Chapter-4

‘The Forbidden Fruit’: The Treatment of Incest in Fairy Tales

The search for a woman begins with the sister

(Central African Asande proverb)

(Maisch 36)

The fairytale is a poetic expression of the sense of confidence that we are secure in this world and more or less at ease with the various codes on which it works. It gives the message that while it may be beyond our capability to comprehend the world as a whole, just as magic is beyond comprehension; yet we can adapt ourselves to it and act and live in it happily. Fairy tales often score over religious tales, whether from the Bible, the Tripitakas or the Upanishads, because though the latter provide answers to the crucial questions of how to live a good life, often they do not offer “solutions for the problems posed by the dark sides of our personalities” (Bettelheim 52). The Biblical (religious) stories suggest essentially only one solution for the a-social aspects of the unconscious: repression of these (unacceptable) strivings. But as Bruno Bettelheim has pointed out, children, because they don’t have their ‘id’s in conscious control, need stories which permit at least ‘fantasy satisfaction of these “bad” tendencies, and specific models for their sublimation (52). The fairy tales, on the other hand, as Tatar puts it, “give us exaggerated and distorted (one might even say uncensored) forms of internal conflicts played out in the context of family life” (Tatar, ‘Reading Fairy Tales’ 93) which endears them to the hearts of children desperate for some help in sorting out their confusions.
One of the major issues for young children is the attainment of sexual maturity, marking the transition from childhood to adulthood through adolescence. In the vast majority of fairy tales, love is depicted in psychological and not physical terms. Explicit descriptions of sexuality are consistently avoided, if not to say prohibited. Yet, from Freud and his disciples to Bettelheim’s influential *The Uses of Enchantment*, the characters and plot situations of individual tales (whether ‘Snow White’ or ‘Red Riding Hood’ or ‘The Frog Prince’) have been deciphered as symbols of sexual desires and conflicts. And as per Lewis C. Seifert’s observation, already noted in the previous chapter, the primacy of sexuality in fairy tale plots, though hardly ever directly stated, becomes obvious in the stereotyped ‘marriage closure’ that the majority of the fairy tales rush towards (2). As Ibrahim Muhawi and Sharif Kanaana succinctly point out in the ‘Introduction’ to their collection *Speak, Bird, Speak Again: Palestinian Arab Folktales*:

...the pretense in front of the young that sex does not exist...merely confirm[s] its supreme importance. Sexuality, in short, is affirmed through constant denial (34).

But, apart from the sanctioned sexuality represented by marriage, there exist in society many such relations which seem to be the product of an uncontrolled id. Fairy tales being narratives of becoming and maturity, they are often used to address these ‘asocial’ or ‘bad’ tendencies of individuals as observed earlier. Even within the context of the family (extended or nuclear), which constitute the chief backdrop of these tales, several forbidden feelings and relations do emerge, of which incestuous tendencies of fathers and mothers towards their children, or of brothers and sisters towards their siblings; is an important, though suppressed, aspect. Extramarital
affairs and sexuality out of wedlock to some extent do find representation in these tales. African folk-/fairy tales abound in tales of love/sexuality outside marriage. In fact A.J.N. Tremearne, in his *Hausa Superstitions and Customs* mentions that there is no word in Hausa which expresses the sentiment of love. The phrase commonly used to denote it, *Ina Son Kí*, can be properly translated only in terms of “possession” or “animal lust” (53). However, the coyness of editors like Wilhelm Grimm or Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar regarding ‘certain situations and relationships’, has led to a considerable lack of tales dealing directly with incest in their collections. ¹ In fact the Grimms’ were so insistent on making their stories ‘pure, truthful and just’ that they eliminated passages they thought would be ‘harmful to children’s eyes’ (Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* 48). Thus the *Kinder-Und Hausmärchen* has only one tale— ‘Thousandfurs’— which treats the theme of incest directly, while *Thākurmar Jhuli* (from a Bengal that was equally, if not more, conservative at that time) has none.

In ‘folk’ tales proper, and in the myths from which these tales often originate, the theme of incest, though not as common as some other motifs, is yet far more prevalent, as can be seen from the entries made under this heading in Stith Thompson’s seminal work, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (1966). In his book, the tale motifs T410 to T425, deal with the various types of incest which may be found in folktales. Thus, T411 is the motif of father-daughter incest, instances of which he has found in Irish and Celtic myths, Italian, Greek, Indian, Eskimo and Danish tales. Tales of the T412 motif (mother-son incest) are also found in Danish, Celtic, Jewish, Indian or Indonesian collections, though the instances are significantly less in
number. T415 is the motif of brother-sister incest; T417 has the son-in-law seducing the mother-in-law, while T423 is the motif of a youth attempting to seduce his grandmother (Thompson 384-386). Accidental incest tales also form a part of the larger category of incest tales. Tales where accidental incest is consummated, though not very common, yet has certain examples including ATU 938, Placidas, which has the unwitting incest of brother and sister; and ATU 931, Oedipus. Tales that depict accidental incest which is ultimately averted is even rarer. In the revised and enlarged Aarne Thompson Uther index of folklore motifs, one such example is ATU 674, ‘Incest averted by Talking animals’ (Haase), but I was unable to find any tale illustrating this motif during the course of my study.

Tales of intentional incest— both averted and consummated— provide another frame though which to view incest tales. Instances of intentional incest consummated are often seen in what are best described as ‘bawdy tales’. It also occurs in tale type ATU 705A (though again admittedly, I could not find any specific tales aligned to this motif amidst the more canonical tales that I studied. The Alur (Ugandan) tale, ‘Uken’ (Edmunds and Dundes 35-38), and the Nupe tale ‘The Love Between Blood’ (Frobenius 239-46) are two such tales, both from Africa. This motif, ‘Born from Fruit (Fish)’ has a mother who casts out her son’s wife and dons the wife’s attire to have sex with her son. This is quite a revolutionary motif, especially for readers fed on the watered down Indo-European tales that come via editorial filters. Whereas in the above motif the man remains in the dark, and the woman exerts her will (though for a wrong reason), the general trend, as will become clear very soon, is totally different.
Generally speaking, tales of intentional incest which is ultimately averted tend to cluster along *gender* lines. Tale types ATU 920A (‘The Inquisitive King’) and 823A (A Mother Dies of Fright when she learns she was about to commit Incest with her Son) both feature a son seeking sexual relations with his mother to test her. In contrast, tale types ATU 510B (‘The Dress of Gold, of Silver, and of Stars’) and 706 (The Maiden without Hands) both depict a father seeking to wed his daughter, usually as a replacement for his deceased wife (Aarne and Thompson 1961, 1964; and Uther 2004, a more comprehensive work based on the methodology of Aarne and Thompson).

To cite some specific examples of incest tales, in Greek mythology, there are Zeus and Hera who were brother and sister as well as husband and wife. They are the children of Cronus and Rhea (also married siblings). Cronus and Rhea, in turn, are children of Uranus and Gaia (a son who took his mother as partner, in some versions of the myth). Cronus and Rhea's siblings, the other Titans, like Nyx and Erebus, are all also married siblings. Myrrha committed incest with her father, Theias, and bore Adonis (‘Incest in Folklore’, *Wikipedia*).

Again, Norse mythology and folklore also have their own share of incest tales. In the ‘Flyting of Loki’ episode in *Lokasenna*, where Loki is spilling all kinds of secrets about his fellow deities, he accuses Freyr and Freyja of committing incest (Bellows). He also says that Freyr himself was born of another incestuous coupling— between Njörðr and his sister. This is also indicated in the *Ynglinga Saga* which says that incest was legal among the Vanir tribe (Tennant, *Online Medieval and Classical Library*).
In Norse legends, the hero Sigmund and his sister Signy murdered her children and begot a son together, Sinfjötli. When Sinfjötli had grown up, he and Sigmund murdered Signy's husband Siggeir. The element of incest also appears in the version of the story used in Wagner's opera-cycle *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, in which Siegfried is the offspring of Siegmund and his sister Sieglinde. Similarly it was an incestuous union of Helgi and Yrsa from which the legendary Danish King Hrólfur Kraki was born (*Wikipedia*).

One tragic tale from the *Kalevala* (the Finnish national epic) is that of Kullervo, a warrior-magician who unknowingly meets and seduces his long-lost sister on his travels (Lönnrot, e-book 5186, *Project Gutenberg*).²

Egyptian mythology, of course is replete with incestuous couples. Osiris and Isis were brother and sister as well as husband and wife. Same were the cases of Nephthys and Set, Nut and Geb, and Tefnut and Shu. Even extremely conservative China has in its mythology the tale of Fu Xi, a god-king who took his sister Nüwa as his bride.

Similarly, in Icelandic folklore, a recurring plot involves a brother and sister’s illegal intimacy resulting in a child. They subsequently escape justice by moving to a remote valley. There they proceed to have several more children. The man has some magical abilities which he uses to direct travellers to or away from the valley as he chooses. The siblings always have only one daughter but the number of sons varies from one version to another. Eventually the magician brother allows a young man (usually searching for sheep) into the valley and asks him to marry the
daughter and give himself and his sister a civilized burial upon their deaths. This is subsequently done (Wikipedia).

In the Old Irish saga *Tochmarc Étaíne* ("The Wooing of Étain"), Eochaid Airem, the high king of Ireland is tricked into sleeping with his daughter, whom he mistakes to be her mother, Etain (Bergin and Best 137-96). The child of their union becomes the mother of the legendary king, Conaire Mor.

Also, in some versions of the medieval legend of King Arthur, Arthur accidentally begets a son by his sister (Morgause, the wife of King Lot of Orkney, who is sometimes conflated with her more infamous sister, Morgan le Fay) in a night of blind lust, and then seeks to have the child killed on hearing a prophecy that it will bring about the undoing of the Round Table. The child survives and later becomes Mordred, his ultimate nemesis (Lupack and Tepa, *Morgause*).

