

From dwarf to dwarfism: the different representations in Snow White /

Do anão ao nanismo: as diferentes representações em Branca de Neve

Valéria Sabrina Pereira*

Graduated in German/Portuguese from the University of São Paulo (2002); Master (2006) and PhD (2011) in German Literature from the same university. Professor for German Language and Literature at the Language Faculty of Letters of the Federal University of Minas Gerais.

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3255-2470>

Ana Clara Amaral de Oliveira **

Graduation in progress in Portuguese Language and German Language from the Federal University of Minas Gerais, in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil.

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-6863-3224>

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to critically analyze the evolution of the representation of dwarfs, from Romanticism to the present day. Firstly, the representations made in Grimm's collection of fairy tales will be analyzed, and the terminology used to designate marvelous characters of short stature will be debated and their narrative function will be presented according to Vladimir Propp's theory. Then, the focus will be placed on the various reinterpretations of Snow White, the most remembered tale when it comes to the popular imagery of dwarfs. Disney's full-length movie and current adaptations, including movies and comics, will be debated, demonstrating that, although the focus of the analysis so far is Disney's patriarchal reading and how feminism has influenced its readaptations, these works also reflect the extent to which the representation of dwarfism (the disability and not only the marvelous creatures) has evolved - or how far we still have to go for it to become minimally acceptable. Despite being an article focused on the marvelous, it aims to be a contribution to disability studies regarding dwarfism.

KEYWORDS: Dwarfism; Disability studies; Snow White; Brothers Grimm; Adaptations.

RESUMO

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 valeriasabrinap@gmail.com

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 ana@agostine.com.br

A proposta do artigo é analisar criticamente a evolução da representação de anões, do Romantismo até a atualidade. Em uma primeira fase, serão discutidas as representações feitas na coletânea de contos de fadas dos irmãos Grimm, onde se discutirá a terminologia empregada para designar personagens maravilhosos de baixa estatura e sua função narrativa seguindo a teoria de Vladimir Propp. Em seguida, o foco serão as diversas releituras do conto *Branca de Neve*, o mais rememorado quando se trata do imaginário popular que se tem de anões. Serão discutidos desde o longa metragem da Disney até adaptações da atualidade, contando com cinema e história em quadrinhos, demonstrando que, apesar do foco das análises até o momento ser a leitura patriarcal da Disney e como o feminismo influenciou suas readaptações, essas obras também refletem até que ponto a representação do nanismo (a deficiência e não apenas o maravilhoso) evoluiu – ou o quanto ainda se deve caminhar para que ela se torne minimamente aceitáveis. Apesar de ser um artigo focado no maravilhoso, ele pretende ser uma contribuição para os estudos da deficiência no que tange o nanismo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Nanismo; Estudo das deficiências; Irmãos Grimm; Branca de Neve; Adaptações.

1 Introduction

In the last decades, discussions about representation and representativeness of various minoritized groups have become increasingly relevant and present. While studies such as Feminism have entered what is being called the fourth wave, others such as Black Studies or Queer Studies have developed far beyond the walls of invisibility that have historically been imposed on them. At the same time, another broad and diffuse minoritized group has begun to develop its own field of study: Disability Studies. In addition to providing visibility for various causes of physical disabilities, it also serves to establish theoretical standards to discuss the limitations socially imposed on this minoritized group (GAUNDENZI; ORTEGA, 2016; MELLO, 2016). Among the groups represented by Disability Studies is dwarfism, which is of particular interest to this article, as it deals with this issue within fairy tales.

If, on the one hand, it is possible to state that dwarfs have been traditional folkloric characters since the Middle Ages, on the other hand, it is a clear problem that a disability is so closely related to magic and the supernatural. It is thus no surprise that the term dwarf has come to be regarded as pejorative, so that in Portuguese preference is given to the term *pessoa com nanismo* (person with dwarfism), and in German the use of *Zwerg* (dwarf) has been left only to the marvelous world, while people with dwarfism are described as *kleinwüchsig* (short-grown). English, meanwhile, still employs dwarf,² despite the understanding that there is a link to the derogative, but nothing as negative as *midget*, a term originally related to circus performances.

² The term *little people* has been much defended, and is the one used by the main American organization, *Little People of America*, but outside that context, *dwarf* is still tolerated.

