

“Do You Hold a Wild Creature Once It is Healed, and Ready to Fly Home?”  
A Feminist Investigation of Fairy Tales and Sexual Assault in Juliet Marillier’s  
*Daughter of the Forest*

by

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## ABSTRACT

New Zealand author Juliet Marillier's 1999 debut novel *Daughter of the Forest* elaborates on the framework of the Brothers Grimm short stories "The Six Swans," "The Seven Ravens," and "The Twelve Brothers," which appear in the Grimms' collection *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, first published in 1821. These three short stories fit into the Aarne-Thompson categorization system in Tale Type 451, often called "Brothers Turned into Birds" or "Sister Seeks Her Brothers." In using the scaffolding of the old stories, Marillier gives vivid life to the tale by changing a few aspects, such as introducing additional important characters, and more importantly by subtly asserting a feminist slant through several ideas by discussing feminine silence, women treated as property, use of first-person voice and narration, reversal of marriage roles, and, most importantly, sexual assault and its position within the tale.

By exploring the intricacies of Tale Type 451 in Chapter 1, the reader gains a working knowledge of how the tale functions. Chapter 2 focuses on the differences between Marillier's version of the Type 451 tale compared to the Grimms' tales. Chapter 3 explores the feminist additions and interpretations that Marillier incorporates into Tale Type 451, and it investigates the implications of how Marillier has re-written the tale. Her use of the main character's voice narrating the entire story, the addition of a graphic rape scene, exploration of silence, and her interpretation of roles in marriage assert Marillier's voice as a contemporary fantasy fiction writer whose approach incorporates feminist ideals.

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## **DEDICATION**

For my beloved parents, Mrs. Lillian J. Hall and Mr. Michael S. Hall.

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## INTRODUCTION

New Zealand author Juliet Marillier addresses aspects of the fantastic in contemporary literature through her work, exploring and incorporating the origins of European fairy tales and Celtic folklore into her books and stories. Her research and immersion in the grounding aspects of folk tales allow Marillier to explore feminine agency, silence, women as property, and sexual assault, all inscribed onto the fairy tale genre. In her 1999 debut novel *Daughter of the Forest*, Marillier rereads the fairy tale genre in powerful feminist terms.

Marillier is a contemporary author whose interest in Celtic-Irish history and lore as well as druidic practices set the stage for *Daughter of the Forest*. In this setting, the threads of the well-known Brothers Grimm fairy tales begin to appear, and as Marillier uses them to guide the reader, she also begins to deviate from the Grimm tales at strategic points in her retelling of the familiar tale, providing a subtle feminist slant to the familiar tale, making it a new story from the bones of an old one.<sup>1</sup> In order to create contrast with the versions from *The Complete Grimms' Fairy Tales*, Marillier offers a critique of patriarchy and the society that forces women into situations similar to that of the main character.

Marillier is well-known in the world of young adult fantasy fiction for creating vivid and outspoken female protagonists. Her compelling writing style and honest, graphic characters are part of her appeal, and in *Daughter of the Forest* in particular, she

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<sup>1</sup> Other tales that use this similar story line include “Children of Lir,” “Udea and Her Seven Brothers,” “The Twelve Wild Ducks,” “The Wild Swans,” and “The Magic Swan Geese,” among others. I am choosing to focus on the Grimms’ tales because there are three within the work of *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, translated ‘Children’s and Household Tales,’ which is better known as *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm* or *Grimm’s Fairy Tales*. I am using the more contemporary publications of the original text, which was first published in 1812.

hints at an agenda of the empowerment of women. By looking at issues of assault, silencing, pregnancy, working women, life choices, and true happiness— all in the context of a fairy tale set in ancient Ireland— new perspectives and powerful feminist statements come to life. Marillier emphasizes the powerful patriarchal lens, pointing out by contrast how readers have commonly accepted this perspective while reading these stories. The result is a vivid portrayal of feminine strength, beauty, and endurance set within another time but speaking just the same to contemporary audiences.

In *Daughter of the Forest*, Marillier works with a common plot theme within several Brothers Grimm fairy tales, which is the story of a young sister seeking to rescue her many brothers. This theme appears most specifically in the 49<sup>th</sup> Grimm tale “The Six Swans,” the 25<sup>th</sup> tale “The Seven Ravens,” and the 9<sup>th</sup> tale “The Twelve Brothers.” In her adaptation, Marillier asserts a subtle, contemporary feminist version of the tales, exploring women’s position within the patriarchal structure set up within the book. She emphasizes several issues that impinge upon women’s rights: the silence forced upon women, the lack of agency, the treatment of women as property, and the indifferent societal attitude about the reality of rape.

A central question that I will address is how Marillier uses folklore, rape aggression, and women’s agency and empowerment to emphasize her concern with feminist principles and with giving a voice to women in hardship. My aim is to evaluate such prominent feminist aspects of Marillier’s text as her use of first-person voice, representation of a graphic sexual assault, and her emphasis on the importance of feminine agency and the female role in patriarchal society.



Working with feminist theory, using authors Copley, Ramirez, Bottigheimer, von Franz, and Rusch-Feja, I also investigate the elements involved in writing a feminist text and critically decipher the decidedly feminist aspects that Marillier has placed within the text, using the a common fairy tale theme.

Speaking to her adult audiences and relating to young readers, Marillier treats the aspects of rape in her work with graphic attention to detail but also with intense admiration of the victim's inner survival. The author exposes rape as both physical and psychological trauma, allowing the reader to experience the character's mindset and to experience the fear that can control a woman both in body and in mind. Marillier's graphic depiction of rape and its repercussions in her characters' lives are central to the story's plot and message; the perceptions, implications, and damaging complications of rape, and exposure of rape for its violence, are concepts that distinguish Marillier from other writers of young adult fiction.

Chapter 1 investigates the formal type of fairy tale, called Type 451, and it describes and explores the common Grimm fairy tale theme in which a sister must save her brothers from a shape-shifting curse at a great sacrifice to her own life. The theme is used in *Daughter of the Forest* and further emphasizes the intermingling of the familiar and the supernatural, and it illustrates what is painful and upsetting about reality. The female maturation process, investigation of the cross-cultural parallels in this tale, and the ways in which Marillier both uses this theme and reworks its message are key aspects of Chapter 1.

In Chapter 2, Marillier's specific deviations from Tale Type 451 are examined through a close reading of *Daughter of the Forest* in conjunction with the three main Grimm fairy tales that fit the Fairy Tale Type 451 category.

Chapter 3 is a synthesis of the implications of these deviations for both Marillier and her readers. Explored questions include feminist reasoning behind the differences between Marillier's version and the Grimms' version, and the overall message to young women that Marillier seems to convey. Through these three chapters, I will assert the feminist implications in Marillier's work as she places them within the fairy tale genre

Thanks to Marillier's use of fairy tales, familiar stories, and aggressive social commentary, her work stands out as a statement for women, as a comfort and a tool to anyone who seeks to become aware of cultural and social silencing and abuse, and as an example of historical, culture-based, and deeply touching fiction writing.

## CHAPTER I

### *Daughter of the Forest* and the Grimms' Fairy Tale Type 451

The Aarne-Thompson tale type index is used by folklorists to analyze common threads that occur within stories all over the world. Categorizing folk tales has become important within the field: “[t]he identification of folk narratives through motif and/or tale type numbers has become an international [essential ingredient] among bona fide folklorists” (Dundes 195). Thompson defined motif as “the smallest element in a tale having a power to persist in tradition” (195). Through the analysis of hundreds of thousands of tales over time, these two authors created seven large categories, which can then be further divided into approximately one hundred more specific subgroups, with individual story types numbering nearly two thousand common themes.

According to the Aarne-Thompson index, the Grimms' tales “The Seven Ravens,” “The Six Swans,” and “The Twelve Brothers” all fit under the folklorist Tale Type 451. This type is also known as “The Maiden Who Saves Her Brothers” (Ramirez 47). In general, these tales follow a specific format with consistent content. The young woman rescues her brothers, who have been transformed into birds, and the stories often include nearly impossible tasks of endurance, patience, and sacrifice. According to critic Diann Rusch-Feja, at the end of the story, a “dual rescue” must take place—meaning that the sister saves her brothers, and then in turn is saved by them—and this takes place “while the sister is still vulnerable to the threat of the negative mother” figure (Rusch-Feja 230). This basic premise serves as the foundation for most Type 451 fairy tales.

Juliet Marillier's *Daughter of the Forest* fits the category because of its thematic parallels to the Grimms' tales. Marillier's main character, Sorcha, fills the role of the

young woman, or the “sister savior.” Often, the guilt of the transformation of the brothers into birds is attributed to this young sister (Rusch-Feja 39). Only through performing a specific and usually very difficult task would she be able save her brothers from remaining birds forever (39).

Overall, the plot development and the type of growth the young woman must undergo can vary, depending on the age of the girl, the tasks she must complete, and her relationship to “the constellation of the other figures” within the story (Rusch-Feja 39). Though there are differences between Grimms’ tales, as mentioned earlier, many common threads remain consistent throughout Marillier’s work, and she uses them to create the general setting that matches the Tale Type 451.

### **Requirements of the Type 451 Tales**

According to Aarne-Thompson’s index of fairy tale categorization, there are several requirements that must be met in order for the brother-sister relationship to fit the category of Tale Type 451. The Grimms’ tales “The Six Swans,” “The Seven Ravens,” and “The Twelve Brothers” all meet these requirements, and—as might be guessed—so does Juliet Marillier’s *Daughter of the Forest*. According to Rusch-Feja, the first requirement is that the sister must be the last child born in a family with only sons. The sons are generally rejected by one or both of the parents as soon as the daughter is born (Rusch-Feja 79). In *Daughter of the Forest*, Sorcha is the seventh child born in her family after six brothers. Because Sorcha’s mother, Niamh, dies in childbirth, the mother’s physical absence precipitates the father’s emotional withdrawal from his children; the mother’s death causes the emotional absence of the father toward the children and creates

within the story the physical absence of the mother. These aspects further mime the Tale Type 451.

In another requirement of this tale type, the daughter's birth is fatally associated with the father's rejection of her brothers; they blame their sister for the distance they feel from the father. Therefore, the sister must carry guilt for their unhappiness, and later, for their tragic transformation (79). This is one aspect that is mirrored in Marillier's work but with a slight twist. Though Sorcha's birth was a both a joy and a tragedy, the brothers did not seem to blame her for their changed lives when they were growing up. If anything, Sorcha was sometimes bullied and teased by her brothers, as any tiny sister having many brothers might be (Marillier 3). When the brothers are transformed, however, Sorcha flees, escaping the effects of the charm because of her small size and her speed (Marillier 147-48). She does not escape because she is guilty of their transformation, the way the main character is guilty in the Grimms' "The Twelve Brothers": in that story, the young woman picks twelve flowers after she was warned not to, and each time she picked a flower, one of her brothers was turned into a raven (Grimm 39). Therefore, she brings about the reason that her brothers are changed.

Another of the several requirements according to Rusch-Feja is that only the sister can rescue her transformed brothers and change them back into young men. In order to do this, the young heroine of these tales must "perform insurmountable tasks and strictly comply with various requirements over a certain time period" (Rusch-Feja 79-80). This is the main premise of Marillier's *Daughter of the Forest*. Sorcha must remain silent for however long it takes to create one shirt for each of her six brothers out of the starwort plant, whose poisonous barbs tear at her flesh and make her hands swell painfully,

disfiguring them. If this were not hard enough, she can make no sound at all in the time it takes her to complete the task, which is also consistent with the Type 451 theme of the three particular Grimm tales.