Moving away from the European world does not put an end to these tales of forbidden passion. In ancient Vietnamese folklore, there is a tale of a brother and a sister. The parents entrust their son with the care and protection of his little sister, before going out to work. One day while the boy is peeling sugarcane, the knife slips out his hand and hits the sister on her head (the Wikipedia version says that as children, the brother and sister fought over a toy, and the brother smashed a stone over his sister's head), and the girl falls down unconscious. The boy thinks he has killed his sister, and afraid of punishment, he flees. Years later, by coincidence, they meet again, fall in love, and marry without knowing they are siblings. They build a house along the seashore, and the brother becomes a fisherman while his sister tends to the house. Together they have a son. One day, the brother discovers a scar on his
wife's head. She tells him about the childhood injury caused by her brother, and the brother realizes that he has married his own sister. Overwhelmed with guilt over his incest, the brother goes out on the sea. Every day, the sister climbs to the top of the hill to look for her brother, but he never comes back. She dies in waiting and becomes ‘Hon Vong Phu’ (‘the stone waiting for her husband’) (see Wikipedia, and Congchua, Legends of the Waiting Statue).

Closer home, in Sri Lankan folklore, there are at least three significant instances where incest is mentioned. The forefather of the Sinhala race, Sinhabahu (the ‘Lion-slayer’), is a king who killed his father (a lion, hence the name) and married his own sister Sinhaseevali. Incest returns once more to the same family when King Vijaya (the eldest son of Sinhabahu and Sinhaseevali), abandons his first wife Kuveni, to marry Princess Vijai. Kuveni’s son and daughter, according to legend, fled to the jungle together in protest of their father's second marriage and their progeny came to form the ‘sabaras’ or the present day ‘veddah’ tribes of Sri Lanka (de Livera, ‘Kings and Rulers of Sri Lanka’). Also, the brother Dantha and the sister Hemamalini (also known as Hemamala) who according to legend brought the sacred tooth relic (the left canine tooth) of Lord Buddha to the island from Dantapuri (present day Puri in Orissa, India), seem to also have a married relationship. It is interesting to note that despite the liberal mentioning of incest in folklore, however, Sri Lankan culture, regards incest as a taboo, as do most cultures. Of course, it must be borne in mind that contemporary Sri Lankan culture is heavily influenced by the cultures of former colonial rulers (the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British), during the last couple of centuries (de Livera). In our Hindu Mythology, as well, there is
Yama, the god of Death and the Underworld, who is supposed to have married his own sister Yamuna and thus ostracized among the gods.

There are thus quite widespread examples of incest in myths and folktales. However, the editor’s censorship, has not allowed many such stories to become institutionalised in the public consciousness as ‘classical’ fairytales (in spite of the fact that these fairytales were often appropriated from those very folktales). In this chapter, I propose to look at the treatment of the discomfiting theme of incest in folk- and fairytales, to see how, if at all, the question of gender is played out in them.

‘Incest’ has been defined as:

Sexual behaviour between individuals who are related in any fashion except directly by marriage. [...] some definitions list only vaginal and anal coitus as behaviours involved in incest, while others include oral-genital behaviours and even fondling or mutual exhibition of genitalia.

(Corsini 572)

Again, Mary Hamer has referred to Sandór Ferenczi’s paper, ‘The Confusion of Tongues between Adults and the Child: The Language of Tenderness and of Passion’, to succinctly describe the workings of incest (85). In the paper, Ferenczi has put forth that tenderness, or rather ‘the lack of it’, is often an issue when incestuous moves are made. Children often believe that they are only playing a game with the adult, who however shocks them by a sudden shift in intention. He/ She substitutes ‘adult passion’ for a tenderness that a child was expecting and is all that he is equipped to handle, thus causing a ‘confusion of tongues’ (Hamer 85).
Outside the nuclear family, permissible sexual behaviour is a matter of cultural preference, since there is no universal conformity on this score. Thus, polygamy was socially sanctioned (and still is) in several cultures/societies. However, as William Arens has emphasised, there is far greater conformity when it comes to judging sexual relations between immediate family members, such as parents and offspring or brother and sister. These core prohibitions or avoidance patterns have far greater cross-cultural applicability. Most anthropologists and sociologists are continually emphasising the universality of the ban on incest as one, or perhaps the only, institutional characteristic which is common to all human societies, as Leslie A. White (in *The Definition & Prohibition of Incest*), G.P. Murdock (in *Social Structure*), S. Kirson Weinberg (in *Incest Behaviour*) and Herbert Maisch (in *Incest*), among others, have tried to argue. However Maisch himself acknowledges that this rule, which is applicable to most living societies, does have exceptions. Thus, e.g., in Madagascar, mothers, sisters, and sometimes cousins are not allowed as brides for the common people, while for the headman and the kings *only the mother* is forbidden. Amongst certain hill-tribes in Cambodia marriage between brothers and sisters is allowed, and among the Indian Kuki tribe, only the mother-son incest is forbidden. However, amongst the Kalangs in Jara, very surprisingly, mother-son marriages are regarded as bringing especial good fortune (34-35). Similarly, the warriors of the Australian Dieri tribe about to set out for battle are allowed incest on the night before, because it apparently will fill them with courage and provide an emotional catharsis as well (38). The culturally relative nature of incest leads to some variation in its treatment in folktales and fairytales. For
instance, the endogamous system of Palestinian Arabs encourages a male to marry his parallel first cousin—a arrangement that would be considered incestuous in many European cultures. In fact, as Muhawi and Kanaana point out, even when husbands and wives are not related to each other, they address each other as ‘cousin’ (ibin ‘ammi, i.e. son of my father’s brother and bint ‘ammi or ‘daughter of my father’s brother’ (16). However, as they further argue folktales need not always validate such kinship arrangements as best simply because they are prevalent, rather they sometimes critique them as well(16). For instance, in Tale 21 of their collection, ‘Šōqak Bōqak’ (181-87), a man rejects seven of his cousins before deciding to exchange vows with someone unrelated to him. His cousins immediately prove their unsuitability as good brides because instead of welcoming the new bride with beatific smiles (as is expected of ‘good’ women by patriarchy), they turn nasty and vindictive. In Tale 25, ‘The Golden Rod in the Valley of Vermillion’ (212-17) two sets of marriages are compared—in one a maligned wife is actually faithful to the husband, but in the other, three cousins, all the while proclaiming their innocence, turn out to be licentious and faithless to their shared husband. I find it relevant to mention here that the yardstick for determining the virtue or otherwise of a woman here too remains the level of her self-effacement in the service of the men in her life, irrespective of how they may treat her.

Since first cousin marriages are not considered incest within this culture, incest tales instead feature sexual relationships within the nuclear family, as illustrated by the story ‘The Woman who Married her Son’ (Muhawi and Kanaana 60-61). These relationships are also subject to variation between cultures. Hasan M.
El-Shamy, for instance, claims that the relationship (not incestuous) between brothers and sisters in Arab cultures is of special importance within the family unit, whereas North American and European culture and culture-studies emphasises vertical relationships (i.e. the relationship between parent and offspring) within families (‘Brother-Sister Syndrome in Arab Family-Life’ 317-20). Shamy was of the opinion that the brother-sister relationship “plays a decisive role in the generation, development, and continuation of a specific pattern of family structure and a host of other related social and cultural institutions” (*Tales Arab Women Tell*, 3)—an importance, which in most other cultures, is attached only to the parent-child relation.

Whatever be the relative significance attached to these close family ties in various cultures, what is of interest to me in this chapter is the perversity that sometimes becomes manifest in them. As argued above, in most cultures the parent-child relation is considered to be the fundamental building block of society—which ideally should be nurtured with the greatest care. Yet, records show that if the reported cases are sought out, then the father-daughter (or stepfather—stepdaughter) form of incest is ironically the most common. Proportionately, coitus appears to occur more often in the father-daughter dyads. If, on the other hand, incest is taken to include casual sexual contact and if a large number of random samples are surveyed, then sibling incest comes forth as the most common with a reported incidence of 10-15% (*Corsini* 572).
Even though instances of incest are quite concretely documented, there is a very perceptible unease, even among the intelligentsia, to accept its frequency. Alfred Charles Kinsey, for instance, downgraded incest as a relatively rare experience, one that “occurs more frequently in the thinking of clinicians and social workers than it does in actual performance” (Kinsey. et al. Sexual Behaviour in Human Male 558). The father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, is also guilty of disclaiming the frequency and extent of influence of incest.

In 1892, in collaboration with Breuer, the young Freud indicated the significance of childhood sexual trauma on adult cases of female ‘hysteria’ in Studies on Hysteria (e.g. case study 4— Katharina) (130-33). However, these observations had implications which were too much for him to handle. Some years later, in an appended footnote to a reissue of another early paper espousing this view, Freud recanted: “This section is dominated by an error which I have repeatedly acknowledged and corrected. At that time I was not yet able to distinguish between my patients’ fantasies (emphasis mine) about their childhood years and their real recollections. As a result I attributed to the ontological factor of seduction a significance and universality which it did not possess” (Freud, Early Psycho-Analytic Publications (1893-1899) 168). His new theory claimed that children desired sexual contact with the other-sex parent but that they had to learn to repress this longing. And most of his patients who claimed to be incest-victims, he felt, were just making up stories for their own wish-fulfillment: that is how he came to put the taboo on incest at the centre of individual emotional life (Freud, ‘Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes’ 241-58). Even now,
many decades later, research reveals that this attitude has not altered in many cases—first-person accounts of sexual violation by daughters often being dismissed as fantasy (Doane and Hodges 2; Wilson 35-58) or as incidents initiated by or consented to by the girls themselves.3

Freud’s theory became hugely popular and influenced the interpretation of fairy tales as well. Critics like Carl Mallet, Alan Dundes and Bettelheim started out with the premise that because the fairy tales contain hidden messages related to our unconscious drives and needs, their inner layers of meaning need to be interpreted as Freud interpreted dreams; it is for us to look beyond the surface and grasp their psychological significance. As Haase points out, for Dundes and the other believers of the psychological approach, incest tales are not about incest per se, but about a ‘desire for connection’! (Greenwood Encyclopedia of Folktales & Fairytales, vol.2 483).

