdin* where the main character uses multiple djinns to achieve his goals with the powerful djinns simply following his instructions. Interestingly, the notion of djinns or genies only granting three wishes seems to have appeared sometime after the earlier version of *Aladdin* that I found, as it is present in both *The Last Wish* and in contemporary depictions of *Aladdin*, such as the Disney movie. *The Last Wish* is quite connected to the rest of *The Witcher* series, being the story that introduces Geralt's main love interest, Yennefer, and sets up the plot point that Geralt and Yennefer are fated to be together through the djinn's magic. Thus, unlike the two other stories, *The Last Wish* ties itself to the larger story in the short stories, as well as *The Witcher* novels.

In *A Grain of Truth*, the protagonist Geralt seems to be somewhat familiar with the concept of a cursed man whose curse can only be broken by true love. This shows that in *A Grain of Truth*, despite it being a rewrite of the *Beauty and the Beast* story, the characters in this universe are familiar with similar fairy tales as the reader, or that the kinds of events from fairy tales are reality to these characters. In this case, the tales are revealed to be true, however the way the protagonist speaks of them at times makes it seem like he is somewhat unclear whether it is true or simply a tale. Thus, even though *A Grain of Truth* seems more like a rewrite of the fairy tale inspiring it, it also shows some signs of the characters being aware of *Beauty and the Beast* and the characters considering such tales as fiction rather than reality. It is important to note that *A Grain of Truth* has no intertextual links to other *The Witcher* series short stories or novels, apart from sharing Geralt as its protagonist and having the same setting. The events or characters from *A Grain of Truth* are not mentioned anywhere else in the series.

*A Little Sacrifice* also portrays some elements of the characters being aware of the original fairy tale that the story is inspired by, but it does not seem to be the main way the story draws its inspiration from the story. While the characters do not seem to know the tale, the character Dandelion muses about writing a ballad on the duke's and the mermaid's relationship.

“In my ballad the mermaid will sacrifice herself for the duke, she'll exchange her fishtail for slender legs, but will pay for it by losing her voice. The duke will betray her, abandon her, and then she'll perish from grief, and turn into foam, when the first rays of sunshine . . .” (230).

This happens after the mermaid has rebuked the duke's suggestion of changing her tail into a leg, and Dandelion's suggestion for his ballad's story follows the original *The Little Mermaid* tale, not what actually happened with the mermaid and the duke in this story. However, Geralt mentions to Dandelion that nobody would believe such a tale, to which the bard answers that a ballad's point is not to be believable. While the characters do not mention that a tale like this exists, they are clearly aware with stories like it, and it seems like the writer wanted to poke fun at the original text that inspired his story. Interestingly, at the end of the story the mermaid actually does



exchange her tail for legs for the duke, however the duke and the mermaid are shown to move on happily, which does not match the original story. Dandelion and Geralt are actually quite surprised that the mermaid acted like in Dandelion's ballad.

#### **4.2 Arguments for the stories being fairy tales**

The short stories studied here portray various elements of theme that suggest that their genre could be considered to be fairy tale. *A Grain of Truth* has a strong theme of not judging people by their appearances, due to Nivellen being beastly in form but rather sophisticated and pleasant when it comes to his personality. The story also teaches a lesson about love; Nivellen had multiple relationships with merchants' daughters without his curse having been broken, and in the end the curse was broken by a vampire's love. Thus, the story teaches that love is powerful, and that love can be experienced by anyone, portrayed by the improbable love between a cursed man and a vampire. All of the elements of fairy tales proposed by Jones are also present in the story. Magic is very much present in the curse as well as in the protagonist's ability to use magic. The protagonist's quest or problem in this case is dealing with the cursed beast, and later with the vampire attacking him. The story seems to be aimed at either adolescents or adults. The protagonist is not very young, which according to Jones implies that the story is aimed towards adults (2). The theme of prejudice in the story is in line with this, but the themes of love can either be directed towards adults or adolescents (Jones 2). Either way, Geralt as a protagonist is someone who can be identified by the reader due to his calm and neutral stance towards most things in the world. Towards the end of the story, the protagonist ponders the meaning of love, which strengthens the already clear moral themes in the story. All of these facts, in addition to the clear inspiration by the fairy tale *Beauty and the Beast* discussed in an earlier chapter suggest that the story is in fact a fairy tale by genre.