The next requirement for this tale type is that, in the first half of these kinds of tales, there must be no dark or enemy figure, like a witch or evil stepmother, who threatens the siblings; she comes later (80). This is also true in *Daughter of the Forest*. The beginning of the book lays the setting of happiness and contentment in the forest of the Sevenwaters family's home. There are several issues that arise which later contribute to Sorcha's character and her growth, but there are no direct threats from a menacing female figure in the first part of the story. This creates a progression of content innocence, moving to despair, then returning to peacefulness, albeit with adult-like knowledge of the darkness in the world.

The terms of the heroine's task for the brothers' rescue itself come about "out of the family situation, the laws of the fairy tale and inner logic, and are usually conveyed to the girl by a 'helper' figure from the realm of the supernatural, or by the brothers themselves" (Rusch-Feja 80). In Sorcha's case, the rules are set out to her by Deirdre, who is part of the supernatural Tuatha dé Danaan, a race of people dwelling in the Otherworld (Marillier 152). The helper figure is generally a woman: either a friendly witch or another figure who understands issues beyond the reader and narrator's understanding.

Finally, at the end of the plot in these tale types, a dual rescue takes place: "the girl, who feels compelled to save her brothers, almost loses her own life in doing so and must often be rescued by the brothers at the last moment from a death sentence" (Rusch-

Feja 80). This lines up exactly in *Daughter of the Forest*, when at the last moment, the swan-brothers circle in above the flames that burn around Sorcha, threatening her life (Marillier 460); she was being burned at the stake for adultery, sorcery, and treason (441-2). This is the climax of the story in both Marillier's work and in the Grimm Type 451 tales.

In all of these stories, two significant events must have taken place: the girl endures the period of silence set upon her until the completion of her task, and the swan-brothers, at the last moment before the girl is burned at the stake, save her from a violent death. According to Rusch-Feja, these two scenes are important because at the event of the fiery rescue, "the girl is reborn at a higher level... In the pictorial representation of the birds surrounding the young woman about to be burned at the stake, there are distinct parallels to the image of the phoenix, symbol of the eternal death, rebirth, and renewal cycle that could well be associated with female maturation and individuation" (95). This universal concept is an important theme, similar to the theme of marriage discussed later in this chapter. Depictions of these important themes are represented across cultures because of their universal appeal.

The shirts that Sorcha creates for her brothers represent another widespread aspect of the Type 451 tales: the emphasis of women's domestic tasks. These tasks appear in many of the tales in a few different forms: "industriousness and adeptness in household work, especially spinning, sewing, and weaving, often highlighted or depicted in exaggerated form. They also represent traits which the male figure in the tale prizes in his search for a wife" (Rusch-Feja 26). This will be covered further in regard to a feminist reading of *Daughter of the Forest* through the tale type.

It is important to note how significant this task is for the young woman in all of the versions of this tale. In Rusch-Feja's words, "[T]he shirts sewn by the sister ... effect a counteractive magic to those which the stepmother ... made. The requirement not to speak or laugh is [only] an additional challenge" (89). These choices of seemingly simple tasks of sewing and remaining quiet are exaggerated in order to exemplify not only activities that women are expected to be good at, but it also points out what is generally seen as attractive in a woman.

As is common in all of these tales, the young woman takes similar steps in order to begin her daunting objective, and, interestingly, it usually has to do with her retreat into the safety of the forest or a heavily wooded area. The forest is a consistent and important theme for the young woman: "To fulfill her tasks, the girl goes off alone, seats herself in a hollow tree, and begins her task of spinning and weaving the spell-breaking shirts. These requirements for the rescue of her brothers correspond to those in the tale of the twelve brothers" in the 9<sup>th</sup> Grimm tale (Rusch-Feja 89). The use of trees in all of these Type 451 tales indicates a psychological assumption about power of the forest to heighten one's mental and spiritual awareness. Thus, the young woman withdraws into the forest and finds either a hollow tree or climbs up into a tree in order to begin—and possibly intending to carry out—the period of silence that she must undergo to save her brothers (90). Rusch-Feja elaborates that the young woman's youth, connected with her reclusion in a tree, can "represent a withdrawal from life," which can be read as a time in the young woman's life when she must grow into an adult (90). The tree can be seen as "part of the symbolic depiction of the female maturation process [and it] can also be seen as a retreat into one's self, a move towards heightened consciousness" (90). This take on



Sorcha's time in the woods is unique, and I would argue that it is an effective interpretation of Sorcha's growth process at the beginning of the story.

Rusch-Feja reminds us that the withdrawal from worldly life has a long tradition: "Even in the Middle Ages, retreat to a solitary hermitage in the forest served as a confession time. The self-imposed abstinence from speaking or laughing was intended to facilitate deeper contemplation, meditation and a closer relationship to God. Seen psychologically, this represents a confrontation with the self and one's subconscious," emphasizing "concentration on one's self" (90). In *Daughter of the Forest*, it seems clear that though Sorcha is forced to become silent, and if her desire is to save her brothers, then she must look within herself during that time, and move away from her childhood innocence into adulthood.

The symbolism of "tree" has a long and rich history. The tree symbols can represent a number of concepts, including protection and even a "renewal of life energies" (Rusch-Feja 91). Critic Marie-Luise von Franz perceives the tree symbol as "a symbol of the process of individuation. The heroic deed or tremendous suffering are aspects of that process" (von Franz 87).

Further interpretations of the tree symbol include seclusion and withdrawal into oneself to uncover and deal with turmoil or an internal issue. "Crawling into a hollow tree," states Rusch-Feja, "means withdrawal from the pain of life, protection from external influences and going to the internal roots of a problem. Attention is drawn away from the life outside and towards fulfilling the inner self, just as the girl fills the hollow tree with [her own] budding life, representing preparation for rebirth" (91). This concept also supports the idea that the young woman in Tale Type 451 is not simply hiding or

being forced to cooperate with the demands of the curse set upon her brothers, but that some power is given to her within her circumstances, that she might examine her own young life.

Instead of seeing the young woman's time in the woods as an imprisonment, which often seems most appropriate, the tree symbol might be examined in the more positive light of transformation and coming into one's own. As Rusch-Feja puts it, "Although the hollow tree can symbolize the return to the womb, or the tree itself the Great Mother, the state of being cocooned before reemergence as a mature being seems more appropriate. During this time of silence and retreat, the girl-becoming-woman develops her own femininity and self-awareness" (91). Though Marillier works with this idea of growth while Sorcha is in the wood, most of Sorcha's self-awareness and realization of her power comes about when she is found by the Britons and meets the character Hugh of Harrowfield, who is also called Red. This is one of the instances that Marillier departs from the requirements of the Type 451 tales: it is while she is in the wood that Sorcha learns about darkness in the heart of mankind in her experience of sexual assault. Her personal growth in the forest is forced upon her through fear and self-loathing that she must experience and then overcome with time. It seems to be emphasized that Sorcha is unable to overcome the inner obstacles without the support of loved ones, who she believes have all been taken from her. This is a take on the Type 451 tale that is discussed further in Chapter 3.

As the young woman in these tales waits out her time while creating garments for her brothers, she is usually discovered by a man or a group of men before the period of silence is over. This "coming out" makes her vulnerable and defenseless against those

who are against her, the main enemy always being—in the various tales—a woman, be it an evil mother-in-law, a step-mother, a witch or sorceress, or some combination of these (Rusch-Feja 90). This dark woman figure is key in all of the tales: she is the catalyst that seems to force circumstances to work against the young woman main character.<sup>2</sup>

In the Grimms' tales, the suffering of the young woman is "vividly expressed" through her circumstance, rather than through any statements of her feelings or thoughts (Rusch-Feja 94). Since the young woman rarely expresses herself, her misery is expressed to the reader differently: it is often "through the ridicule, slander, and defamation by the evil mother-in-law, who also steals the young bride's new-born children [in "The Six Swans"] and accuses her of being a child-eating witch. After the mother-in-law has convinced the king of this, the young wife is sentenced to death" (94). In *Daughter of the Forest*, the aspect of ridicule and slander is followed closely by Marillier, in contrast to the storyline about the evil mother-in-law and the young woman's children, which is followed only loosely; Marillier does not directly utilize the "child-eating" sub-theme of cannibalism.

Despite being ever under one unfortunate circumstance or another, the young woman in Marillier's work and in the Grimm tales does not fight what happens to her, and her demeanor remains regal, and in some cases, people begin to fear her. Marillier emphasizes their negative treatment of Sorcha: "They mutter among themselves, and one or two make a sign with their fingers, unobtrusively, to ward off evil" as Sorcha passes by them (Marillier 261). Sorcha does not resort to any form of "fighting back" or other

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<sup>2</sup> I am careful here not to use the word *protagonist* because Marillier uses the young woman character as a thinking, feeling, intelligent human being, contrasting with a passive and undeveloped character who has things happen to her and around her without her thoughts or reasoning, which is the case in the Grimms' tales.

activities which would flaw her pure and noble character” (Rusch-Feja 233). This is in direct contrast with the dark forces that conspire against her type of character in all of the stories.

Marillier’s Sorcha is pursued—and by all accounts seems to be despised—by two older women: her malicious stepmother the sorceress Lady Oonagh, and her mother-in-law, Lady Anne.<sup>3</sup> The mother figure often is associated in the Type 451 tales with the framing of child murder and, in one case, of cannibalism. Yet the aspect of cannibalism mentioned in the Grimms’ tales is completely absent in *Daughter of the Forest*. Sorcha does not bear children at all in this story, though she does have children in later texts.

In the Grimm tales, according to Rusch-Feja, the young woman ultimately proves that she is willing and capable of sacrificing her own “earthly joy (husband, status as queen, and children) to redeem her brothers... and they help save her from being vulnerable to the negative mother’s plot to destroy her and losing her chances of a positive (happy-ever-after) marriage to the king” (Rusch-Feja 96). In Marillier’s novel, the negative mother in the first half of the story is the Lady Oonagh who is responsible for Sorcha’s and her brothers’ curse; in the second half, the negative mother is Lady Anne, Red’s mother, whose menace is represented through her obliviousness to Sorcha’s suffering, through softly-spoken comments made to her son, and through her silence.

But in order for the young woman to be exposed to either of these dark female figures in the second half of the story, the men who find the young woman in the first half always take her back to their kingdom.

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<sup>3</sup> The former is guilty of turning Sorcha’s brothers into swans; the latter, of turning a blind eye to the cruel treatment that Sorcha undergoes at the hands of her household, while Sorcha’s husband Red is away.

In “The Six Swans,” it is a hunter who discovers the young woman as she sits in the tree, sewing the plant-shirts together (Grimm 533). The hunter brings her to the king, who is also in the riding party, and the king, struck by her silence and beauty, soon falls in love with her: “Since ... she was so beautiful, the King’s heart was touched, and he conceived for her a strong affection. Then he put around her his cloak, and, placing her before him on his horse, took her to his castle” (533). Similarly, in the Grimms’ “The Twelve Brothers,” the young maiden had been up in a tree for three days when a king’s dog scented her, barking (39). Consequently, the king “was so struck with her beauty that he begged her to come down, and asked her to be his bride” (40). Interestingly, as seems to be the case with all Type 451 tales, the ultimate and most desirable ending is marriage.

Marillier includes this “ultimate goal” motif in *Daughter of the Forest*: “[t]he theme of marriage [i]s the highest goal in these tales ... marriage and the explicit, socially acceptable form of sexual union has been a preoccupation of all times and many peoples – especially of girls in the puberty and pre-puberty years” (Rusch-Feja 232). The fact that the Grimm tales—and later the Disney movies and nearly all romantic films—depict marriage as a lofty goal indicates a cultural consciousness of the importance of the marital union.