In The Uses of Enchantment, Bettelheim has used the ‘Oedipus Complex’ theory postulated by Freud, to interpret many well-known tales from the Grimms’ collection, though they do not deal with incest directly.

According to Bettelheim, the Oedipal boy feels threatened by his father because he wishes to replace the older man in his mother’s attentions. Thus, fairytales abound in giants, ogres, and monsters because the son, in his imagination, casts the disruptive Father thus. Since the desirable female/princess is held captive by the giant, ogre or dragon, the little boy is able to comfortably believe that but for
the brute force preventing her, the girl he prefers (Mother) would willingly have come to him, the coveted hero (113).^4

On the other hand, Bettelheim continues, in fairy stories meant to assist the girl grappling with Oedipal feelings come to terms with her feelings and find vicarious satisfaction, the plot changes. In such tales, the stepmother’s or the sorceress’ intense jealousy and evil machinations keep the lover (who in the mind of the girl is the Father) from finding the princess (the girl herself). While the Oedipal boy does not want any children to interfere with his mother’s complete involvement in him, the Oedipal girl apparently, does want to give her father the love-gift of being mother to his children (113). Psychoanalytic criticism definitely has its uses, and Bettelheim does clarify that his inferences should not be taken to mean the girl actually thinks of having sexual relations with him, for a child does not think in such concrete terms (113). However, his scholarship, I feel, is clouded by the prevalent stereotypes of women as born mothers and nurturers, when he says that even little girls have a ‘dim anticipation of her motherhood to come’ and that she instinctively knows at her age that children are needed to ‘bind the male even more strongly to the female’ (113). And this brings us again to how gender influences fairytales— their narratives as well as their interpretations.

In the tales showing father-son conflict like the Grimms’ ‘The Six Servants’ (KHM 134)(Grimm and Grimm 627-632), male heroes often struggle physically and aggressively with their fathers. The male is thus allowed to engage in open confrontation to resolve his inner disturbances. But as already noted, in the case of oppressed female protagonists, there exist elaborate variations on the theme of
maternal domestic tyranny, but with a few exceptions like ‘Thousandfurs’ (KHM 65) or ‘Peau d’ Ane’ (the French version), the theme of paternal erotic pursuit is suppressed.

Instead of amplifying what his women patients told him about abuse, Freud constructed a theory that focussed on men and on the danger of men getting too close to their mothers. Freud argued that it was on the separation between mothers and sons that the ordering of human society depended. The African folk-tale ‘The Mother’s Boy, is one tale which emphasises the point Freud tried to make very forcefully (Frobenius 230-31). In the story, a newly married young man about to get intimate with his wife, suddenly rushes out, goes to his mother’s hut and says, “Mother, I am hungry. Cook me a good meal.” The mother cooks a sumptuous meal for the youth and he stays back with her. On coming to know that his son had not consummated his marriage, the father barges into the mother’s hut, ordering him back into his wife’s arms. The mother is ordered not to cook any more meals for the young man. Finally the youth sleeps with his wife and also gets a good meal cooked by her, in the bargain. The story ends with the maxim: “A father should bring his son up to be a man and a husband, for if he stays with his mother, he will only learn to eat” (231).

But the ugly reality and far-reaching consequences of incest on women and its social implications cannot be denied or pushed under the carpet with tales such as this. Judith Lewis Herman has suggested that one out of every hundred females has had a “sexual experience” with either her father or stepfather (12). Again, practicing psychoanalyst, Joseph Peters feels that Freud “oversubscribed” to the fantasy theory,
with regard to incestuous feelings in children, which according to him “relieved the collective conscience of adults” (‘Children Who are Victims of Sexual Assault’ 401). The veracity of Peters’ observation regarding the reluctance of public conscience to take responsibility is rather worryingly established when even Michel Foucault, the famous historian of sexuality, is seen to dismiss child sexual assault as nothing more than one of life’s “inconsequential bucolic pleasures” (31). Peters also notes that in 1925, Freud himself admitted to suppressing the information that in two published cases of female hysteria, the fathers had indeed ‘molested’ their daughters (Freud, *Early Psycho-Analytic Publications (1893-1899)* 203) and it was not just their imagination.

Thus even though fairytales are largely silent about this issue (reflecting real society’s unease about the issue) and almost certainly abstain from any overt sexual tones; the matter-of-fact manner in which the few tales which do talk about incest, deal with the trauma of the abused and absolve the men of their guilt is quite shocking.

In the Grimms’ tale, ‘Thousandfurs’ (Grimm and Grimm 346-350) or Perrault’s *Peau d’ Ane* (‘Donkey-skin’) (137-60), the powerful king, who had been requested by his dying wife to marry only someone as beautiful as she had been, can only think of his own daughter ‘worthy’ of the honour. Hoping to dissuade him, the princess asks for a number of rare presents: a coat made of the fur from every animal (or the fur of the magic donkey from the royal stables, in Perrault) and three extraordinary dresses, resembling the sun, the moon and the stars respectively. But in a symbolic illustration of the awesome power and unassailable position of the
patriarch,\(^5\) he is able to meet these seemingly impossible demands with ease. As a result, the princess has to flee the palace and its comforts in the dead of the night, covered in the coat of many furs (or the donkey-skin), with her hands and face blackened with soot. This action of hers can be interpreted in two ways— the girl hides her face, accepting the shame and responsibility of her father’s perversion and also seeks to ward off further unwanted advances. Thus, it is borne out once more that it is always the woman who must bear the stigma of being the target of unwanted sexual behaviour, as if she somehow ‘asked for it’ (this phenomenon is evident even today in the way society treats the rape victims). Leigh Gilmore very forcefully points out in *The Limits of Autobiography* that “incest lies at the nexus of legal definitions of rape and family, in which children are construed as property” (57) of the elder family member—father, uncle, brother, sometimes mother or aunt or sister— and that “incest is sex to which one can never consent” (57-58). And yet the blame keeps getting shifted to the victims, who are mostly (though not exclusively) girl children.

This is borne out also, for instance, by a law of avoidance in force among the Akamba (or Wakamba) in erstwhile British East Africa (present day Kenya, Somaliland and Uganda), wherein a girl must steadfastly avoid her own father between the time of her attaining puberty and her marriage. She is to hide herself if she meets him on the streets, and is not supposed to even sit by her side. After her marriage (when she is sexually disposed off), these restrictions are lifted (Freud, *Totem and Taboo* 815). Freud says that these taboos are a product of ‘man’s deep aversion to his former incest wishes’, now repressed (*Totem* 820)\(^6\). But, in reality we
see that the rules are far more restrictive of women’s freedom, than the man’s. To come back to ‘Thousand Furs’, the girl, of course, is not really able to escape, and the incestuous advances of the father only begin a long history of abuse for her, as is seen, for instance in D. L. Ashliman’s translation of the 1812 version of ‘Thousandfurs’ (the German title is Allerleirauh) from Heinz Rolleke’s edition Märchen aus dem Nachlass der Brüder Grimm (Ashliman, ‘Incest in Indo-European Folktales’). In this version, the girl is captured by another king and at his palace she lives beneath the steps and works at the hardest jobs in the kitchen. Further, “each night she was required to go to her master’s bedroom and pull off his boots; whereupon he would throw them at her head” (‘Incest in Indo-European Folktales’).

It needs to be pointed out that no reason for this violence is offered by the editor. A variant found in the Grimms’ manuscript collection Märchen aus dem Nachlass der Brüder Grimm makes the sexual abuse even more apparent:

When she came to his room the king said, “you are a very beautiful child; come sit in my chair, so I can lay my head in your lap and you can louse me a little.” Thousandfurs was ashamed, for a while she could say nothing at all. “I am nothing but a poor child whose father and mother are dead.” But he insisted, until at last she sat down and loused him, and from that time on, she had to cook his soup for him and louse him every day. When he was lying in her lap, he saw the beautiful dress with stars through the sleeve of her rough coat. Then he ripped off her coat, and a beautiful princess stood before him.

(‘Incest in Indo-European Folktales’)

The way in which the princess’ identity is revealed to the king, with the king tearing off her clothes, to enable them to marry and ‘live-happily-ever-after’, also reads too much like molestation for comfort.
From the 1819 version onwards, the Grimm brothers left out the episode of the boot throwing, evidently to downplay the abusive nature of the relationship between the two lovers. However, as Ashliman points out, most versions of the tale speak of some kind of cruelty by the King towards the woman who he would later marry. Even more striking, and important for my argument in this chapter, is that the guilty father is not mentioned again and thus his crime too is forgotten and forgiven. This further bears out the contention of my preceding chapter which stressed on the unequal distribution of mercy to the two sexes in fairytales. In Perrault’s version of this story, the girl actually returns to her father with her new husband and is welcomed with open arms by a father who seems to have completely forgotten his earlier persecution of his innocent daughter. Thus, in these tales, the father’s incestuous leanings (or désir criminel) fold almost effortlessly into legitimate parental love (amour paternal). Logically this is a situation where there should be much externalised conflict or tension between the father and targeted daughter. But any such conflict (or any turmoil in the mind of the errant father) that may have existed at the beginning of the tale, is turned into a psychic drama internalised within the victim herself—it is she who apparently has ambivalent feelings for the parent, and not the other way round. According to Freudian theory (adopted by many psychoanalytic critics of fairytales), if incest rekindles the fires of fatherly love, ‘it is because these two passions spring, transformed, from the heroine’s own evolving psycho-sexual identity’ (Seifert 161)—i.e. because in her pre-pubescent/pubescent years, the daughter herself is confused between the two kinds of love she feels for her male parent.
As mentioned above, psychoanalytic critics also hold that by struggling with their fathers, Peau d’Ane, Thousandfurs or The Handless Maiden are in fact “struggling to define themselves both within and beyond the patriarchal family unit. [...] Their homecoming bespeaks *a longing for stability through the repetition or re-establishment of paternal authority at the end of the tale*” (Seifert 162).