*The Last Wish* is not so clear in its fairy tale likeness. While it portrays some of the elements of fairy tales like mentioned before, it does not seem to have as strong a theme of any kind when it comes to the three kinds of problems the protagonist usually has to face in a fairy tale. It also does not seem to have any explicit moral teaching about it: unlike *A Grain of Truth*, *The Last Wish* does

not end with the protagonist stating his views on some view of the world, nor does there seem to be any strong themes across the story. An argument could be made for the story advocating for minding one's own business and not meddling with things one does not understand, such as Dandelion with the sealed jar containing the djinn, but this theme does not carry through the story. Although Yennefer does also try to use the djinn for her own advantage and fails, in the end Geralt does succeed in using the djinn to banish itself as well as make himself and Yennefer have some sort of mental connection, making them fall in love. Thus, it cannot be said that the story is trying to say anything about Yennefer's greed being immoral. Due to *The Last Wish* being lacking in the appropriate themes for a fairy tale in addition to lacking any kind of moral lesson, it cannot be considered to be a fairy tale in the same way that *A Grain of Truth* is.

*The Last Wish* differs from *A Grain of Truth* so that it is connected to some of the other short stories and novels in the series in a clear way. It introduces the character of Yennefer, showing how the protagonist Geralt met her for the first time. It also shows how Geralt and Yennefer became lovers and establishes the relationship between them. This is not the case for *A Grain of Truth*, as none of the events in that story are connected to, or even mentioned in any of the later short stories or novels.

*A Little Sacrifice* is perhaps the clearest case of the stories being their own standalone fairy tale. While *A Grain of Truth* seems most strongly to be a rewriting of the classic fairy tale *Beauty and the Beast*, and *The Last Wish* has the least fairy-tale elements while still being clearly inspired by Aladdin, *A Little Sacrifice* shows many fairy-tale elements on its own, but despite its clear inspiration it seems to not be a rewriting. The story has a strong theme of sacrifice and love, which is in accordance with the thematic core of a fairy tale (Jones 2). The duke and mermaid are in love, yet one of them is required to sacrifice their home and become something else in order for them to be together. Similarly, Geralt and Essi enter a love-relationship during the story, where Geralt learns to stop his self-pity and negative attitude towards love, which could be seen as some sort of personal sacrifice. However, this is not the true sacrifice Geralt ends up doing, as at the end of the story Geralt knows he cannot stay with Essi despite loving her, as Geralt's true love is Yennefer. Geralt's sacrifice is showing his emotions to Essi despite the conflicting emotions he has.

The story also uses mirrored actions to enhance its themes. Dandelion's ballads are mentioned multiple times, always when referring to someone's sacrifice, either the Mermaids' in order to be with the duke, or Geralt's and Essi's when they finally acknowledge that they have feelings for each other, yet still must go their separate ways. The story also ties in to its name, *A Little Sacrifice*, as the characters speak about sacrifice being necessary multiple times in the story. Perhaps the strongest show of how this is portrayed as a morality lesson is when the Mermaid speaks of how she gained her legs and abandoned her life underwater to be with the duke: "Indeed. Because I love you too, you loon. And what kind of love would it be if the one who loves were not capable of a little sacrifice?" (297). This is later repeated at the very end of the story where Essi waits for Geralt to show "a little sacrifice", by which she means him showing his emotions to her despite him also loving Yennefer. While the story does show that some sacrifice is necessary for love, it does also have a grimmer teaching at the end. As Geralt and Dandelion part ways with Essi, the narrator explains how Geralt and Essi never met again, as Essi died in an epidemic four years later. Dandelion was there to bury her himself, as he was somewhat of a big brother figure to Essi, whom he called 'Little Eye'. Thus, to Dandelion, Essi became his little sacrifice for love as he had to watch her die and be buried.

Through all of these strong ties to the story's theme, as well as how, discussed in the chapters before, the story does not show very strong elements of the story being a rewrite or not a fairy tale, it seems clear that *A Little Sacrifice* at least is a fairy tale.