However, it can also be argued that within the Tale Type 451 marriages, the king or husband figure seems to consistently marry the young woman “pre-maturely,” before the “rescue function for her brothers” and before the completion of the young woman’s task (Rusch-Feja 93). The young woman is not available to the “more binding marital relationship,” yet she is asked to marry anyway. So, even though Marillier emphasizes and embraces the importance of marriage within her version, it is clear that the union has

several faults, starting, like in the Grimm tales, with a rushed marriage proposal (Marillier 397-8). Though Sorcha has developed feelings for Red by the time he proposes, it is still a shock for her when he suddenly suggests marriage: “ ‘As my wife,’ [Red pointed out] ‘you would be safe.’ My heart lurched, I sprang to my feet, my skirts spraying sand in his face. My answer must have been clear in my eyes as my hands moved convulsively to reject his words. *No. You cannot do this. No*” (397). Sorcha sees how improper the proposal seems, fearing that he will ruin his own life with such a rash decision. Red continues, “‘This marriage would be—would be in name only, a marriage of convenience, you might call it. I offer you the protection of my name, so that you may complete your task in safety. No more and no less.’ [Sorcha thinks,] *You cannot do this. It is all wrong*” (398). By this time, the reader can see more of who Red is as the husband figure, and can see his loving and noble motives.

In contrast, the husband in the Grimm tales is identified as generally weak and unsuitable in a number of ways, though his intentions seem honest. For example, in the Grimms’ tales the husband always happens to be absent whenever his wife is about to bear a child. He is also absent each time she encounters trouble from other characters, including his mother, and accusations by people within the household.<sup>4</sup> Thus, in the Grimms’ tales, the husband remains largely unaware of the danger his wife faces, making him relatively impotent; this demands that, eventually, the young woman be saved—not by her husband—but by her brothers (Rusch-Feja 96). Although Marillier uses the Grimms’ element of the husband’s (Red’s) “timely” absences which make him unaware of his wife’s ordeals, the general idea of the husband’s impotence contrasts with

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<sup>4</sup> In *Daughter of the Forest*, the predation of Sorcha’s vicious uncle-in-law named Lord Richard is one of the main concerns of Red’s absence, not the mother-in-law; this deviation from the Grimms’ versions is discussed further in Chapter 2.

Marillier's presentation of Red in the ending of *Daughter of the Forest*, because he does come to Sorcha's ultimate rescue at the very last moment.

In general, the young woman who appears in the Type 451 faces great personal sacrifice, has the courage to see to and face her life's challenges alone, is dedicated to her goals, and has the ability to endure self-restraint under extreme pressure (Rusch-Feja 96). Sorcha is undoubtedly based on the young woman who appears in several different Grimm fairy tales; however, there are significant differences that set Sorcha and author Juliet Marillier apart in the fairy tale genre.

## CHAPTER II

### Deviations from the Folklorist Tale Type 451

There are many obvious deviations from the Grimms' tales that Marillier seems to use to her advantage. The most prominent of her deviations include introduction of such elements as additional key characters, a birth scene, the absence of any children who belong to the king, the reason the king feels the need to take the young girl home with him, the role of the father figure, and unusual portrayal of role-reversal in marriage.

In the early versions of the Grimm tales #11 and #49, the young woman becomes a mother (Rusch-Feja 94). This element of feminine identity is not, as mentioned before, a part of Sorcha's story in *Daughter of the Forest*, though Sorcha does bear children in subsequent books in the series. This deviation from the fairy tale plot might exist because the focus of the book is solely on Sorcha herself as the protagonist, also focusing on the development of the supporting characters of Sorcha's husband and her brothers.

However, a feminine element absent in the Grimms' tales but introduced in *Daughter of the Forest* is Sorcha's healing abilities and motherly behaviors. In Marillier's novel, the young man named Simon is a character whose presence changes the direction and intentions of the entire tale. A captive in Sorcha's family's household, he was severely physically abused during questioning. Sorcha and her brother Finbar smuggle Simon out of the household after he is tortured, and Sorcha takes care of Simon, telling him folktales as a skilled storyteller and using her herb lore and knowledge to heal him. Sorcha suspects that he will never be healed physically, much less psychologically (Marillier 92). This is a parallel to Sorcha's sexual abuse at the hands of the farm boys while she is hiding in her place among the trees (Marillier 198).



Simon one day disappears, and Sorcha suspects that she will never know what happened to him (Marillier 114). However, Simon returns at the climax of the story (492-3), an aspect that is nonexistent in the Grimm tales. Despite his disappearance, Simon is metonymically present throughout Marillier's entire novel as an influential force seen mainly through his brother Red's concern for him. Sorcha does not share with Red the information she has about Simon; Red's desire for that knowledge is what first drew him to bring Sorcha to his home in Harrowfield (Marillier 228).

In addition to noble characters such as Red and his close friends John and Ben, there are also various predatory male figures that appear as three different figures within Marillier's novel; those figures include the boys who rape Sorcha; Simon, in a lesser sense as the man "with the golden hair, and the eyes that devour" (Marillier 481), and, most notably, Sorcha's vicious uncle-in-law, Lord Richard. His sexually aggressive behavior toward Sorcha is one of the main concerns of her existence during Red's absences in the second half of the book.

The fact that the immediate evil in *Daughter of the Forest* resides directly in the hands of a powerful man, Lord Richard, rather than with the mother-in-law, is another of Marillier's deviations from the Grimms' structure. Richard treats Sorcha most cruelly, alternately as a sexually-exciting piece of property and a lowly prisoner deserving only to be spat upon and ridiculed. He takes advantage of her silence to grope, harass, and verbally abuse Sorcha (Marillier 290, 319, 323):

'So this is the girl,' observed Lord Richard. His voice was held deliberately soft. Soft, I thought, like a cat's paw when it toys with a mouse. 'Well, come forward. Let me see you, girl.' Margery gave me a

gentle push in the back, and retreated to the far end of the room ... [I] held my head high. Looked him straight in the eye. *I am the daughter of the forest. I am not afraid of you.* ... [Then Richard said,] ‘Look at the way she holds herself, and the hatred in those eyes... Whose daughter are you?’ Silence. Silence was the only defense. *Breathe in, breathe out.* Try to think of nothing. Try to hold down the rage that rose in my breast; try to keep the pain from my face... Calm. Calm like a stone. (Marillier 289)

Richard tries to use aggressive intimidation toward Sorcha as a means of getting information about Simon. To him, she is “a thing” that can help him in political gain; she is not a person. He abuses her both physically and mentally.

At the end of the novel, Sorcha has saved her brothers from their stepmother’s curse; the brothers’ appearance as men saves the integrity of their little sister; and Red physically saves Sorcha from the flames, at the risk of his own safety (464). Based on the ending of the Grimm tales, what is intended to be the dual rescue in *Daughter of the Forest* is more of a triple rescue when Red risks his life to save his wife, by jumping onto a burning pyre to untie her before she burns. Sorcha recalls:

[Red’s] face was white as death. The flames were licking at the highest logs [near Sorcha]. He grabbed me by the waist, slung me over his shoulder like a sack of vegetables, and leapt again, awkwardly this time, so that the two of us landed in a heap on the middle of the smouldering wooden platform which stood beside the pyre. An instant later there was a flaring. (464)

Red's selfless heroism is not the type of behavior found in the Grimm tales, and the feminist implications of this deviation are explored in Chapter 3.

Another twist on the Tale Type 451 found in Marillier is that Sorcha learns that not all men are good; she is sexually assaulted and verbally abused *while* she is in the woods, which is starkly ironic given the symbolism of the protection and rebirth of the tree symbol described in Chapter 1. Contrasting with the majestic tree symbol, Sorcha's personal and abrupt psychological awakening and growth in the forest is forced upon her through fear and self-loathing. It seems to be emphasized that Sorcha is unable to overcome the inner obstacles set before her without the support of loved ones, who she believes have all been taken from her.

The roles of the males in the Type 451 tales are significant; the role of the father and brothers is universal and at various points includes that of the caregiver, the neglecter, the one needing care, and the adored loved one. These are all part of the backbone of the Grimms' tales, mirrored clearly in *Daughter of the Forest*. The men in all versions of the tale are central to the young woman's motives and actions.

What is different within Marillier's version about the role of the men is the father. In *Daughter of the Forest*, Lord Colum is the father of all seven children, and his purpose in the story halts with his marriage to the sorceress who becomes the children's stepmother. This contrasts with the Grimm tale "The Six Swans," where the father is represented as someone who adores his children, and who sides with them against the jealous stepmother to keep them safe (Grimm 532). This is not at all the case with Colum, who, by the end of the novel—is portrayed as a husk of a man, used up mentally and emotionally by his young wife's sorcery, and exhausted by the belief that he has lost all

of his children he'd had with his late first wife. When Sorcha returns home after saving her brothers, she speaks to her father for the first time in several years:

I scarcely knew what to say [recalled Sorcha]. I had been a child when I left, he a stern, distant figure whom I hardly knew. Now it was as if I were the parent, and he the child. 'Father?' I ventured. 'Do you know me?' He took a long time to reply.

'My daughter was a little girl,' he said finally.

'It—It's been quite a while.'

'I lost them, you know. All of them. Even the smallest one [Ciaran].'

Around us the garden was quiet.

'Father. Perhaps we should go in. My brothers are here, all of them. It's all right now.' But I knew this was untrue. He sighed.

'I don't think so. Not yet. I will stay here for a while. You go in.' He settled back into silence, and his eyes again lost their focus. At length I got up and walked to the door ... [and] he spoke again, behind me. 'I'm sorry, Niamh [Sorcha's mother],' he said. 'I'm so sorry.' But when I turned my head, he was not looking at me ... I sensed he saw something far, far away, as distant as an ancient memory, but still sweet and strong as the note of a harp, and painful as a sword thrust deep. (508)

Colum is an important part of Sorcha's story in his choice to bring the Lady Oonagh into his own and his children's lives.

Another feminist facet of Sorcha's story emphasizes the aspect of choice, which can be debated, depending on interpretation. I would argue that Sorcha is given a *choice*

within the story, because it is true that the most trying part of her shirt-making task, if she should choose to undertake it, is to remain entirely silent for as long as it takes to create the painful shirts. No one *makes* Sorcha remain silent; she is given the option, if she wants to take it, to bring back her brothers at the price of years of sacrifice. No one commands her to be silent, and she undertakes the task with a grim sense of optimism, confident that she will be able to complete it, but that it will be difficult. On the other hand, it might also be argued that since leaving her brothers as swans is not even an option, Sorcha is underhandedly forced to become silent, in order to save her brothers.<sup>5</sup>

A further instance of Marillier's deviation from the narrative framework of Tale Type 451 is Red's reason for taking Sorcha with him to his land where he is Lord of Harrowfield; Red hopes that Sorcha will one day overcome her overwhelming fear of men and give him the information about Simon that he wants. Therefore, Red does not take her home with him because her silence makes her desirable, which is unlike the Grimm tales. In "The Six Swans," the King—Red's role—loves her even in the beginning because she is both beautiful and mute:

The King asked, 'Who art thou? What art thou doing on the tree?' But she did not answer. He put the question in every language that he knew, but she remained as mute as a fish. As she was so beautiful, the King's heart was touched, and he was smitten with a great love for her. He put his mantle on her, took her before him on his horse, and carried her to his castle. (Grimm 533)

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<sup>5</sup> This aspect of the story can also be seen as the opposite when it comes to choice. On an earlier draft, Dr. Wawrzycka commented, "Once a condition is attached to the task—a condition to remain silent while making the shirts, lest the power of the shirts to turn swans back to men be voided – Sorcha has no choice but to comply" so that her brothers can be saved.