Such interpretations reinforce the stranglehold of patriarchy by equating ‘stability’ with ‘paternal authority’. However, the very nature of the women’s struggle against their fathers, how they avoid outright confrontation and in fact, appear emotionally distraught about opposing their father’s will is problematic. Unlike the sons who seem to make a heroic virtue out of disobedience, the daughters depicted in fairytales are bound to the absolute obedience due to fathers, even in the midst of their victimization.

Thus, the loving embrace of legitimate paternal love that the errant father extends to the daughter at the end of the tales, as seen above, actually reveals a blindness or amnesia not just in that particular father, but patriarchy in general—a trend illustrated in many ways in society even today.

Some storytellers protect a father’s good reputation by letting him be unaware of the natural relationship between himself and the object of his desires, however illogical this situation may appear. Thus the Chilean tale ‘The Little Stick Figure’ (Pino-Saavedra 99-104) begins:

> There was once a woman who had a little girl by a certain gentleman. When this man returned sometime later, he didn’t recognize the girl as his daughter, and as she grew up, he fell in love with her. Her mother
had let her know that the man was her father, so she respected him as her father. But as they had never said a word to him, he followed the lovely girl day and night, leaving her no peace (99).

In some variants, responsibility for the father’s incestuous advances is symbolically shifted towards the victim herself (she is shown to act in ways to make her directly accountable, rather than only subconsciously going through the oedipal struggle as heretofore discussed). The Gaelic tale ‘The King Who Wished to Marry His Daughter’ (narrated by Ann Daroch of Islay) (Campbell, Popular Tales of West Highlands, 226-31) lets the daughter set events into motion that lead to her father’s advances:

There was a king before now, and he married, and he had but one daughter. When his wife departed, he would marry none but one whom her clothes would fit. His daughter one day tried her mother’s dress on, and she came and she let her father see how it fitted her (emphasis added). It was fitting her well. When her father saw her he would marry no woman but her (226).

This attitude adopted by the fairy tales is not an isolated one, rather this is exactly what is often mirrored in real life incidents. For instance, one of the worst scandals to hit England was the Cleveland child abuse scandal in 1987 where 121 cases of suspected child sexual abuse were diagnosed by paediatricians Dr Marietta Higgs and Dr Geoffrey Wyatt (though many of them were later dismissed for lack of clinching evidence). While researching their response to this debacle, Mary MacLeod and Esther Saraga discovered a case study in a book by a pioneer of the use of therapy with “abusive” families. It tells about a man called Brian who sexually abuses his daughter’s four year old friend while playing hide and seek with her, and
is apparently convinced during the act that the little girl was encouraging him, unlike his wife (‘Against Orthodoxy’ 17). Again Ken Plummer is of the opinion that “it is comparatively rare that the sex act is forced upon the child” (Plummer 225).

In fact, this outlook can be traced back to what is probably the oldest father-daughter incest tale on record, the Old Testament story of Lot and his daughters (Genesis 19:30-38). In the story the blame is entirely removed from the father as we are told that the two women gave their father wine and then slept with him without his knowing what was happening. As a result, his reputation survived into New Testament times as a “good man” (2 Peter 2:7-8). It should also be noted that although numerous specific sexual pairings are prohibited in the Old Testament, intercourse between fathers and daughters is not explicitly forbidden, as can be seen in Leviticus 18:6-24 and 27:20-23 (though of course this could be because the law-makers thought this taboo to be too obvious to put down in writing).

Much more recently, noted anthropologist Robin Fox, in *The Red Lamp of Incest*, went so far as to imply that girls would probably enjoy the experience of sleeping with their fathers if only those in authority did not spoil it for them by passing judgements.

Italo Calvino has observed that every tale, no matter what its origin, “tends to absorb something of the place where it is narrated— a landscape, a custom, a moral outlook, or else merely a very faint accent or flavour of the locality” (xxi). Sometimes that something can be trivial, but often it takes on a representative
significance, telling us something about the ethos and assumptions of the culture in which a given tale took hold and developed in new directions.

An Indian variant of tale type 510B is the Tulu tale ‘The Princess whose Father Wanted to Marry Her’. This is one of the rare tales in which the sexual attraction is spoken of outright. The king, returning from supervising the irrigation of his lands, sees his daughter standing on the terrace of his palace. “She was buttoning her blouse. He caught a glimpse of her breasts, and wanted her for himself” (Folktales From India 223). It also appears that this tale is not very eager to absolve the father of all guilt, since here his perverse passion for his daughter is not the result of his dying wife’s last request. In fact, his queen is still alive and a passive onlooker as her husband tries to justify his criminal intentions by asking “Would it be all right if I ate what I planted?” The daughter, sensing her father’s nefarious intentions, makes her escape in a big wooden box. The box floats along the river till it reaches another kingdom. Here, the woman does not have to take up work as the household drudge, nor is she abused in anyway by the second king. She is discovered by him when night after night she climbs out of her box to eat half his share of milk and bananas. I would like to note here a small detail that I find heartening—it seems that the girl strikes an equation of equality with the man, symbolised by her claiming equal amount of food as him.

But this girl’s escape is not all that smooth either. Only her trials and tribulations in the new land are precipitated by a different agent in this tale. The king’s former favourite concubine gets wind of the transfer of her man’s affections through her maidservant. When the king goes to war, leaving the wooden box and its
precious contents under the care of his mother, the concubine wheedles the box out of her. Back in her own house, she proceeds to mutilate the ill-fated princess in one of those scenes of excessive and senseless violence that fairytales often give in to:

She cut off her hands and had them buried in the row of yams in her garden. She cut off her legs and had them buried in the manure pit. She cut off her breasts and had them buried in the bin of paddy husk. She plucked out her eyes and put them in the pickle jar. Then she threw the rest of the princess’s body into a pit in the backyard, where, still half-alive, she lay moaning without a limb or an eye (225).

As is typical of fairytales, the princess is ultimately restored to her earlier beauty (by an old woman who literally pastes her together again). When the king returns from war, there is a grand reunion and a gala wedding. Unlike Peau d’Âne in Perrault’s tale, this princess does not go back to meet her father and he is not mentioned again.

This story has a few variations from ‘Thousandfurs’ or ‘Donkey Skin’. The princess does not have to work as a servant, nor is she harassed by the man she is to wed later. On the contrary, it is actually another woman who persecutes her (after her escape from her lecherous father). However, a close understanding of the text shows that it is again the man who is to blame for her sufferings—the father of course is very obviously responsible for her having to flee in the first place, but her fiancé is also not totally unaccountable. Because of his fickleness, the concubine, his earlier favourite and totally dependent on him for her very subsistence; is driven to such extreme measures. My argument should not be seen as an attempt to condone her wickedness, but merely one to look at her motives. The point about unequal pardon
being granted to men and women, that I tried to make in the earlier chapter, is illustrated here as well. The tale ends thus—“And the concubine was hanged by her neck on the outskirts of the capital.” Since no mention is ever made again of the incestuous father/king; his responsibility in forcing the princess out of her home in the first place, is conveniently shrugged off.

As a daughter grows up, her emotional and spiritual growth is deeply affected by her relationship to her father. Being the first masculine figure in her life, he is the prime shaper of the way she relates to certain aspects of herself and ultimately to men. From the above stories, we see that since the young princesses get used to being abused or persecuted by the first male in their life, they accept physical and sexual harassment from their prospective partners, not finding anything amiss. This fact is very forcefully emphasised by Jane Yolen in her retelling of ‘Allerleirauh’ (in The Armless Maiden and Other Tales 36-39). Yolen's story begins, as do the traditional versions, with the death of a queen. The promises the king makes, however, are different. He promises to love the baby that the queen died giving birth to – which is not something he does in the traditional versions; and he twists this promise to suit himself as his daughter grows up. Again in Yolen's retelling, the king's promise to marry no one unless the new wife is as beautiful as the dead queen is not extracted from him. He volunteers it himself, unsolicited. Yolen holds the king, and no one else, accountable for the abuse of his daughter. In her story, the princess does not make impossible demands of her father, and does not run away to escape. Yolen reminds her audience that certain magic is expected in fairy tales: "Now if this were truly a fairy tale...the princess would go outside to her mother's
grave. And there, on her knees, she would learn a magic greater than any craft..." (39). Then Yolen abruptly rips those comfortable expectations away from her reader: "But this is not a fairy tale. The princess is married to her father and, always having wanted his love, does not question the manner of it (emphasis mine). Except at night, late at night, when he is away from her bed and she is alone in the vastness of it" (39). Yolen's princess dies giving birth to a daughter "as lovely as her mother. The king knows he will not have to wait another thirteen years. It is an old story. Perhaps the oldest" (39).

Yolen's princess cannot expect a happy ending. The adults who might have saved her are kept quiet out of fear of the king's retaliation. "Silence becomes the conspiracy; silence becomes the conspirators" (39). As Helen Pilinovsky says, this retelling is “a painfully insightful tale of what it is in society at large, and in the individual human spirit that makes such abuse possible” (Pilinovsky, ‘Donkeyskin, Deerskin, Allerleirauh’). The princess is representative of every child with a shameful secret, with no one willing to help, and no magic key for her escape. Even more worrying is the point I started out with, that such unfortunate women begin to accept abuse as their lot, and often, as psychologists say and as illustrated in the tales analyzed above, they accept, or even look out for, potentially abusive partners in later life as well.

According to Linda S. Leonard, the father-daughter ‘wound’ (as she calls it) is not only an event happening in the lives of individual women, but a condition of our culture as well:
Whenever there is a patriarchal authoritarian attitude which devalues the feminine by reducing it to a number of roles or qualities which come, not from woman’s own experience, but from an abstract view of her—there one finds the collective father overpowering the daughter, not allowing her to grow creatively from her own essence (10).

Thus the collective father or patriarchy includes in itself not just the father-daughter dyad but all others where a male is in a position of power with respect to the female, and that implies the brother-sister dyad as well. And as the Incest Survivors’ Campaign declared in 1981, incest is:

The sexual molestation of a child by any person whom that child sees as a figure of trust or authority... Incest is the abuse of power (qtd. in Nelson 14).