## 5. Conclusion

It is clear that fairy tales are used as inspiration in *Witcher* short stories looked at in this thesis. Even just the kind of world that they are set in dictates it: a world of magic and monsters will always be somewhat inspired by fairy tales. However, they are much more strongly implied than just simply by as much as the genre of fantasy itself owes its inspiration to fairy tales. *The Witcher* series short stories, at least the ones looked at here, all have some elements of fairy tales, like the morality or strong themes common in fairy tales, as well as having a quest or a problem present which is also an important element of a fairy tale. While quests are quite common in stories in the fantasy-genre as well, and the two genres are quite close to each other and thus hard to separate, it is important to remember that not all fantasy literature is built around one single quest or problem, like these short stories are. I have come to conclusion on all of the short stories and how they are related to fairy tales.

*A Grain of Truth* is clearly a fairy tale, as well as a retelling of its inspiration, set in the world of *The Witcher*. This becomes clear to see as, while the story shows the events from the point of view of Geralt, the story in general runs through the same steps of a man being cursed, woman, or in the story's case women, living with him, and the curse being lifted through true love. The story has a strong moral background, with the characters pondering the nature of love through the story as well as making a definitive statement on it at the end, which is all in accordance with what is expected of a fairy tale. While the main character Geralt shows that he is familiar with some kind of story where a similar thing happens, it does not change the fact that the story hits virtually all the same points as the original *Beauty and the Beast* story.

*The Last Wish* is a separate story that only uses the fairy tale *Aladdin* as an inspiration for some of the elements in the story, as well as having the characters be aware of the original story and at times make fun of it. It cannot be considered a retelling of the original fairy tale, as while it may have some elements in common with it, it clearly takes its own different route in its story. It also does not show very strong fairy-tale elements, as it does not really have a strong theme or moral behind it. While it does clearly contain the magic and quest/problem aspects of fairy tales, these

are also fairly common in fantasy literature. Thus, it seems that *The Last Wish* is more clearly a fantasy tale than a fairy tale. It may be that stories like it with a higher level of intertextuality to the other short stories and the series as a whole lean more towards fantasy literature than fairy tales, and the more self-contained stories may show more of the fairy-tale elements.

*A Little Sacrifice* is perhaps the most ambiguous of the three stories looked at here. It shows many different forms of inspiration from the original fairy tales. It clearly does mimic the story of *The Little Mermaid* in some of its parts, namely in the subplot with the duke and the mermaid. However, it is not the main plot of the story but only a little part, and even then, the story does not follow exactly the same tracks as the original. The name of the story also clearly notes to the fairy tale, as both start with an article, followed with the word "little" and then followed with another word. Interestingly this is the closest any of the stories point toward the original fairy tales, yet it is not the one strongest mimicking them.

When it comes to being a fairy tale, *A Little Sacrifice* clearly holds true in the aspect of having a strong moral behind it that the story attempts to teach the reader. The characters have conflicts in love, and the overarching theme in the story is that love always requires some form of sacrifice, be it little or larger. The story also has a number of problems the main characters need to face, as Geralt and Dandelion need to find money as they are low on it, and thus they end up doing a number of jobs, which also cause them more problems to solve. In addition to this, Geralt's feelings towards Essi become a personal quest for him that he needs to overcome in order to move on with his life. Thus, the story does clearly show the elements of a fairy tale. It is also interesting that while the story really is a standalone one as no later story or book mention its events, it is not completely separated from the broader story like *A Grain of Truth*, as the characters still talk about characters from other stories as well.

This divide between different kinds of fairy tale inspiration is not only contained to these short stories in the series. I believe that all of the short stories in the series could be divided into the different categories of inspiration present here. It is also possible, that the divide is connected to the divide between the short stories that are self-contained units in the protagonist of the series',

Geralt's, life and those that tie in to the other short stories as well as the later novel series. It is possible that at least most of the short stories that are not connected to the other stories or the later novel series are fairy tales, while many of the less standalone stories might lean more towards the genre of Fantasy. It would be interesting to look at more of the short stories in the future, especially ones that have stronger connections to other stories in the series and see if they still show the same kind of inspirations as the ones looked at here. It is quite impossible to draw any broad conclusions from a sample size this small.

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