Whereas in the Grimms' tales, the young woman's power over the king resides in her beauty and silence, Sorcha's power over Red rests in her knowledge of Simon. Red's desire for information about Simon is the reason why he wants to have Sorcha near him, respecting that her silence was *imposed* on her (rather than being a sign of feminine coyness). The desirability of such female traits is discussed further in Chapter 3.

It is also interesting to note that the reader knows what information Red wants, and the reader also knows that Sorcha does not have all of the information that he wants (Simon had disappeared long ago, and no one knows for certain what happened to him). Red's persistence, however, is the heart of the story for Sorcha and contributes to the further development of Sorcha as a character.

As a character himself, Red is quite un-fairy-tale-like for a number of reasons. The most notable is the fact that he gave up his title and his property in the land of the Britons across the sea to be with Sorcha, and Marillier emphasizes the importance of his support and love for her. Red, like Sorcha, is a well-developed and emotionally round character. This differs from the Grimm tales not only because Marillier's work is much longer, but also because Marillier emphasizes the motives behind the characters' actions, based on the protagonist's understanding, thoughts, and interactions with others in the story.

Interestingly, when Red and Sorcha first encounter one another, the meeting is not at all like the Grimm versions of the fairy tale. Their appearance and also reasons for coming upon one another are completely different. Critic Tamara Copley points out:

[Sorcha] is not beautiful and ethereal but bedraggled and angry, terrified as much by the king figure[']s maleness as by his belonging to an enemy

race. She thinks to herself, 'Before I let them do anything to me, I would kill myself' (Marillier 220). In the tales, we only see a romantic meeting of princess and king as he hunts in the woods. They view each other as only the 'handsomest' man or 'loveliest girl' and fall in love shortly thereafter. (Copley 54)

This purposeful deviation from the Grimm fairy tale seems to have been specifically chosen—like the other deviations that Marillier employs—to create a critical environment of patriarchy within the parameters of the tale itself, and the way in which Sorcha is treated, especially by the male characters such as Red, is key.

In addition to her relationship with Red, Sorcha forms tight bonds with the women around her in a way that she was not able to in the woods of her homeland. Her life with friends is a large concern in *Daughter of the Forest* because of her need for survival. She grows to care for the people in the household who are kind to her, particularly Margery, who is a lady of the house whose husband, John, is good friends with Red. They are expecting their first child and both are kind to Sorcha. However, all the other members of Red's household fear Sorcha and believe that she is a witch. When Margery goes into labor—another deviation from the Grimms' tales—Sorcha is kept away from the birth room of her beloved friend because the household fears she will kill the child: “ ‘You can't go in there,’ she said. ‘You'll not be allowed to set your curse on a woman in childbirth, nor lay your filthy hands on her unborn babe, Be off with you. Your kind are not welcome here’ ” (Marillier 302). Incidentally, some of the Grimm tale versions also feature the young woman accused of harming the child. When Margery's labor becomes complicated, Sorcha is brought in. She works through the night, directing

servants with sign language to get the various herbs to make the medicines Margery needs. Sorcha brings the male child into the world, but he is not breathing. She knows how to revive him, and soon his strangled cries fill the room (Marillier 306). As everyone weeps with joy, Sorcha escapes, grieving, because in order to save the child, she gave up one of her chances to see her brothers.

By changing the Grimms' story line from harm to the children to saving of children, Marillier takes a wide turn in her story, but still maintains her novel's relevance to the Tale Type 451.

The most salient and significant difference between the Grimms' tales and Marillier's version of the tale is the rape scene. This scene takes place very soon after the brothers are turned into swans and Sorcha enters the forest. There are three boys who stalk Sorcha, find her, strip her, and take turns forcing themselves on her (Marillier 198).

'So this is your faery girl, eh, Will? Looks like flesh and blood to me. And a nice ripe little piece at that! Get an eyeful of this!' He put his hand to my tunic and ripped it open right down the front, exposing my body from neck to ankle. I tried to cover myself, but found my arms pinioned from behind. 'How about it then?' said the other, almost drooling in his excitement. He fumbled with his belt. 'Prize piece of fresh meat! Just the way I like it, young and juicy. Should be very tasty'. (199)

The vivid details and psychological trauma are important aspects of the tale; they are explored further for meaning in Chapter 3.

A final deviation from the Grimm tales that Marillier uses is Red's choices about Sorcha toward the end of the novel: first, he saves her from the flames, and secondly,



when he follows her back to her home in Erin, he asks her to decide whether she wants to remain within the bonds of marriage with him now that her task of saving her brothers is complete, and his protection is no longer required. In these scenarios, Red is selfless. He offers himself up to Sorcha and to her family as a man who no longer rules his homeland, Harrowfield, and who has only come to her home in order to be with her. His love for her shines bright through his words.

## CHAPTER III

### **Marillier's Feminist Perspective Including the Rape Scene**

After an analysis of the Tale Type 451 in Chapter 1, in which the reader can see the original context and inspiration of Marillier's book *Daughter of the Forest*, and after exploring in Chapter 2 many of the significant deviations that Marillier uses in her version of the story, this chapter will analyze some of the implications of Marillier's choices for the differences between her story and the Grimms' Type 451 tales. Marillier's choices suggest a subtle feminist slant that delivers a powerful message by bringing to light issues of female silence, desirable qualities in women, women treated as property or lesser than men, strong feminine narration, issues of pregnancy, reversed marriage roles, and sexual assault.

The young woman's fate in the Type 451 tales is based on her remaining silent. It might be argued that the reason the Grimm tales are well-known is because they teach a lesson: women who are quiet are able to have what they desire, which must inevitably include a husband, a household, and children. For this virtue to be encouraged and cultivated, it must be presented as attractive.<sup>6</sup> Silence, therefore, is an appropriate starting point and repeated theme which Marillier uses to re-work the Grimms' tale narrative. Marillier presents silence as a concept even in Sorcha's fictional timeframe of 10<sup>th</sup> century Ireland: silence in women is a positive attribute, and it is a virtue to strive toward in a patriarchal society. In silence, she is beautiful, serene, and mysterious.

Even today, women are silenced both outright and in smaller, less noticeable ways, and Marillier's novel, by presenting patriarchal culture as oppressive, seems to encourage the reader to apply *Daughter of the Forest* story to the 21<sup>st</sup> century because her

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<sup>6</sup> This idea is discussed further with literary critic Bottigheimer later in this chapter.

critique of patriarchy is applicable across time and culture. She seems to argue that the system in which we exist today is inherently a function of men being consistently placed higher in status, among other things, than women.

If Marillier's audience can see the patriarchy as oppressive, then Marillier has succeeded in depicting how Sorcha's choice to become silent has nothing to do with ideals of patriarchy; in fact, she thwarts the system by *choosing* to adhere to its demands. The Grimms' tales *force* the young woman into silence 'for her own good,' to make her desirable, which happens in "The Six Swans" and in "The Twelve Brothers." Sorcha acts in direct opposition to this by making her choice to be silent, so that she might save her brothers. No one makes this decision for her; she is given the option, and she takes on the task after considerable thought.

'You must choose your own path. You must choose it now.'

'There is no choice,' I wailed. 'She took them, she changed them, and now they are gone! What can I do but run and hide, and be alone?' ...

'You can live out your days in terror, without meaning. Or you can take the harder choice, and you can save them'. (Marillier 152)

After evaluating the situation for some time, Sorcha shows that she thinks for herself and makes her own choices, based on the parameters set before her.

Sorcha's determination to remain silent and do what she must for her loved ones is not only upright and noble, but it is a most difficult choice. Critic Ruth Bottigheimer asserts, "Men [in literature and drama] could be silent, but women were silenced" (118). This is not the case for Sorcha. She takes on the difficult task knowing what she needs to do, and she does it of her own volition. She is silent, but she is not silenced. Sorcha

thwarts the story's implications and literary intention through her powerful choice to complete the task for her brothers: "For whom did she work, for whom did she keep her silence these three years, for whom did she choke back her laughter and her tears and her screams of pain? You [her brothers] accepted what she did for you" (Marillier 488).

Language's relationship to power is obvious in Grimms' numerous muted females, in that power is taken from them when their voices are silenced (Bottigheimer 127). It is important to note within the Type 451 Grimm tales that the young woman is not named, other than to be called Sister. She does not think in first person, and the story is told about her and what happens *to* her. Before the story has even begun, the young woman is already silent; she has no say.

The silence in all of the versions of the Type 451 tales is also important to unlocking what the woman in the story needs to attain, sharing patriarchal insight into what is right and good: a quiet woman is a desirable woman. Many scholars suggest that this silencing of the woman is a teaching tool for readers and listeners of the Grimms' tales. It is a virtue for a woman to be silent, and this aspect of femininity has been taught to young girls for centuries: young boys go out and play, and young girls stay quiet and keep house. Thus, as Bottigheimer points out, many ideas about how women should act are subtly inserted into the Grimms' *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* collection. For instance, "[t]oo much chatter [for women and children] could be punished, and severely"; excessive talking is associated with witchcraft, something no young woman wants to be part of (Bottigheimer 117). This instills a clear message that for a young woman, talking is unattractive and even offensive. Not only is there a lesson being taught about how women should act, but there are statements about the way girls speak and how negatively

this is perceived: “Girlish and womanly silent repose” is polite and demanded, and men hate “nagging, [which is] the only category of female speech... recognized” (117). It is the *best* choice, according to Grimm tale discourse, for a woman to be silent.

Furthermore, in regard to silence, mute women also exhibit sexual vulnerability (Bottigheimer 128). In keeping with the narrative structure, Sorcha’s sexual vulnerability tests her resolve to remain mute during the task to bring her brothers back; the sexual assault she undergoes is traumatic, and her promise to remain silent, no matter what happens to her, means she will receive help from no one, since she cannot call out.

These ideas of silence were subtly enforced in society by the Grimm tales, serving as “paradigms for powerlessness” (Bottigheimer 130). The preference and reinforcement of feminine silence and servitude forced upon women over time has created a structure in which learned helplessness becomes attractive and subconsciously strived toward.

Rusch-Feja emphasizes further the importance of feminine beauty being subtly asserted through common fairy tale ideas: “[T]he shirts sewn by the sister ... effect a counteractive magic to those which the stepmother ... made. The requirement not to speak or laugh is [only] an additional challenge” (89). These choices of seemingly simple tasks of sewing and remaining quiet are exaggerated to exemplify not only what women are expected to be good at, but also what is generally seen as attractive in a woman, and in the story these traits are generally exaggerated (Rusch-Feja 26).

Yet Marillier’s feminist lens points out the truth that “desirable” aspects in women such as silence, compliance, and servitude are dangerous, painful, and often have detrimental outcomes. Yes, they are the elements of a folk tale type, and yes, they are common in many stories and cultures, but one of the insights of Marillier’s elaborate

version of the story is that “folk tale” patriarchal assumptions about women are troublesome and inherently oppressive.

When Red takes Sorcha with him across the sea to the land of the Britons, she has become his property. She is not asked if she wants to leave; she is taken, or rather, kidnapped. Here, Marillier continues Sorcha’s story along the same narrative structure that the Grimms used, and Sorcha is treated as property by the man she will marry, just as she was treated as an object or property by her brothers and her father as a young child. Like in the Grimm tales, Red shows interest in her past and also in her silence, but Red’s interest is rooted in his desire for information about his brother, Simon.