Incest between siblings is also fairly common, as the source quoted at the beginning of the chapter shows. However, one is hard put to find any tale among the more well-known of the fairytales, which deals directly with the theme of sibling incest.

Critics like James McGlathery have read some suppressed incestuous elements in tales like ‘Little Brother and Little Sister’ (KHM 11), ‘The Golden Bird’ (KHM 57) or ‘The Glass Coffin’ (KHM 163).

In ‘Little Brother and Little Sister’ (Grimm and Grimm 62-67); the brother is transformed into a deer calf, as he cannot restrain from drinking of a pool enchanted by his wicked stepmother. Since then, the siblings are shown living a blissful (and isolated) life together in a small house in the forest. According to
McGlathery, there is, however, an implicit acceptance in the story that this idyllic arrangement turns problematic, once the siblings have passed puberty—and that is suggested by the events leading up to the sister’s marriage to the King (38). The events are set rolling when on hearing the horn sounded by the King’s party; the brother feels an irresistible urge to join the hunt, though in his chosen guise of a fawn he would be the hunted and not the hunter.

As he goes off to the hunt, the sister tells the brother, that she will let him back in only on hearing the password, “Dear sister, let me come in”; otherwise she says, “I won’t open up my little door”—a statement loaded with sexual implications. On the first two days, everything goes as planned. On the third evening, however, the King, who has found out about the girl and the password, is the one standing on the threshold when she opens the door. The King, decked to impress in full royal finery, proposes at first sight, and is promptly accepted by the sister. This swift acceptance on the sister’s part may indicate an instantaneous—and in that sense, feels McGlathery, ‘magical’—passage from girlishness to maidenhood. Still, the condition that the prospective suitor has had to address her as ‘sister’ in order to get her to ‘open her little door’ to him may suggest that “her farewell to her childhood and its incestuous attachment is not all that complete” (38).

Again in ‘The Golden Bird’ (Grimm and Grimm 289-96) and ‘The Glass Coffin’ (695-700), we see a brother’s persistent attempts to find a groom for his sister. The bungling youngest son’s (in ‘The Golden Bird’) or the tailor’s (‘The Glass Coffin’) good fortune in becoming the heroine’s bridegroom owes much to the help they receive from her brother. This active interest of the brother has been interpreted
by McGlathery as a “product of the sibling’s secret dream of living together happily-ever-after under more decorous circumstances” (43). For tales dealing more directly with sibling incest, we must, however, look beyond the Grimms or Perrault. The Lithuanian tale ‘A Brother Wants to Marry his Sister’ gives a particularly graphic presentation of the nightmare a girl might experience when threatened by a male relative (here a brother) and refused protection by other family members.  

An old couple had two daughters and two sons. One daughter was ugly and the other beautiful. The tale informs us in a very matter-of-fact manner that the younger brother ‘decided’ to marry his beautiful sibling, though she did not want to. Once when she returns home after washing her clothes, her family refuses to let her in. She knocks by turn, on the windows of her mother, father, sister and older brother, but they refuse to open the door unless she addresses them as mother-in-law, father-in-law, sister-in-law and brother-in-law respectively. Thus rendered helpless, the girl has no choice but to knock on her younger brother’s window, thus symbolically surrendering to him. The younger brother gleefully lets her in and hugs and kisses her. Thus ravished and stripped of all dignity, the girl wishes for the earth to open up and swallow her. Even as the brother makes a grab at her hair, pulling it out, she escapes into an underground kingdom, where again she has to work as a servant before the young lord likes and marries her. Here the girl is ultimately saved from the incestuous advances of her brother (ratified by a callous family). But what is to be noted is that the woman is able to eke out an existence for herself only in an underground kingdom, which is far removed from her everyday life. Perhaps, in a patriarchal society, a ravished woman cannot find easy rehabilitation even in a fairy
tale! And, as has already been noticed about such tales, there is no reference to any sorry end coming to the brother.

In the Indian tale, ‘Sona and Rupa’ (Ramanujan, *Folktales From India* 14-17), the brother is guilty of illegitimate desires of both incest and polygamy. He decides to marry his two sisters (unique in their beauty because one has hair of gold and the other of silver). After making a half-hearted attempt to talk their son out of it, the old King and Queen make preparations for a grand wedding, befitting the prince of the realm, completely disregarding the plight of their two daughters, Sona and Rupa. On the wedding day, Sona and Rupa climb a sandalwood tree and hide among its branches. As the time for the rites approaches, a search for them begins. The King himself comes to the tree to entreat:

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Come down, come down,
My daughters, Sona and Rupa,
The wedding hour has come.
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But Sona and Rupa reply:

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Father, we called you Father,
How can we call you Father-in-law?
Higher, higher, O Sandalwood tree!
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(16)

And the tree keeps growing higher, taking the two ill-fated girls more and more out of reach. Then ultimately, the prince arrives to shamelessly ask them to come down, but at this the skies thunder and the sandalwood tree splits into two, to accommodate the two girls, who disappear from view in no time. Thus again, we find how it is the *woman* who has to suffer for the transgressions of the *man*. Further, not only do these two tales present the sorry fate of incest victims, but by making the parents acquiesce to the son’s demands, they symbolically highlight the ruthless
silence and blindness (Elizabeth Marshall calls it a ‘cultural silence’) that most such victims receive from their families, instead of support and rehabilitation (403). Kinsey was of the opinion that, “... the emotional reactions of the parents, police officers, and other adults who discover that the child has had such a contact, may disturb the child more seriously than the sexual contacts themselves” (Sexual Behaviour in Human Female 121). It is this seamless ploy of society of absolving themselves of uncomfortable duties, all the while pretending to have the victim’s benefit in mind, which is painfully illustrated in the tales above.

These two fairy tales, at least, thus contradict William Arens’ view that, in cases of brother-sister sexual conduct, since both authority figures (mother and father) are uninvolved, they are presumably ‘prone to take immediate remedial action’ (12).

Another variant woven around this motif is the Kannada tale, ‘Hanchi’ (Ramanujan, A Flowering Tree and Other Tales 74-79). Incest is not the overriding theme in this tale, which Ramanujan has referred to as the ‘Kannada Cinderella’. But it is the brother’s illicit passion for his golden haired, beautiful sister which sets the action in motion in the tale. Like Allerleirauh, this girl too has to flee her home, because she has become the target of a relative’s (here a sibling, not the father) lust. In a deviation from the earlier tale, ‘Sona and Rupa’, this girl has the sympathies of her mother, who unfortunately is too powerless to stop her son’s advances and can only help her daughter flee to an uncertain future. Giving her a clay mask to hide her face (in place of the fur cloak or donkey skin), thus giving her her name, Hanchi (‘hanchu’ means clay tile), the mother poisons herself to escape grief and anxiety,
thus making another powerful statement of how many women have to be silent spectators of abuse in the family out of fear of society, or because their sustenance depends on the abusive male. The story progresses much like ‘Donkey Skin’ or ‘Thousand Furs’ after this, with marriage, hardships and a final reconciliation with the husband, with no mention made ever again of the lecherous brother.

The same thing can be seen in the tale from the Trobriands Archipelago, ‘Momovala’ (Malinowski, *The Sexual Life of Savages* 346-7). Momovala goes with his daughter to the garden and sends her up a tree. As she is climbing, he sees her genitals and lets out the *katugo-gova*, a cry of immense emotional excitement of a pleasant kind. By the time the daughter comes down, he is already stripped of his ‘pubic leaf’ and forces her to copulate with him several times. In shame and disgust, the daughter tries complaining to her mother, but when the lustful patriarch denies his role completely, she goes off to the seashore and gets a shark to eat her up. Learning of his daughter’s tragic death, the father’s immediate reaction is to shamelessly force his wife to disrobe immediately and copulate with him. So violent are his actions that his wife too dies after the act.

The story ends with Momovala cutting off his own genitals and finally dying. But that is only after pointed questions from neighbours regarding the disappearance of his wife and daughter become too much for him to handle. Besides, even though the man here does ultimately pay for his perversity and violence, the fact remains that he chooses his own death, whereas the women lose their lives because of his crime.
The Santali tale ‘Kora and His Sister’ is yet another terrifying variant of this motif (Bompas 163-67). Here, some blame for the brother’s desire is shifted on to the sister who plucks a flower from the tree which had been planted by Kora, the youngest of seven brothers, with the intention of marrying the maiden who picked one of the flowers and put it in her hair. Psychoanalytic theory will probably read this as a symbol of the sister’s hidden desire to be ‘deflowered’ by her brother. Once Kora makes his desire of marriage explicit, however, the sister runs away from home and hides herself in the branches of a huge palm tree. But her secret is given away by a pedlar. Her parents, relatives, all come to take her back to be the bride of Kora. When she refuses, they go back and invoke a storm to blow her out of her refuge. Wet and miserable, the unnamed sister is forced to come down from the swaying palm tree and go to the cowshed, where along with a warm fire, Kora awaited her. Lying down by his side, the humiliated girl cuts her throat with his nail-cutter. Awakened by her last blood-soaked moans and struggles, Kora also slits his throat in the same way. The tale ends with some rich symbolic observations— the blood from the two corpses is found to flow in opposite directions and even the smoke from their common pyre rises in two separate columns. The people of the community conclude that ‘the marriage of brother and sister is wrong’ (167).

Here, both the brother and sister die. Thus, unlike in the western tales, the errant male is punished here. And if the psychoanalytic view of the girl’s subconscious willingness for the liaison is accepted, then even her punishment is understandable, though perhaps too harsh.
Ashliman has pointed out that most folktales do not challenge a father's authority to do as he pleases with the members of his household, unlike fairy-tale stepmothers and mothers-in-law who are summarily put to death for their wicked deeds. This is not just a question of gender, for he points to uncles who are executed without mercy for sexually threatening their nieces. For example, in the Finnish tale ‘The Merchant’s Daughter’, a man found guilty of attempting to rape his niece is dragged to death behind a stallion, and the title villain of the Italian tale ‘The Wicked Uncle’, who commits a similar offense, is burned to death (‘Incest in Indo-European Folktales’). But for tales in which the guilty father—a more ‘authoritative’ male than the brother or uncle—is punished, we have to go a bit further back than Perrault or the Grimms. The oldest surviving account of a ‘Thousandfurs’ type heroine is found in Le Piacevoli Notti (The Facetious Nights) of Giovanni Francesco Straparola, first published in Venice in 1550. Straparola’s version in, ‘Doralice’ (night 1, tale 4) lacks many elements common to the folktales of type 510B: the motifs of the celestial dresses, the persecuted heroine’s period of debasing labour, and her anonymous appearances at a festive occasion leading to her discovery by and marriage to a prince (Heiner). However, the most significant deviation in Straparola’s story is an ending almost unheard of in European folktales, as D.L. Ashliman points out: the execution of the guilty father, Tebaldo (‘Incest in Indo-European Folktales’). Giambattista Basile’s Il Pentamerone contains two stories about heroines confronted by the sexual advances of their own relatives—in one instance a brother (‘Penta of the Chopped-off Hands’, day 3, tale 2, type 706B) and in another, the father (‘The She-Bear’, day 2, tale 6, type 510B). Basile’s ‘The She-
Bear’ is more closely related to type 510B of folklore than is Straparola’s rendering of this material (Basile, e-book 2198, Project Gutenberg). But, even then, Basile’s heroine is refreshingly different from her sisters, Thousandfurs or Peau d’Ane. The father in Basile’s version does not even pretend to try and woo his daughter with rare gifts like the fathers in Perrault or Grimm, but peremptorily orders her to his bed, hoping to ‘settle the accounts of love’. But an old woman has given the girl a magic chip, which when placed in her mouth, turns her into a ferocious bear. In a powerful departure from the eternally self-effacing and silently suffering heroines of fairy tales, Basile’s heroine has no qualms in taking on the shape of a terrible bear to threaten her father. Terrified, the king hides himself under the bedclothes until well into the next day, making it possible for the persecuted girl to escape into the woods. However, while the heroine’s ferocious self-assertiveness gives some respite, the fact that ultimately she has to make an escape, shows how patriarchy continues to wield the baton. In an unpublished paper, ‘Incest is Gauche, Lineage Adultery is Taboo: Sex, Marriage, and the Enactment of Kinship Among the Moose’, presented at the 1982 meetings of the American Anthropological Association, Washington, D.C., Alan Fiske has mentioned that among the Jalé tribe of New Guinea, sexual activity between members of the same social division is punishable by death for both parties. However, on occasion, the male can be reprieved by undergoing a ritual that involves eating a coprophagous sausage— that is, a pig’s bladder stuffed with human and animal excrement.13
However revolting the above means of penance may be, what is of interest is that, ultimately, it is only the male who is allowed to re-enter the mainstream of life, even when both are guilty of committing the same error.

Whereas stories focussing on a father’s jealous devotion or incestuous leanings towards a daughter exist, albeit not in abundance, in fairy lore; tales of mother-son incest are conspicuous by their absence from collections of Basile, Perrault or the Grimms. In fact, as McGlathery has pointed out, using the tale ‘The Nix (Water-Nymph) in the Pond’ (KHM 181)(Grimm and Grimm 756-60) as illustration; even legitimate sexual desire, especially when it came from a woman, is invariably veiled with the use of magic (150). Thus, it is hardly a surprise that such highly forbidden relations as mother-son incest would not be depicted in their works.

The few instances of this particular type of illicit liaison to be found in folktales (and the Stith Thompsons have shown that there are such tales) have not been institutionalised in the public memory as the better known of the ‘classic’ fairy tales.

In a few of the Western tales dealing with this theme, the misogynistic element is quite pronounced. Tale types ATU 920A* (The Inquisitive King) and 823A* (A Mother Dies of Fright when She Learns that She was about to Commit Incest with her Son) both feature a son seeking sexual relations with his mother to test her. This is borne out in tales like the two that I will now study. The medieval European tale ‘Secundus’ seeks to explain the reason of the permanent oath of silence observed by the Greek philosopher, Secundus (Krappe 181-82). Coming back
home after a number of years of schooling abroad, Secundus learns that his father is dead. He is beset with a desire to test the virtue of his mother for he had often heard that there is very little good in women. He goes to see her without revealing his identity and even proposes to her. She readily grants ‘what he wanted’, after which he makes himself known to her. The shock costs his mother her life. Stricken with remorse, Secundus makes the vow never again to utter a word.

Thus we find that even though the mother was widowed and had given in to Secundus’ proposal not knowing his real identity, in order to preserve her dignity, ultimately she has to die.

Secundus, though he committed the error in full knowledge, is let off far more lightly, with only a self-imposed ban on speech.

In another tale, from the cycle of wise king Solomon's exploits, King Solomon similarly wishes to test his mother (Aiken 146-48). When asked by his followers about whether women be good or evil, he espouses: “There are as many kinds of women as there are women, but in general they are selfish, untruthful, and bad” (146). To prove his point he employs his servants to try and seduce his mother. The first two fail but the third manages to win a nocturnal appointment from her. But it is Solomon who actually knocks on his mother’s door at night and having suitably chastised her and proved to all, the essential frailty of women, he returns triumphantly. Thus, the son gets away even after behaving as a pander for his mother, his only provocation for such shameful behaviour being to prove a point and satisfy his ego; and in fact is hailed as Solomon the wise.
A slight exception to this trend of misogyny is however found in the Indian (Marathi) tale ‘Mother Marries Son’ (*Folktales From India* 227-29). It is the story of the daughter of goddess Satwai, the goddess who writes the future on the forehead of every child on the fifth night after birth. The daughter learns from her mother that it is her fate to marry her own son. Determined to outwit fate, she resolves to never marry, never even set eyes on a man. She goes into the deep forest and builds a hut there. Some years later, when she has grown up into a young woman, fate intervenes. A king, out on a hunting spree in that forest, drinks from a lake and having gargled with some of the water, throws it back into the lake. Magically, his sperm gets mixed with the water and sometime later when drunk by the unsuspecting girl, makes her pregnant.

The girl tries to fight fate once again, by throwing her baby boy, wrapped in a sari, from a steep mountainside. However, as is typical of fairy tales, the infant survives and is adopted by a childless gardener and his wife. Years later, when Satwai’s daughter, tired of her solitary life in the forest, decides to return to civilization, she is inexorably led to this very household. Confident in her belief that her son is dead, she marries the grown up son of the gardener (as she thinks him to be). But soon the secret is revealed to her, as she comes across the same sari in which she had wrapped her infant son before throwing him away, so many years ago. However, the girl decides to keep her lips sealed and “lived on with her husband happily, blessed by her old parents-in-law, to whom she was always kind and dutiful” (229).
In the above tale, the woman manages to get many of the privileges accorded generally only to the male in fairytales, marking a happy departure from the rampant patriarchal bias observed in this and earlier chapters. Firstly, she is absolved of all guilt, as the narrative makes it clear that it is destiny which leads her into this illicit relationship. Again, Satwai’s daughter is guilty of attempted murder but for once the woman is allowed to get away with it. And the story ends with the woman, rather amorally (though practically), deciding to live on happily with her husband, and the tone of the narrative is very non-judgmental about it.

‘The Wild Goose Couple’ is another tale where the mother-son incest is portrayed (Wilbert 73-75). The mother likes being fondled by her son so much, that she gives in to his advances quite willingly. The story ends thus:

They fell head over heels in love and were turned into birds (‘sekus’- a kind of wild goose). Since that time the two accompany each other constantly and, to this day, live together exclusively by themselves (75).

‘The Little Woodpecker’ (Wilbert 75-78) has almost the same storyline as above, with some minor variations. Another tale which treads similar grounds is ‘Sikhalól and his Mother’, from the Pacific Atoll (coral island) of Ulithi (Lessa 49-50). Lisor, a beautiful young woman married to a chief by name of Sokhsurum, gives birth to a son prematurely at seven months. Since the infant is still covered with amniotic fluid, Lisor does not realise there is a baby inside and sets it adrift on the ocean. However, like in the earlier tale about Satwai’s daughter, this baby too is saved. A fisherman called Rasim takes him home and performs such magic that in a month the baby grows to be a young man. Rasim guesses the identity of his parents,
since only one girl had been pregnant in the village at the time and he knew she had delivered a premature baby. However he keeps his counsel. This infant-turned-young-man, Sikhalól sets out on a canoe with his friends and comes across Lisor in her menstrual house (cf. the custom of segregating women from normal society during their menstrual cycle, as discussed in chapter 2 of this dissertation). Lisor is charmed by this handsome youth and makes love to him several times, refusing to leave her menstrual hut even when, after ten days, her impatient husband comes calling for her. When Risam reveals the true identity of Lisor to Sikhalól, neither seem to care. Instead of betraying any shame or guilt, the tale shows not only Sikhalól, but also (and specially) Lisor very eager to continue the nightly trysts. In the end, Sokhsurum is killed by Sikhalól and the tale ends thus “Sikhalól then took Lisor back to his village, and they lived together from then on” (50).

While psychoanalysts keep arguing on whether this tale can be called a representation of oedipal triumph or not, it cannot be denied that like Satwai in the earlier tale, Lisor is allowed to get away with what is considered one of the greatest perversities in most societies. In fact, Lisor is far more an exception than Satwai, for the latter acted mostly in ignorance, while the former was in full cognition of what she was doing. Lisor is different even from the mother who turns into a goose, for she does not have to give up her human existence for what she does. The aim of this dissertation is not to condemn or condone these actions, only to point out that in a hugely patriarchal world; these are few tales where that leniency has been shown to women, which is generally reserved for the men.
However, since these are rare tales, it is not possible to trace any pro-women trend in fairytales from them, though Allen W. Johnson and Douglass Price-Williams opine:

The conjoining of mother and son “happily ever after”, whether as married couple or as birds that fly off together, is a common element in tales from small-scale societies, though hardly universal (51).