During the climax of the story, Sorcha is able to choose whether she will leave, given the choice by her husband. As a person, she is expected to make decisions. However, in a step backwards, she is made property again by her brothers as soon as she is relinquished to them from her husband’s household. Sorcha’s brothers, changed back from swans into men, surround Red and their sister, and the brothers take Sorcha from Red. She is their property now. She recalls:

For an instant, [Red’s] arm tightened around me still further, and then he let go. I twisted around to be scooped up into Conor [her brother]’s arms like a child, and soon they were all around me, Liam exclaiming, Diarmid cursing, Cormack and Padriac already armed with short swords deftly removed from a couple of men who now lay groaning at the foot of the steps. (Marillier 465-6)

Though her strength is obvious, she functions within the boundaries of what she knows. She only challenges those boundaries a few times within the story, but when she does, it is exceptional.

When Sorcha's brothers find their bearings after changing back to men, their first inclination is to forcefully demand answers. For example, they argue about Sorcha and speak at her, but they do not truly expect an answer by which they would change any plans. When Sorcha's marriage to Red comes to light, for example, there is no confusion; there is only outright and immediate denial. "Can this be true? That you are wed to a Briton?" 'Rubbish. She's still a child.' This was Diarmid, his expression outraged. Even though I had my voice back, it seemed to be very hard to speak. Instead, I clutched the ring that hung around my neck, and put the other arm around my knees, and turned my face away from them" (Marillier 472). Sorcha is not given the chance to speak, though her brothers address her. This is an interesting tactic by Marillier to showcase the powerlessness of woman sometimes without her awareness of it.

Sorcha finally begins to assert herself as her brothers argue about what they will do with her *now that she has saved them*. She finally stands up for herself in regard, interestingly, to her man. Whereas her brothers will not allow her to speak with this "unworthy" husband alone because he has allowed so much danger to come to her, Sorcha asserts herself: "This is my decision,' I said quietly. 'I will be quite safe. I will not go far; just beyond the door.' And I walked out, eyes straight ahead. Nobody tried to stop me" (Marillier 488).

Thus, Sorcha is not a pawn forced to cooperate with the demands of the curse that was set upon her brothers; power is given to her within her circumstances so she might

examine her life on her own, as a real person and as someone who has initiative and individual thought. This concept is absent from the Grimms' tales – the young woman is not given thoughts or the ability to do things for herself, unlike Marillier's Sorcha. However, even as Sorcha's brothers come to her rescue, they are angry and want the event to be put behind them, and though their intentions are true, Sorcha is still just an object to them. Her brothers are defending her and fighting for her, but it is for the wrong reasons. She has little say, and she is not being treated by them as a grown and functioning young adult.

In the Grimm tales, the events in the story all happen *to* the young woman, and though in the Grimms' tales she withstands the cruel treatment and hostile reality of her life during the difficult task to save her brothers, it might be argued that she simply doesn't know any better, so simply does what she is told. This seems to be the underlying message from the Grimms. In "The Six Swans," the young sister first hears about the reality of her brothers' curse and quickly decides that she will save them:

'Can't you protect me?' asked the little sister.

'No,' [her brothers] answered. "We can take off our swan-skins for only a quarter hour each evening [...] After that we are again transformed into swans.'

Crying, the little sister said, 'Can you not be redeemed?'

'Alas, no,' they answered. 'The conditions are too difficult. You would not be allowed to speak or to laugh for six years, and in that time you would have to sew together six little shirts from asters for us. And if a single word were to come from your mouth, all your work would be lost.'



[...] Nevertheless, the girl resolved to redeem her brothers, even if it should cost her her life. (Grimm 532-33)

There is no emotional turmoil, no questioning, no argument from the young woman. She immediately begins working to un-do the curse on her brothers, and this seems to suggest that she does not consider her options or the reality of what she will actually undergo to complete the task. In this way, the Grimms' treatment of the young woman is similar to the treatment of a pawn or an object that is moved about to move the story forward.

Similarly, since Sorcha's brothers continue to treat her like an object or property, it can be argued that these circumstances are also comparable to how Sorcha's rapists treated her: as an object: "[My brothers] discussed me as if I were a piece in their game of strategy; a prized one, but still just an object to be maneuvered to best advantage. I lay there unblinking, silent in the darkness" (Marillier 203). Even when Sorcha's brothers are finally turned back to their human form at the end of the story because of Sorcha's obviously victorious and difficult efforts *for* them, they force their way through the crowd as soon as Red saves Sorcha from the fire, and they surround her, swords raised. They do not ask her if she wants to stay, but instead they claim that she will be taken with them back to Erin. The brothers discuss her marriage to Red as a matter of campaign and politics (Marillier 472-3). It is Sorcha's brothers who silence and subdue her the most, which is interesting, because they owe Sorcha their lives.

Even in the final pages of the story, it is clear to Sorcha that she is unequal in emotional and mental capability to her brothers: they joke about Sorcha's misery when she is without Red, dismissing her love for him "as a young girl's calf love, something I

would soon grow out of. Despite all, they still saw me as little more than a child” (Marillier 513).

Sorcha’s brothers love her and they take care of her, boss her around, and make decisions for her; a mix of the healthy and the aggravating. This is also how the story begins, with the clear message that, from the beginning, her brothers watch over her, but they also feel in charge of her. Sorcha’s youngest brother is the first example of this behavior: “‘Don’t lean over so far, Sorcha,’ said Padriac. ‘You might fall in.’ He was a year older than me and made the most of what little authority that gave him. You could understand it, I suppose” (Marillier 1). Sorcha sometimes ignores her brothers and makes her own way, which is one of the Marillier’s steps in showing Sorcha’s independence and feminist stance in contrast with the young woman character in the Grimms’ tales.

Though this seems to contradict a feminist reading by showing how much the men in Marillier’s *Daughter of the Forest* treat the protagonist as property, I argue that Marillier’s use of the Tale Type 451 framework, which requires the young woman to be subjected to patriarchal treatment in this manner, allows Marillier to underscore the powerful instances when Sorcha takes a stand against her oppressors, however close and loving to her they may be. This is a critique of the patriarchal norms upheld by the tales; Marillier reworks the story to point out how powerful these norms are.

Sorcha’s brothers’ unthinkingly cruel treatment highlights the physical aspects of violence in patriarchy. The society that harms Sorcha cannot heal her, and that the same concept applies in “criticism on the treatment of [rape] victims by family or even by police or medical staff at hospitals [today] ... it is easy to dismiss female suffering”

(Copley 53). Marillier takes this knowledge and uses it to re-work the familiar framework of Tale Type 451 in Sorcha's story to make her feminist statement.

Despite being treated like property by many of the men in the story, Sorcha is asked to marry Red so that he may protect her through his name: thus, in an explicit deviation from the Grimm tales, Red proposes a marriage "in name only" (there is no love commitment at this point or any expectation to consummate their union). The young woman in the Grimms' versions of the Type 451 tales marries the lord because he desires her. For instance, in "The Six Swans," the third-person narrator states that the young woman's "modest manners and courtesy pleased [the King] so much that he said, "My desire is to marry her, and no one else in the world" (Grimm 533). Her silence and good manners make her desirable in the eyes of the patriarchal society she lives in. In contrast, though Sorcha's attractiveness to Red does seem to be reinforced by her silence, Marillier emphasizes through Red's own words that Red has grown to love Sorcha for her characteristics of strength, love of others, beauty, and intelligence (Marillier 527).

Marillier deviates from the Grimm tales to show that Sorcha has grown as an adult and as an important person— a *woman*— and that Red has also evolved in his love for her as he begins to share his life with her, however strained and confusing their relationship becomes in his hesitation to reveal his feelings, and in her struggles with the curse set upon her family (Marillier 348). She begins to transform into a human being in Red's eyes, and he finds that he loves her. This is also a deviation from the Type 451 tales.

Furthermore, when asked if Sorcha is free to go or not, Red states, "Do you hold a wild creature once it is healed, and ready to fly home? [...] [Sorcha] makes her own

choices. She knows that she is free to go. She knows she need only tell me, when it is time” (Marillier 487). This is a radical deviation from the Grimm tales; at no point does the King in the Grimm tales ever acknowledge that his wife has any authority over what will happen to her. In the Grimm tales, the young woman remains with the King for the rest of her life after she saves her brothers.

Another important aspect of *Daughter of the Forest* that must be considered is the idea of guilt, in reference to the family and related to the marriage bed: Sorcha is not guilty of her brothers’ transformation in the same way that the main character is guilty in the Grimms’ “The Twelve Brothers,” where the young woman picks twelve flowers as gifts for her brothers, and each time she picks a flower, one of her brothers is turned into a raven (Grimm 39). In contrast to this, Marillier offers a unique difference between the two Grimm stories in this way by avoiding any blame for the brothers’ transformation. But Sorcha still is the only character in the story capable of completing the task of saving her brothers—a belief upheld by her wise brother Conor and by the otherworldly Deirdre. According to critic Rusch-Feja, “The girl is stronger than her brothers, who inevitably ‘regress’ or are ‘reduced’ to an animal state, a pre-conscious state, a state lacking full integration to life” (96). Sorcha’s endurance, patience, kindness, love, and strength, help her to overcome the task she chooses to undertake.

Furthermore, it seems evident that readers of Marillier’s work will admire and identify with Sorcha, and rightly so; with her own faults, Sorcha nonetheless represents a feminine ideal, knowledgeable in medicine, healing, and care, which are commendable qualities. Therefore, it is interesting that Marillier follows the Grimms in creating stories that problematize pregnancy and childbirth.

Pregnancy is a wholly feminine concept. The men are kept out of the room, and the women all take part in the birthing process. Marillier adds this whole facet of woman to the story to highlight Sorcha's femininity, her knowledge, and her ability to cope and to heal others.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, there is stark contrast between the loving birth scene in *Daughter of the Forest* (305) and the scene in the Grimm tale "The Six Swans," which features the theft of the protagonist's newborn child and the framing of the protagonist not only as a witch but as a cannibal: "[A]fter the queen had brought her first child into the world, the old woman took it away from her while she was asleep, and smeared her mouth with blood. Then she went to the king and accused her of being a cannibal. The king could not believe this and would not allow anyone to harm her" (Grimm 534). The young woman in the Grimm tales is accused of eating her own children by her hateful mother-in-law.

In setting the stage for more elaboration on child-related parallels to the Type 451 tales, Marillier adds Lady Margery's delivery of her son, Johnny, to further the sense of camaraderie and love between women, in contrast to having them treated as property and simply as vessels by which children are created and cared for:

'Jenny! [Sorcha's nickname]. You're here!' she said in a faint little voice.

'Why didn't you come? I wanted you. Why wouldn't you come?' [...]

I did not think I could bear to see Margery's face, or John's, if I could not lay their infant son safely in its mother's arms. (Marillier 305)

Sorcha is not only concerned about the birth of Johnny for the sake of her own safety in the household, but she is also concerned as a devoted friend to Margery, who has always been kind to Sorcha despite the cruelty of nearly all of the other Harrowfield residents.

Marillier also creates men in her book who love their women, but the patriarchal structure within the text prevents the men from seeing their wives and lovers as anywhere near equals to themselves. However, Sorcha's knowledge, compassion, and love for Margery—and even for the people who have wronged her—attests to the feminine ability to endure despite hardship (Marillier 304).

Thus Sorcha's healer abilities in childbirth and Margery's kindness, despite the hatred of the household, speak to the strength of feminine compassion amid difficulty. Margery is expecting a child, and the reader learns that Margery tried to have children before and had a daughter who had only lived "a few moments in the world" (Marillier 281). Through her relationship with Margery, Sorcha further reveals how intelligent, competent, and warm she really is, which the household begins to perceive despite Sorcha's strange, self-inflicted suffering, which alarm many of the members of Harrowfield (Marillier 273, 302).