I feel that the key words in the above quotation are ‘small-scale societies’. Not only does it betray a bias in the authors, it strengthens my contention that the so-called larger, more ‘civilized’ societies are more repressively patriarchal and because they control with an iron fist what is to be allowed mass-circulation and popularity, their canons either don’t have such tales of forbidden desire (e.g., *Thakurmar Jhuli*) or if they do, they give the license and turn the blind-eye to only the male’s misdemeanours (as seen in tales like ‘Thousandfurs’).

This is something that struck me even more while studying relevant tales from the African continent. In those tales, not only is the incest theme treated far more numerously than in the European canon, but the women there have far more active roles (whether in staving off unwanted advances or giving in to forbidden but desired ones). The Dinka tale ‘Diirawic and her Incestuous Brother’ for instance is a variant of ‘Kora and his Sister’ or ‘Sona and Rupa’ discussed above (Deng 78-90). Teeng, the brother, is so enamoured of his sister Diirawic’s beauty that he refuses all proposals that come for her. He then goes to his parents and all other relatives with the question as to whether he could marry his sister. Just like the passive family members of the earlier stories, here too no one condemns Teeng. Rather every one
pushes the ball in someone else’s court. Finally his mother’s sister actually gives him the permission of sorts to wed Diirawic if that is what he desires. However, unlike the hapless sisters in the earlier tales, Diirawic refuses to give in to her brother’s nefarious plans. She allows Teeng to lie on the same bed with her, but without the slightest compunction, cuts off his testicles as he is sleeping, killing him instantly. Further, she then organises a celebratory dance where all her friends are invited, where she relates the tale with gusto. There is a false note in the tale when it seems that even such a courageous girl will not be ultimately allowed to merge back into her prior life, when she leaves for the wilderness, albeit not alone and friendless, but with all her mates in tow. However, this is an exceptional tale in more ways than one. After several adventures in the wilderness, Diirawic returns home with a lion-brother and expresses a desire to get married. As is generally the case for men in fairy tales, magic here aids the woman— her past misfortune does not cast any shadow on her chances and she gets to choose her husband from several eligible bachelors, enabling her to live happily without having to go through the abuse of poor Donkeyskin or Peau d’ Ane.

The tale ‘The Elder Brother and his Younger Sister’ also marks a departure from the conventional treatment of incest (Eguchi 921-27). When the brother expresses his desire to marry his sister, she refuses outright. And instead of her running away to save her honour like Sona, Rupa or Kora’s sister, it is the brother who rushes off to commit suicide, heartbroken at being thwarted. However, it is a patriarchal world after all— he ultimately does not have to die because the sister
ultimately gives in to his demand, unable to watch him drown. The story ends with them married and living together.

The Ngombe tale ‘How the Earth was Peopled’, again, tells very noncommittally of how a brother and sister commit incest at the behest of the mother (Edmunds and Dundes 39-42). Mbokomu is sent down to earth with her son and daughter by God (Akongo) because, apparently, she ‘bothered everybody’. However there is no wallowing in sorrow at the loss of paradise in the story. Rather Mbokomu establishes a prosperous farm and is in fact so worried that there will be no one to enjoy the plenty after their demise that she insists that her two children copulate to take the clan forward. The son and daughter comply willingly enough and instead of hearing of any moral censure, we are told that it was through the several children of those two that the earth was peopled.

One of the most exceptional tales (at least its first half is exceptional) on this theme, which I came across in the course of my study, is the Shasta (native North American) tale ‘The Girl Who married her Brother’ (Thompson, Tales of North American Indians 196-98). Here, it is the sister who relentlessly pursues the reluctant youngest brother to fulfil her lust. When the brother eludes her clutches and tries to make an escape to the skies above with the rest of the family, the girl sheds copious tears, seeking to deceive them into a false sense of security that her intentions were now altered. But once the basket carrying her terrified family comes back to the earth, she kills everyone in a fit of rage. Only the brother manages to escape, and like Thousandfurs finds love and gets married. There is a difference from the Grimms’ tale however. While Thousandfurs’ lustful father is never mentioned again in that
tale, here the cruel girl responsible for so much trouble is sought out by her brother and his children and killed off at the end. The evil deeds of the girl do merit punishment, and so her end can probably be justified. But I cannot help but notice once again, how in the hands of male editors, the men get away while the women get punished for the same crimes. David Finkelhor has shown in his study of real-life sexual abuse incidents that perpetrators are hardly prosecuted in such cases because it is very difficult to establish the credibility of the child’s claim; abuse being such a hidden activity (‘Current Information on the Scope and Nature of Child Sexual Abuse’ 45). While this can probably account for the safe passage of the fathers of Thousandfurs or Peau d’Ane, or Kora and the brother of Sona and Rupa, it cannot explain why then are the women almost always brutally punished in tales where they are the abusers. Exactly the same thing can be seen in the Comanche tribe’s (who originally inhabited parts of what is now New Mexico, Colorado, Oklahoma and Texas) tale on the same theme (Kardiner 70-71). A young man had nightly trysts with a woman who attracted him much. But when one day he realises that his paramour is his own sister, he is horrified. As penance, he takes a stick and sharpening it on both ends, places it upright between himself and his sister when the next night she comes to him. As a result they are both pierced and killed. But the story is not over here. In stark contrast to the male perpetrators who get away; about the woman, the tale records that ‘the boy’s body was honoured, but her body was mutilated and thrown out’ (71).

The above tales thus make it clear that contrary to Johnson and Price-Williams’ views, even these so-called small-scale societies (whether African or
South American or Eskimo) are not really very liberal towards women. They are just more open to recording these tales of forbidden desires and liaisons in their canon, and hence some contrary tales find their way in. The majority of the tales still, sadly, smack of the patriarchal bias, where fathers or brothers can do what they want with their daughters or sisters. The Eskimo tale ‘The Woman and Her Brother’ illustrates this very well (Hennigh 365-66). A girl reluctant to get married because she feels averse to physical intimacy is seduced in the dark by her brother. When the girl gets to know the identity of the man she has slept with in her ignorance, she comes back home humiliated and cuts off her breasts to offer to her lascivious sibling. When bleeding and mutilated, she tries to run away, he follows her shamelessly. In a mode of escape typical to fairytales, the girl finally rises to the sky and becomes the sun. But there too she is pursued by the brother, who becomes the moon and continues to move around her in close proximity. Similarly the Mehinaku (Native South American) tale, ‘Eweje and his Daughter Kwalu’ talks of a powerful magician (the tale uses the term ‘witch’ for him) who feels the unlawful attraction for his pretty daughter and brutally rapes her when she refuses to give in willingly (Gregor 65). Because of his considerable malevolent magical powers, no one dares to stop him from openly keeping sexual relations with the hapless daughter (just as no one dares to stop the king from wooing his daughter in the Grimms’ or Perrault’s tales). People would throw him snide asides, but they did nothing to deter Eweje. The tale ends by informing us that “he lived with Kwalu as her husband till the day he himself perished to witchcraft” (65).
The fact thus remains that in a patriarchal society, even in its fairy tales, a woman is dealt a double whammy—when a ‘victim’ of incest, she has to be meek and submissive and often take the blame of her father’s or brother’s illegitimate desires on her own shoulders. Yet, when it comes to making her the perpetrator (and thus giving her some agency, even if negative), society either metes out the harshest of punishments, or worse—refuses to accept the very possibility of such a thing, making excuses and trying to deify the ‘mother’ stereotype. Thus, both ways, women are expected to be passive recipients of abuse. Angela Carter had commented with her typical irony that “it is far easier for a woman to lead a blameless life than it is for a man”, because with regard to women, morality does not involve much ethics and can be achieved simply by avoiding “sexual intercourse like the plague” (Wayward Girls x).

In a world where women are expected to keep away from any kind of sexual experience outside sanctioned wedlock, W. Arens’ observation below, regarding women as perpetrators of incest, comes as no surprise:

Although there is no way of enumerating or assessing actual incidence, most cultures would probably consider father-daughter and brother-sister sexuality as the more feasible, responding with greater incredulity when it comes to mother-son sexual activity (13).

In the same vein, James McGlathery points out that, in a patriarchal society, “depiction of a mother’s incestuous feelings toward a son [is] wholly unacceptable, in the poetic imagination as well as in the prose of everyday life...” (109). Joseph Shepher, again, has used a lot of mathematical calculations to show that father-
daughter incest is the only form of incest that “pays genetically” compared to out-breeding (i.e. the chance of future generations being born with genetic disorders is least in this type of incest), thus predicting that it would be understandably more common than mother-son incest (117). However, this contention is debatable and highly controversial. Further, Shepher also speaks of the gender-based difference of parental investment or involvement in the upbringing of the infant. As Shepher says, “Even the gradual emancipation of the infant from its mother does not significantly increase the parental investment of the male, but rather the time spent in individual play” (119). In humans, the father’s investment in bringing up an offspring is of course higher than in most primates, still it is much lower than the mother’s. This lack of closeness with their children when they are children is what the sociologists cite as a reason for the greater number of lapses on the part of the fathers as opposed to mothers. The attempt to shift blame from the male to the female is glaringly evident here as well. Reputed psychiatrists Tony Baker and Sylvia Duncan, who provide therapy to abused children and their families, for instance, opine:

In families where the mother is absent, sick or powerless or spends large amounts of time away while others, including the father, care for the children there is an increased opportunity for abuse to take place. The father whose self-esteem has been damaged by redundancy or unemployment may have ample opportunity to reassert himself by abusing a child as he is cast into the role of primary caretaker (263).

Thus there seems to be almost sympathy for the fathers who abuse their children if forced to take care of them—a role which patriarchal society has not designated for them! Even more unfortunate is that the blame (and accompanying guilt) seems to be
very casually being shifted to the mothers whose job it is to be minding the children, even if they themselves are sick or incapacitated.