In the Grimms' tales, the suffering of the young woman is "vividly expressed" through her circumstances, rather than through any statement of her feelings or thoughts (Rusch-Feja 94). Not only is she a foreigner; in *Daughter of the Forest*, her damaged hands mark her as alien in addition to being a representation of the emotional and physical abuse she has undergone.

In the Grimm tales, the young woman is not given thoughts or the ability to do things for herself. Everything happens to and around her, and though she withstands the

cruel treatment and hostile reality of her life, it might be argued that she simply doesn't know any better and so easily does what she is told. For example, when the young woman in "The Six Swans" is accused of killing and eating her children, she cares nothing of it and only "sits composedly sewing at her shirts and paying attention to nothing else" (Grimm 534). Marillier takes a strong stand against this idea that the main character has no agency, by giving Sorcha a definitive voice through narrating *Daughter of the Forest* in first-person, through Sorcha's point of view.

In the beginning of the story, it is Simon and Sorcha's interaction which is one of the first instances when the reader can experience Sorcha's skill and intelligence; she is speaking as "I" and thinking for herself, referring to herself as "I," giving the reader access to her clever thoughts (Marillier 62). She cares competently for Simon in addition to telling him stories, creating tinctures and other medicines, deeply touching his young life.

In contrast, the sister savior in Grimms' tales never has a voice or has thoughts of her own. The Grimms' story of "The Twelve Brothers" tells the tale of the sister unknowingly plucking twelve magical flowers, one for each brother, and thus bringing about the change in her brothers accidentally, not realizing the flowers' magical purpose; she must remain silent for years in order to bring them back: "[T]he moment she brought the lilies in from the garden, her twelve brothers were changed into twelve ravens, and flew away over the trees of the forest" (Grimm 39). The sister feels guilty about this and sets out to save her brothers, as mentioned earlier.

Although Sorcha is blameless for her brothers' calamity, she still feels guilt (similar to the sister's guilt in the Type 451 tales), but instead her guilt is felt for bringing

disaster upon her husband Red and his family. As mentioned before, Red's household is unkind to Sorcha (as is the case in all of the versions of this tale), and members of the community often use signs with their fingers to "ward off evil" that they think Sorcha represents as a foreigner (Marillier 55, 261). As a foreigner, she is less than a human. She is the "Other," someone to be feared and despised. This is true in the Grimm tales and in Marillier's tale, but Marillier adds several nuances that alter the circumstances of Sorcha's stay at Harrowfield; one of the most significant additions is Marillier's introduction of two key characters who do not appear in the Grimm tales: Simon and Lord Richard, the latter of whom is explored further toward the end of the chapter.

Red's brother Simon is important in how he showcases Sorcha's early abilities as a caregiver, which is one way the reader can begin to see Marillier's use of female empowerment. From the feminist perspective, Marillier's purpose, in deviating from the Grimm's Tale Type 451 tales and introducing Simon, serves to show the reader Sorcha's autonomy, her wisdom and knowledge of healing and herb lore, and her ability to think, love, and speak intelligently. This differs widely from the Grimm tales, where the sister who is the savior of her brothers never has thoughts of her own and never speaks outside the realm of her brothers, her father, or her man.

In contrast with characters added to the Tale Type 451 framework, the figure of an evil stepmother or witch is a constant within all of the versions of Tale Type 451. As mentioned in Chapter 2, and keeping within the narrative structure, Sorcha nears her teenage years, and her father Colum marries the mysterious, eldritch woman called Lady Oonagh who ultimately curses the children and transforms them into swans. The event of transformation is mirrored throughout the other tales in various forms: sometimes the



brothers are ravens, or other wild birds and the time period for which they are changed varies widely. Though her presence could be perceived as anti-feminist, it is important to note that Oonagh is the catalyst that brings about the most powerful changes and disaster upon Sorcha—this is not performed by an overpowering man, but a cunning, magical, and power-hungry *woman*. Oonagh is deliberately portrayed not as inept, old, or crone-like, but as a formidable and calculating.

The timing of this powerful woman's arrival in Marillier's story is crucial; Sorcha is entering her formative, adolescent years and the coming of age of the young woman in the Type 451 tale is usually a time when her trouble begins in each version of the Grimm tales. However, in Marillier's story, Sorcha's woes begin at her birth. There is trouble lurking in every corner of her life *because* she is a female child born after six brothers, and the men in the story create various difficulties for her. This fact is not as much a deviation by Marillier from the Grimm stories as a salient point that Marillier is making that much of Sorcha's difficulty takes place *because* she is female. Whereas gender theory would critique the stipulation that one's life is determined by the sex of an individual, Marillier seems to offer a different perspective: her character Sorcha, in spite of being a member of "the weaker sex," makes several pivotal decisions, one of the most significant of these being marriage. My argument is that Sorcha *chooses* to marry Red, who is, incidentally, imperative to Sorcha's ability to heal from the sexual assault she experienced as a child. In other words, Sorcha, with the help of the man she chooses, becomes a *defender of her own rights* as protector and savior of her brothers. She is presented twice with a choice to be with Red, and the brothers must grudgingly take her

decision as law, realizing and accepting that Sorcha *can* and *should* make her own decisions because she has saved their lives (Marillier 488, 531).

In a major deviation from the Grimm tales, Sorcha's brothers ultimately take her back to Erin, breaking her heart from having to part from her husband, whom by now she has grown to love, which magnifies her misery:

The further time took me away from that shore, the more I recognized how much I had given up. [...] What did I expect, that Red would have begged me to stay? [...] How could I have remained thee to drag him down, a burdensome wife, object of hatred and distrust to all his people? I could not have done that to him. When I wanted didn't matter. [...] So why did I feel so miserable? What was wrong with me? (Marillier 501)

Because Marillier so clearly depicts Sorcha's longing for Red, it seems evident what Sorcha's choice would be if her circumstances enabled her to be with him. At that point she is unaware of Red's eminent arrival, and has instead resigned herself to the fact that she will have to face her unhappiness alone.

The importance of Red in Sorcha's life seems to emphasize that Sorcha is unable to overcome the inner obstacles without the support of a man. But Marillier further complicates the marriage issue when Red comes to Erin to find Sorcha, offering himself to her if she will only have him. Red arrives at the time when, after many months of having returned to her homeland, Sorcha's hands heal; this foreshadows the emotional healing that Red helps her achieve at the end of the story. During her initial return to Erin, Sorcha rejoices in the love of her brothers and father. One evening, the guards bring in a blindfolded man who Sorcha recognizes immediately as her Red. Although she is

commanded to be silent, it is only so that this man can proclaim his deep love for Sorcha. He does so, telling the story of what had happened to them over the past years, and stating that he has given up all of his holdings and wealth in Harrowfield, and that he has come empty-handed and prepared to start a new life in Erin if Sorcha will accept him, and he recalls his story:

‘One night, everything changed. He—he had cause to save a young woman from drowning; and from the moment he first plucked her from the water, half grown, half starved, half wild as she was, he knew. From that moment on, every step he took, every decision he made, would be different, because of her. She was not much more than a child, lost, hurt, and frightened. But strong. Oh, she was the strongest person he had ever met. He had cause to know it, on the difficult journey home, as she stood by him; as she healed him, although he was her enemy. [...] She showed him things that were almost beyond his understanding, so strange and wondrous did they appear [...] In his household she was like a wild creature set suddenly in the farmyard, like a fledgling owl in a chicken coop. With her deep silence, with the strange task she was compelled to do, working in pain and solitude under the uncomprehending eyes of his family, she filled him with a confusion such as he had never known before.’ (526-27)

In a twist on the tradition and expectations of a patriarchal engagement, it is *Sorcha* who accepts Red, and Red has thus become like property in a traditional marriage offering turned on its head. Sorcha makes her own choice of whom she will marry; her father and

her brothers do not choose for her. Her father states, “‘Untie his hands, Sorcha,’ he [Colum, Sorcha’s father] said gravely. ‘Take off the cloth that binds his eyes. This is your decision, your choice. You are a woman now, and the sacrifice you made for your brothers has earned you the right to determine your own path, though it may not be to our liking’” (Marillier 531).

The unusual aspect of *Daughter of the Forest* is that there are many *men* who contribute to and aid Sorcha’s need to heal. There are instances throughout the book where Sorcha mentions her fear of men; it is a common motif within the work: “[t]rust went just so far. He was a man, after all” (Marillier 311). However, Red offers his love without forcing it upon Sorcha; he supports her without telling her what she should do; and he shows her the extent of his ultimate devotion by pursuing her all the way to Erin at a great sacrifice (Marillier 530). Copley asserts that these attitudes are important: they are “‘traits in a man worthy of such a woman or any woman’”; men can often “‘provide healing in the process of overcoming rape’” (Copley 27). It is difficult to overcome something so traumatic and degrading, alone.

Sorcha’s realization that she, after all, does desire the company of a man, or even that she is not whole without that man, departs from her earlier stance as an independent woman and could be critiqued from a feminist point of view. According to Copley, however, it is true that healing and happiness “‘rarely involves just one person’”: the victim alone (Copley 99). A significant other can be the key to healing—Red appears to fulfill that role in Marillier’s framework of the novel.

Many readers and critics disagree with reading Marillier’s work as a feminist text because of the happy ending, the perfect and understanding man, and Sorcha’s settling

into a happy marriage. Though Marillier's text has elements that support a feminist reading, many readers dismiss *Daughter of the Forest* as a feminist text because it is:

... supportive of the patriarchy both because of the happy endings and because of the subtlety of the efforts employed. One feminist challenged Marillier's right to include what she derided as a simple happily ever after. Marillier's response ... was that the conclusion of her book was "neither truly happy nor truly an ending. (Copley 22)

Marillier does not directly thwart patriarchy by downplaying the role of men or by avoiding marriage altogether. Marriage is a part of Sorcha's culture in *Daughter of the Forest* and Sorcha eventually is happily married. Sorcha's brother Diarmid says gently to her when she is a young child, "Father already plans a marriage for you, in a few years' time," and Sorcha responds, "I'll never have an arranged marriage ... I'd rather not marry at all" (Marillier 27). Sorcha does not buck marriage, but she *does* take into her own hands *who* she will marry; she predicts her own future, but in a way subtle enough to allow her to exist contentedly in the patriarchal system.

It is important to note that Marillier does not attack the whole structure of patriarchy with her work, especially with the idea of marriage; she does not seem to espouse the idea that men are morally inferior to women. Instead, according to Copley, Marillier's text *questions* specific aspects of patriarchy (53). The issues that Marillier explores involve most specifically the treatment of women.

One of the most significant aspects of Marillier's version of the Type 451 tale is with reference to Lord Richard, the male villain of the novel, and an addition to the tale type, as mentioned before. The character Richard interacts with and highlights nearly all

of the feminist aspects Marillier calls upon in order to showcase Sorcha's message: by treating Sorcha as a sexual object instead of a person, and by taking advantage of her silence, Lord Richard eventually brings about his own downfall. When Sorcha is imprisoned for adultery and treason, he visits her often and the household members jump to conclusions when she is discovered in the woods hugging her brother Conor. Richard and his party walked into the scene; in Richard's accusatory words,

‘We both saw her; and we both saw the fellow she held fast in her arms. There was no question about what they had been doing. Ahem!’ He cleared his throat, glancing at his sister in a show of reticence ... ‘Well they—er—to speak plainly, the fellow had very few clothes on, and the girl was—um—wrapping herself around him in a very—intimate—fashion [...] We challenged the Irishman, and he fled into the woods. The girl was apprehended [...] They were speaking of men and arms and fortifications. Of the defenses of Harrowfield’. (Marillier 443)

Marillier's phrasing and the descriptions of Richard's behavior is intended to make his deceit and malice plain within the text. That is, in Red's absence, Richard arranges for Sorcha to be killed by burning at the stake (Marillier 445).

Leading up to this, Richard attempts several times to touch Sorcha: “[Richard's] hand came up, and one finger touched my cheek delicately, and then ran a slow pathway down my face, and my neck, and my breast above the neckline of my plain gown. I felt the blood drain from my face, and my insides clenched tight with remembered terror, and I caught my breath” (Marillier 290). Sorcha's memory of rape is awakened by his proximity and hostility.

Richard further harasses Sorcha and mocks her by describing what he has done in the past to other women; he also embarrasses her with comments about her developing body: “‘Amazing what a bit of good food can do for a girl’s figure.’ I glanced at him sharply, and intercepted a look that went up and down my body ... My insides went cold. ‘You’ve filled out nicely, young woman. Very nicely indeed.’ I tried not to listen” (Marillier 319).

But his own words will come back to haunt him; in thinking that Sorcha cannot understand his words, Richard sounds his own death knell when she is later able to speak and condemn him for all of the lies he has told over the years about his conquests and the false knowledge he planted about young Simon’s fate. Sorcha tells Red, “When I was— Your uncle spoke to me, unguardedly, at some length. He told me many things which he will now regret. He thought... he thought I would not [be able to] tell you” (Marillier 489).

Finally, one of the most important aspects of the book is Marillier’s use of the medium of the fairy tale to depict the violence and the lasting traumatic effects of sexual assault— in Sorcha’s case, it was rape. In Copley’s words, Marillier “weave[s] folklore and literature together to create a fantasy guidebook to surviving rape and to healing” (1). She addresses three common issues often placed in fantasy form: rape, redemption, and the possibility of hope. I suggest that Marillier not only turns Sorcha into a powerful woman who makes her own choices, but she also makes Sorcha into a “poster child” for the horror of rape and what it does to women in a patriarchal culture. The fact that Sorcha is able to overcome the effects of rape is another powerful message that Marillier conveys to her young adult audience.

Thus, rape is a significant issue that *Daughter of the Forest* addresses through deviation from the Grimm tales and through a feminist reading. One may pose a question about Marillier's reasons to include the rape scene in *Daughter of the Forest* (instead of staying in line with the Grimm's tales) and wonder about Marillier's feminist agenda. One of the explanations could be that rape is widespread and prevalent in patriarchal society and always has been. In addressing feminist issues such as the horror and trauma of rape and assault, Marillier uses her fiction as an effective tool to focus on this prevalent and under-addressed issue of violence against women.

As mentioned before and referenced throughout the book, during the time before Sorcha was taken across the ocean with Red, she was assaulted and raped by several teenage village boys; Marillier takes the reader through the heart-wrenching scene in first person, describing in excruciating detail not what is being done to Sorcha, but what Sorcha experiences in her head, making it a statement against rape rather than glorifying it in graphic physical detail. The rape is not glamorized to titillate the male reader or embody fantasies of forcing a woman into intercourse. Rather, it is a lament, a cry of misery from the perspective of the ravaged and abused victim. Sorcha, pinned down by her violators, suffers in silence, lashing out at them helplessly. She recites in her head the Old Lore to distract herself from dwelling on what is being done to her body while the young perpetrators ridicule and spit on her:

[W]hile the one held me down, the other spat on his fingers and shoved them inside me, and I sank my teeth through my lip, holding back my scream, and felt blood and tears wet my face as he pulled down his pants and forced himself into me. It hurt; it hurt so much, and I had no voice to



curse him. I tried our old trick, tell a story to block out the pain ... *her name was Deirdre, lady of the forest* ... I screwed my eyes shut, not to see their red, sweaty, excited faces ... *if you were very quiet, as quiet as a ... as a mouse, you might see her* ... I tried and tried, and it went on and on, and one shuddered and pulled away, and the other took his place. 'See, not a word out of her! She loves it, don't you, little slut? Some faery girl; this one's mortal enough, belongs in the farmyard, she does. Best thing that ever happened to her.' (Marillier 199)

This graphic scene is well-known as one of the most haunting in all of Marillier's works. Notice the psychological trauma sustained and the frequent mention of the event as Sorcha's only point of reference about men and male sexuality. She recalls of that terrible night:

'I remember still the feeling of solid rock at my back, how I pressed myself in right against the wall, curled in on myself as small as I could, biting my knuckles, one arm up over my head in protection. I remember wishing the earth would absorb me, take me in and soak up the hurt and guilt and the wretchedness. I was full of hate; hate for the men who had done this, hate for the innocent [boy] who had led them to me, hate for the lad Oonagh who had driven me to this lonely place. I hated my father for his weakness. I hated my brothers as well, for not being there when I needed them. Besides, they too were men, and so how dared they try to make it better?' (Marillier 201)

Sorcha's hatred of all men in her life at that point in time—guiltless though they may seem—is an illustration of one of the devastating effects of assault: Marillier makes the trauma of what has happened to Sorcha a touchable and stark reality. “She had been hurt,” Red points out, remembering how Sorcha behaved around him when he first met her (Marillier 526). Throughout her ordeal and through Red's kindness as they grow to love one another, Sorcha begins to change. One of the most important moments of Sorcha's life was when she finally had to leave Red, and she felt in her heart the change that was taking place:

He reached into his pocket. ‘I have something for you.’ He put it in my hand. A round, shiny, perfect apple, green as new grass with a faint blush of rosy pink. A now his eyes had changed so that I saw what lay there, hidden deep, so deep only the bravest or most foolhardy would seek to find it. He had always understood me better, without words. So I laid my hand on my heart, held it there for a moment, and then moved it over and touched my palm against his breast. *My heart. Your heart.* [...] I turned away, just before the tears began to well in my eyes and spill down my cheeks, and I ran to the boat. (496)

Near the end of the book, before Red has returned to her, Sorcha is contemplating why she is so miserable without him, and surprises herself:

Anyone would have thought ... *anyone would have thought you were no longer afraid of men.* That was the small voice of common sense, like a dash of cold water. I am. I am still afraid, I said to myself, for I still remembered how those men had hurt and shamed me, the ugly things they

had said, in every vivid detail. The memory still turned by body cold with disgust. It would never go away. That was one side of the balance. As for the other side, for there was now another side, I thought I would give almost anything to have that one moment against, the moment when I had gel Red's arm around me like a shield against the world, and his lips against my hair, and his heart drumming under my cheek. In that moment, he had not wanted to let me go. It's all right. *It's all right, Jenny*, he had said. But it was not all right. (Marillier 502)

Marillier illustrates the rape in *Daughter of the Forest* in explicit mental detail so that there is no confusion about who the victim is (Copley 50). Though the details are graphic, never does it seem that the rape was exaggerated, overemphasized, or glorified by any stretch. Marillier also seems to point out in her text that rape is about the body, but it can also be a metaphor for the pillaging of land and culture. Rape is seen as the “right of conquerors,” and “more about dominion than it is about sex” (Copley 44).

Also, this story is not only about the rape of a girl but also about the rape of the land of Erin and its native people by Britons like Lord Richard (even though Sorcha's rapists were of the same origin as she was—they were boys of Erin). Copley states that “[t]here is no event with greater emotional destructive impact” than rape: it can create a feeling of distance from loved ones, from home, and even from oneself (45). Rape is the ultimate act of patriarchal oppression, mainly because the woman's body becomes an object: she is “a thing” without emotion, and what is done to “a thing” is not remembered by that thing. This kind of consciousness (or lack of it) is blamed for atrocities committed all over the world.

The significance of the rape scene is not simply a critique of patriarchal oppression and violence; it is also an assertion of the physical reality of rape. As Copley points out, “The actual rape scene [in *Daughter of the Forest*] takes no more than two pages, yet forms the center and direction of all that is to come” (43). The entire story that Marillier creates around the thread of the Grimms’ tale centers upon the terrible event of rape.

It is important to note how watchful Marillier is in addressing the rape event that she brings into Sorcha’s story. Rape in literature “bears the marks of a patriarchal discourse of honour and chastity” (Copley 3). Through rape, the value of a woman’s self-worth and honor are stripped from her, and she is given a new identity by the patriarchy: no longer a woman, she is a weak and blameworthy victim. The significance of Marillier’s representation of the rape scene is that it is wholly first-person, based not on honor but in the emotions that take place in reality, and the traumatic pain that is both physical and psychological. I would argue that the role of Sorcha’s character is to bear witness to rape.

Interestingly, rape in Marillier’s story is not only avenged, but it is avenged violently enough (the boys are killed) to uphold power-hungry ethos:

‘[L]et Cormack stay here and tend to the dog. I will go. This task is mine.’  
Finbar [my brother]’s voice was shaking. Then, peering between my fingers in the half light, I swathe three of them take cloak and knife from the cave, and slip away into the forest with death in their eyes ... I remember waking with a start as Liam drove a bloodstained dagger into the earth by the fire and wiped his hands on his cloak ... [Finbar’s] hands

were dark with blood ... Their three daggers stood in the soil across from the fire [...] the bright metal encrusted with their quarry's life blood. It had been a hunt, not a battle. A swift, violent meting out of justice.

(Marillier 202-3)

Even Finbar, the most sensitive and least prone to violence among Sorcha's brothers takes one of the main roles in the immediate and furious revenge. It could be argued that this illustrates the depth of Finbar's vision of his sister as his property, but I argue that it illustrates the power of the patriarchy over one's sense of what is right and wrong, not that the young woman is seen as property. This fits with the power- and war-hungry ethos of patriarchal society, even within fairy tales because it is part of many different emotions. Marillier therefore emphasizes the influence of patriarchy over everyone, even those whose emotional actions are based on love for family.

Marillier uses the medium of fairy tale-based fiction in a fantasy genre effectively when it comes to rape. She "weave[s] folklore and literature together to create a fantasy guidebook to surviving rape and to healing" (Copley 1). Interestingly and poignantly enough, Sorcha points out:

"If I were telling this tale, and it were not my own, I would give it a neat and satisfying ending. The children would come home [...] The wicked stepmother would be punished for the evil she had done, and driven forth from their home. The father and his sons would live happily ever after. In such stories, there are no loose ends. There are no unraveled edges and crooked threads. Daughters do not give their hearts to the enemy. The wicked do not simply disappear, taking with them the satisfaction of

vengeance. Young men do not find themselves divided between two worlds. Fathers know their children. But this is my own story, and surprisingly, it was I who met our father first, for when my brothers followed Donal indoors, I slipped around the side to my old garden, which Oonagh in her spite had destroyed. I had thought my heart broken, then. How little I had known of sorrow. (Marillier 506)

Marillier turns Sorcha not only into a powerful woman who makes her own choices; she allows Sorcha's experience to stand as a testimony about the horror of rape and its effects in a patriarchal culture, with an added message that rape is possible to overcome. Marillier's feminist slant on the Tale Type 451, which is used in several instances in the Grimm tales "The Seven Ravens," "The Twelve Brothers," and "The Six Swans," delivers a powerful message in its discussion of female silence: women treated as property or lesser than men, strong first-person feminine narration, issues of pregnancy and childbirth, unusual marriage roles, and most significantly, sexual assault.