The observations above are very much true and strengthen my thesis regarding the gender based segregation of space and performance in fairy tales and life. Also it would be nice to think of one half of the human species as completely free of this vice—that the ‘fairer sex’ is indeed ‘fairer’ in this context. But since stereotypes of any kind ought to be shunned, the contrary picture needs to be studied. And tales like the North American ‘The Girl who married her Brother’ cited above, however scanty their occurrence, prove that there is a contrary picture. The Encyclopedia of Women and Crime, for instance, clearly points out in the entry for “Child Abuse by Women” that although one of the primary social roles for women is that of mother, some women engage in child abuse, a category that includes neglect and physical and sexual maltreatment. According to the U.S. National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information, in 1996, state child protective service agencies investigated more than two million allegations of child abuse involving more than three million children. These investigations resulted in the confirmation of approximately one million cases of abuse. And approximately two-thirds of the perpetrators in these cases were found to be women (Rafter 22-23).

Similarly Estela Welldon has also pointed out in Mother, Madonna, Whore: The Idealization and Denigration of Motherhood that because of society’s desire to maintain the myth of motherhood as something pristine and ideal; some of its very sombre aspects are hardly discussed. The fact that being almost totally responsible for children combined with having total power over them, can and sometimes does,
arouse the darker passions in the mother (as much as it does in the fathers and brothers) is often overlooked. The protagonist of Elizabeth Jolley’s short story, ‘The Last Crop’ (which is part of an anthology very significantly titled *Wayward Girls & Wicked Women*) (Carter 1-21), despairingly observes that:

Babies...is all wind and wetting and crying for food and then sicking it up all over everything and no sooner does a baby grow up it’s all wanting. Wanting and wanting this and that, hair and clothes and records and shoes and money and more money (5).

Perhaps every mother at some point in her life or other has had similar feelings. Yet, as Welldon argues in Chapter 4 (‘Motherhood as a Perversion’) and chapter 5 (‘Mothers who commit Incest: the surrogacy of the child) of her book, all women are discouraged if not prohibited from expressing anger or disgust, however much in trouble they may be, especially if such negativities threaten to reveal one of society’s best kept secrets— that motherhood is not always perfect bliss. But the anger, outrage and stress these women experience do not really disappear. Rather since the natural outlet of speaking about their frustrations, which could have provided catharsis, is denied; these tend to fester inside the minds of the poor women. Sometimes they surface in the form of sadistic fantasies, in extreme cases as sexual abuse of their own children (Welldon 63-105).

According to the National Clearing House, 24% of confirmed cases of child abuse involve physical maltreatment. Slightly over half of the perpetrators are women, many of them teen mothers. In much the same vein as Welldon’s argument, the study reveals that these young mothers tend to suffer from low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and low frustration tolerance and also tend to lack empathy and
intellect. Most fairytales are relics of the times when women were married off very early and thus attained motherhood sooner as well. So, all the cruelty that the fairy children have to endure at the hands of their mothers seems to have a solid socio-biological explanation. Only of course, the cruel aspects of the mother are all bundled into the form of the evil ‘stepmother’ or ‘witch’ in the black-and-white world of tales.

Sexual abuse is the main problem in about 12% of confirmed cases of child abuse. Most studies report that 90% or more of perpetrators of child sexual abuse are males (Geiser; Finkelhor). The few women, who do engage in sexual abuse of children, tend to be accomplices to males, *isolated single parents*, adolescent female babysitters, or women who become romantically involved with adolescent men (Finkelhor 46).

However child sexual abuse by women is being seriously studied only since the late 1980s. While there are no definitive estimates of the prevalence of this type of offending, it may not be as rare as previously thought. Finkelhor’s review of the literature suggested that women are perpetrators in 5% of the cases of sexual abuse of girls and 20% of the cases involving abuse of boys (Finkelhor, Child Sexual Abuse: New Theory and Research 53). The extent of sexual activity specifically between mothers and sons, however, has not been sufficiently studied and therefore is not very well known at this time. It is probably for this reason that the ‘classical’ fairy tales have totally skirted this aspect of an already problematic issue.

It might be reasonably argued that cruel stepmothers, absent fathers and child abandonment counted far more significantly than father-daughter or mother-
son incest among social problems in the age the Grimms’ recorded the tales. Perhaps that is the reason why “lurid portrayals of child abuse, starvation, and exposure, like fastidious descriptions of cruel punishments” survived despite the frenetic editing of Wilhelm and Jacob (Tatar, *The Hard Facts* 10-11), but instances of sexual abuse were weeded out. Even today, research reveals that neglect and physical abuse make up a far greater percentage of substantiated cases of child abuse, as compared to sexual abuse (McCurdy and Daro, *Current Trends in Child Abuse Reporting and Fatalities*). Yet, in her seminal work *Cinderella: Three Hundred and Forty-Five Variants of Cinderella, Catskin, and Cap o’Rushes*, Marion Cox has shown that the incestuous father (of Catskin, type 510B) appears almost as often as does the evil stepmother (of Cinderella, type 510A), far outnumbering the King-Lear-type father of Cap o’Rushes, demanding love tests (type 510C). Of the 226 tales that unambiguously belong to one of the three above motifs, if 130 tales show a wicked stepmother, as many as 77 talk of what Cox calls an ‘unnatural father’ (71-80). Thus as Tatar argues, the heroine is as likely to leave the home because of her father's unnatural erotic desire and relentless persecution, as her (step) mother's tyranny. Yet, for the solitary story in the Grimms' *Children's and Household Tales* that depicts a father's pursuit of his daughter openly, there are a dozen that recount a girl's misery at the hands of her stepmother (*The Hard Facts* 153).

Apart from such obvious attempts to hide the father’s abuse (and to only a slightly lesser degree, the brother’s), my study reveals that in the few tales that do deal with the theme, the patriarchal bias remains very pronounced. Alessandro Falassi observed about these tales, that they are not about happiness and fulfilment,
but about surviving and coping. And hence, though these tales were not much liked (so the limited space in the canon) they were still told (46). The problem, however, is that the ways in which victimized women are being taught to cope (by running away, silently accepting abuse, totally suppressing hurt and anger, and being all-forgiving) is the stuff of male fantasy. Marshall, for instance, stresses how the ‘Thousandfurs’ tale suggests that “the danger inherent in father-daughter incest is not the act itself, but in potentially knowing and telling about it (emphasis mine)” (410). With constant crude reminders that girl-children at least, should be seen and not heard, these tales may ensure peace-of-mind for a society reluctant to recognise ugly truths, but holds no promise of justice or rehabilitation for the victims.
NOTES


2 J.R.R. Tolkien later mirrored this story in his mythology of Middle Earth, The Silmarillion. In the story, ill-fated Túrin Turambar is enchanted by the dragon Glaurung and flees north, being convinced by the spell that his love Finduilas and his mother are in danger. Through a convoluted series of events, his sister Nienor ends up bewitched by Glaurung as well. She is found by Túrin wandering in the wild and he falls in love with and marries her. The secret is later revealed when Túrin kills the dragon. When Nienor realizes what they’ve done, she jumps to her death in the river, and Túrin later kills himself upon his own sword.

3 When Kathryn Harrison published her memoir, The Kiss, which dealt with her seduction by her father, it was mostly debunked by critics. Simply because the traumatic event took place when Harrison was a twenty-year old and not a child, her experience was termed as ‘an affair’, rather than ‘incest’ and ‘sexual abuse’ (Kenney). Also she was chastised for bringing into the open the ‘private life’ of her family (Yardley D2+) and asked summarily to ‘hush up’ (Crossen A 16).


5 As Roland Mousinier has pointed out, at first glance, the fairy tale fathers would seem to share remarkable similarities with the pater familias of the ancien régime, whose “power over... his wife and children, and in practice also over his servants [increased] as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries advanced” (85).

6 One illustration of this incest wish (largely repressed in civilized society) that Freud talked about can be seen in the following superstition amongst the South African tribes living along the Nkotami river. The male hunters of this tribe spend days watching the behaviour of the hippopotami in the river. The night before they actually set out for their month-long hunting expeditions, they have sexual relations with their own daughters, which is, again, supposed to give them strength on their missions (Maisch 39). Needless to say, the daughter’s consent (or lack of it) is immaterial.
7 Walter Scheidel has reported in ‘Brother-Sister and Parent-Child Marriage outside Royal Families’ that priestly castes in ninth-century Persia encouraged men to take their daughters and nieces, even on occasion their own mothers as their wives, on the grounds that it was the best way to maintain a harmonious household (319-40). However, this recommendation should not be seen merely as a bid for domestic peace and stability. By assuming that the mothers themselves, let alone the other women, would have no say in the matter, it rests its notion of harmony on silencing all voices except that of the male (here the priest).

8 In Britain, on 6 January 1999, the noted newspaper, The Guardian, printed an obituary of Petra Tegetmeier, the daughter of Eric Gill, a British artist who made a practice of abusing his young daughters, in which he was endorsed for ‘initiating them into the mysteries of sex.’ It took a woman reader to write in and offer a different language— ‘I thought that it was called child abuse’, read her letter.


9 The same sentiments of the abused child, at once attracted to and repulsed by her abuser, and the conspiracy of silence surrounding the act of sexual abuse, can be seen in Margaux Fragoso’s true account of her years of abuse in Tiger, Tiger. Fragoso’s story is not of incest proper, because her abuser Peter (51 when he first abused her— she was seven!) was not directly related to her. Yet he was much trusted by her and her family, thus making her tale of fifteen years of continuous abuse as shocking as one in which a family member is involved.

10 J.L. Herman has observed in Father-Daughter Incest that girls who have been incest-victims in childhood often become rebellious at pubescence, running away from home and seeking solace in an unrelated man’s love. This often results in pregnancies that they are physically or emotionally ill-prepared for, and yet they feel happy, for escaping the trauma of incest is their first priority.


12 This episode is reminiscent of Sita’s ‘Pātāl Prabesh’ in The Ramayana.