## CHAPTER IV

### Conclusion

The use of the Tale Type 451 framework – with significant deviations – to assert a feminist agenda is a fascinating genre for Marillier to work with. Sorcha's choices throughout her life in the context of *Daughter of the Forest* are contrasted with the oppressive fairy tale culture of the silent woman, which Sorcha, on the one hand, embodies completely to choice, but, on the other hand, through that choice, she also quietly subverts as she sets out on the journey to retrieve her brothers. Marillier also enables Sorcha to rise above the tendency of patriarchy to objectify by presenting Sorcha's story as a first person narration, which offers her thoughts, ideas, and grasp of knowledge, herb lore, human nature, love, intelligence, and kindness. Finally, Marillier adds a rape scene to the framework, and proceeds to liberate Sorcha from the traumatic childhood experience to give hope to the countless victims in cultures all around the world; it is hope against a crime that is one of the most heinous and yet one that is the least talked about. Marillier's use of a familiar backdrop for strong feminist views is subtle, powerful, and influential.

## APPENDIX

### **Summary of Marillier's *Daughter of the Forest***

Sorcha is born the youngest child and only girl into a wealthy family whose land and holdings are hidden in the deep forest of Sevenwaters. Sorcha, who is about twelve years old at the start of this story, has six beloved older brothers. Her solemn father Colum is a powerful leader in Erin, which is present-day Ireland. Sorcha's mother died giving birth to her, and her father never recovered.

A Christian priest named Father Brennan who lives near their domain, though the community at large— including Sorcha's family— is pagan. He is good to those who come to him, and Sorcha is a devoted friend to him.

Sorcha's father's men one evening bring a young fair-haired man in as prisoner. They torture him for information. Sorcha and her brother Finbar smuggle him out and take the young man to Father Brennan's cabin to try to heal his injuries. This exhausting and frightening task soon belongs to Sorcha, and over the weeks the difficult and angry young man, Simon, and Sorcha forge a bond; he is volatile, though sometimes kind to her, and after their friendship begins developing in earnest, he soon disappears.

Sorcha is still in her pre-teen years when her father remarries a woman named Oonagh, a powerful sorceress. Oonagh becomes pregnant with Colum's seventh son and, after mistreating the household with subtle, destructive displays of her power, she casts a shape-shifting spell on the children to rid the household of all of Colum's heirs, so that her own child will inherit and one day rule Sevenwaters which is a large holding in Erin. Sorcha alone escapes this spell that has turned all six of her brothers into white swans.



After the transformation of her brothers, SORCHA hides in the forest and soon encounters the Lady Deirdre, a supernatural queen of the Tuatha Dé Danann and benevolent ruler of the Otherworld. Deirdre gives SORCHA the option of taking on a task in order to bring her brothers back: SORCHA must create six shirts out of a spiny, poisonous plant called starwort—making one painful shirt for each brother out of the plant—in order to change the brothers back into human form. This task will ruin her hands and test her to the brink physically; but not only must she create these horrible shirts, she must remain entirely silent for the entire time that it takes her to complete this task; she is not to laugh, cry out, or make any sound at all. If SORCHA takes on this task for however long it takes her to create the shirts, her brothers will again assume human form. In the meantime, during the process, the brothers will return briefly to their human form twice a year.

Months pass as SORCHA works alone in the forest with her brother's dog, Linn, a loyal hound, by her side. During this time, SORCHA is raped by local young boys; she is deeply traumatized, feeling abandonment, deep hatred, and self-loathing. Her companion dog is killed during the assault, and when her brothers temporarily change into humans, they exact fatal revenge on the perpetrators in their rage.

SORCHA reaches adolescence and in the meantime lives within the same forest, though she is miserable, confused, and completely alone. Unexpectedly, Deirdre tells her that it is time to leave this place; SORCHA sets out in a raft on the ocean. She is found by travelers and flees from them, abandoning her raft, but she cannot swim. The men, foreigners called Britons, rescue her but she hates them and is uncooperative, not eating or—of course—speaking.

One of the men shows interest in her past and also in her silence based on the few possessions she carries. This man is Hugh of Harrowfield, who is also called by his nickname “Red.” Red finds out by looking at Sorcha’s possessions that she knows Simon, who is Red’s little brother, the young fair-haired boy who had been tortured in her household. Red plans to take Sorcha with him across the sea to the land of the Britons because she has information that Red wants.

Meanwhile, Red is injured in their travels and Sorcha cares for his wound and fever. Later, arriving in the land of the Britons, Sorcha is treated with suspicion and scorn, though Red tries to make her way easy for her by making her an honored guest in his house. Sorcha’s only comforts in the cruel household include Red’s attentiveness and kindness, and a gentle relationship develops between them. Sorcha—called Jenny in this new home—takes care of Simon’s elderly and temperamental terrier Alys. Sorcha becomes friends with Margery, who is expecting a son with her husband John; John is Red’s good friend and man-at-arms. Ben, another friend, is also good to Sorcha.

Lady Anne is Red’s mother, and she does not receive Sorcha well. In her grief and confusion over her son Simon, she strives to continue to run her household, though she clearly disapproves of the way Red has taken Sorcha in as a guest, and how he speaks with her so openly, “as if to another self.”

Sorcha must continue to harvest and work with the starwort plant at Harrowfield, Red’s home. She is given much grief for this because the household does not understand her work and she cannot explain it. Red, however, helps her; yet there grows much hostility within the community about Sorcha, drawing the attention of the vicious Lord

Richard, Red's uncle and Lady Anne's brother. Richard's kind-hearted but stern daughter Elaine is betrothed to Red, so they might wed to advantage as far as land holdings.

Red is often traveling. When he leaves, danger preys on Sorcha. Terrible events begin to happen, starting small. It becomes suspicious that Lord Richard is often around when these events occur, such as missing clothing, signs drawn on walls, and attacks on the dog Alys that frighten the dog, then later to injure her.

Sorcha's friend Margery goes into labor. No one seeks Sorcha's help though it is clear there are complications with the pregnancy. As a last resort, Sorcha is called, though it is nearly too late. The baby is born breeched, or feet-first, which is very dangerous. Sorcha saves the boy child, though he is born not breathing. She breathes into him and he lives.

She flees outside the estate and, as is common between her and Red, he seems to sense her distress and finds her, comforts her kindly and unobtrusively. He wishes she would speak to him but knows she cannot. Their relationship grows as the weeks go, and Sorcha continues her spinning of the shirts.

Tragedy befalls the household when John, Margery's husband, is killed in a suspicious rockslide, and Sorcha cannot cry for help, though help would not have arrived quickly enough. Breathing his last, John expresses how Sorcha should "say yes," though Sorcha is not sure what he means. As the only person there when he dies, she relays a message to Margery in sign language of everything John would have said, had he the time.

Red proposes marriage to Sorcha as a source of protection, negating his betrothal to an understanding Elaine, much to the dismay of his mother and the community. He

makes it clear that he only means to offer Sorcha protection, though his affection for her has become evident. Sorcha, unable to see this, shrugs and accepts him, confused by her own feelings and frightened by the hostility of the household and of the recent events.

But Red leaves urgently, called away by a possible sighting of Simon, and Lord Richard descends on Sorcha. At a party, Sorcha steps away to meet briefly and secretly with her brother, Conor. When she is found embracing him, the household assumes, under Richard's guidance, that Sorcha has committed adultery; she is imprisoned and treated cruelly in the dungeons of the manor. For weeks she is starved and abused in Red's absence. Richard begins to visit and gloat about all of the ways he plans to undermine his nephew by abusing and verbally assaulting Sorcha, while planning to have her killed for her treason and adultery.

There is a trial heard by a local priest in which Richard speaks against Sorcha unjustly. The priest does not agree with Richard, yet Richard takes matters into his own hands and organizes a burning ritual outside the estate at Harrowfield; Sorcha and her belongings will burn at dusk a few days hence. Preparations are made as Sorcha waits in prison.

The day arrives, and Richard visits and continues to gloat and to ridicule her. Sorcha, with her mental link with one of her brothers, calls for them in her mind, that they must come tonight or she will perish.

She is soon taken above ground from her cell and bound upon a huge pyre. She begs for the shirts she has made, though the sixth shirt is missing one of its sleeves. A kind officer hands her the shirts, disobeying commands. She watches the horizon for her swan brothers.

The pyre is lighted and a huge crowd gathers. As the heat rises, Sorcha sees her brothers flying toward her. In a frantic rush, the birds circle and land in confusion on the wooden pyre that has not yet caught. Hurriedly, Sorcha throws the shirts around their long swan necks. The youngest brother, Finbar, takes the longest to arrive. As she waits for Finbar, Red approaches the crowd at a hard cantor on his horse, then pushing fast through the crowd. Simon, miraculously, is with him. Sorcha notices one of Richard's archers in the window of the manor, aiming at Red. A strange wind snatches the shirt out of Sorcha's hand. To warn Red, Sorcha cries out, breaking the curse. She is devastated that she had been faithful to her command to be silent for so long, only to fail at the very last moment. Red takes an arrow to the shoulder, then rips it out, bleeding. He jumps up on the pyre, slashes the ropes binding Sorcha, picks her up and jumps again as the pyre bursts into flame. For a moment, with Red's body protecting hers, his arms wrapped around her tightly, Sorcha grieves anew for the brothers she fears she has lost, though deep within she feels the rightness of Red so near to her, protecting her.

She hears her human brothers as they approach, weapons drawn. The curse had been lifted. The brothers want their sister back, and Red, after a moment, lets go so they might receive her. It becomes clear at last to Red and to the household what her task had been: she had given up her childhood for her brothers. She loved them above all else.

After much arguing, political arrangements, and power struggles, Sorcha leaves for Erin with her brothers, having said a heart-wrenching and silent goodbye to Red. She says with her gestures, my heart is your heart. Tears streaming, she flees, leaving the man whom she now knows she loves.

Months pass in her homeland. Sorcha grieves for the loss of Red and explores her own feelings regarding the rape she suffered as a child and her hatred of men since then. Despite these feelings, she knows that Red is the man she loves, and she longs to be with him.

The siblings' father, Lord Colum, is much changed by his wife Oonagh. He does not realize they have truly returned until some time after they have come and have been interacting with him. He sees Sorcha and thinks she is her mother Niamh, so similar are they now. Oonagh has left. Some brothers travel after her and their infant brother, who is Oonagh's and Colum's son named Ciaran. The Sevenwaters community has suffered under Colum and Oonagh's neglect. The siblings begin working to make it right.

On the evening of midwinter, Red is taken captive by the Sevenwaters soldiers because he has trespassed onto the land, then lets himself be taken in. He is blindfolded and Sorcha and her brothers know him instantly. Sorcha is immediately elated; she is warned to keep quiet to hear this man's story. He says he has only come to speak to his wife. He is asked to tell his story. He tells it in third person, turning his life into a tale starting with his birth, his land rights, the danger of his brother, and moving into how he met Sorcha, whom he calls "Jenny," and how from the first day when he saved Sorcha, he knew she would affect his life. Blindfolded, he tells his tale, about his deep love for her, and how he has now given up his land and holdings to come be with her in Erin if she will have him.

Sorcha is given leave by her father to make her own decision. In front of her family, she approaches Red, who is still blindfolded. He knows it is Sorcha who is cutting the ropes, laying her hand on the back of his neck. He is untied and they passionately

embrace, finally. Red later shows Sorcha the gentle way that a man and woman can be together, with none of the horror Sorcha experienced when she had been raped years before. Sorcha and Red begin their life in Erin as part of the Sevenwaters household, and Sorcha continues visiting the local homes as a healer, like she did before. They are soon expecting a child. The story ends in full anticipation of the next book in the series, *Son of Shadows*.

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