The different designations demonstrate the discomfort caused by comparisons of dwarfism with wonderful characters and it is no exaggeration to state that the very representation of these characters, especially the famous seven dwarfs as presented by Disney, is still recurrent and causes discontent. This can be easily observed in the recent controversy with actor Peter Dinklage regarding the shooting of *Snow White* as live-action. While Disney was celebrated for choosing a Latina actress for the role of Snow White, the actor, famous for his performance in *Game of Thrones*, had another point of view about the production. On *WTF with Maron* podcast, he said:

They were very proud to cast a Latina actress as Snow White, but you're still telling the story of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. [...] Take a step back and look at what you're doing there. It makes no sense to me. Because you're progressive in one way, but you're still making that fucking backward story about seven dwarfs living in a cave together, what the fuck are you doing, man? (DINKLAGE apud KIRKLAND, 2022)

Dinklage's criticism arises from the fact that Disney breaks with aesthetic standards of ethnicity but persists in stereotyping people of short stature. To him, it makes no sense for art to continue portraying the folkloric dwarf, since people with dwarfism suffer from the consequences of comparisons with these fictional characters. The actor adds: "Have I done nothing to advance the cause from my soapbox? I guess I'm not loud enough. [...] All love and respect to the actress and the people who thought they were doing the right thing. But I'm just like, what are you doing?" (DINKLAGE apud KIRKLAND, 2022)³

While Disney's live-action remains unreleased, this article aims to discuss the development of the representation of the mythical characters of dwarfs in Grimm's tales, and in the later retellings of *Snow White* until today, when some representations are already beginning to distance themselves from the mythical and take into account issues of dwarfism itself.

2 Grimm's tales

Despite the frequent appearance of magical characters of short stature in medieval literature and folklore, from dwarfs like Albericht, the guardian of the treasure of the 12th century *Song of the Nibelungs*, to the magical blacksmiths of Scandinavian mythology, the representations

³ After Dinklage's critics, Disney made an official pronunciation that "to avoid reinforcing stereotypes from the original animated film, we are taking a different approach with these seven characters and have been consulting with members of the dwarfism community. We look forward to sharing more as the film heads into production after a lengthy development period." (D'ALESSANDRO, 2022)

we know derive especially from Romanticism, a time marked by a renewed interest in medieval narratives, especially due to the rescue of folkloric figures in celebration of a supposed national spirit (GUINSBURG, 2002, p. 18). Grimm's tales stand out, since they were a strong influence on Disney productions, including its first full-length movie, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, released in 1937.

To this day, the Grimm brothers are known worldwide for their collection of 156 tales, *Wonderful Children's and Household Tales*. In many studies and commentaries, it is possible to identify that there is a myth about the brothers' work that continues to be reproduced. This myth assumes that the Grimm brothers collected all stories from the German oral tradition and published them in the supposed original format. The truth is that the first collecting took place mainly in libraries, while only the second edition included oral sources (NEUHAUS, 2005, p. 133). Moreover, the collection made by the brothers is not without modifications. While Jacob was in favour of keeping the tales in the original version, Wilhelm stood out for the reformulations, standardizing the stories, adjusting them to the morals of the time and including the well-known "Once upon a time" catchphrase (NEUHAUS, 2005, p. 132).

There are many examples that reverberate this imagery about Grimm's work. In 1951, in one of the founding works on children's literature in Brazil, *Problemas da Literatura Infantil*, Cecília Meirelles (1984, p. 48) states: "Charles Perrault, Mme. d'Aulnoy, the Grimm brothers and others collected narratives that they found still in oral form". This misconception is reproduced in other studies on *Snow White*, such as in the article *Branca de Neve: Por que (não) conta pra mim?*, which states that: "Tales such as Snow White, Hansel and Gretel and Rapunzel were written in the first version by the brothers Jacob Grimm (1785-1803) and Wilhelm Grimm (1786-1859), after collecting folk tales from the oral tradition in various regions of Germany" (SANTOS; SILVA, 2021, p. 206). Another article that repeats the statement about originality is *Branca de Neve: o conto de fadas e a mídia*, where the authors designate the tale of the Brothers Grimm as "the original tale" (MORAES; MARTINS, 2010, p. 3). If, on the one hand, the influence of their versions on literature and arts is undeniable, on the other hand, the use of the word *original*, without further clarification, can be considered questionable, as it reflects the misunderstanding.

While it is true that the brothers adapted the narratives that were not appropriate for children (NEUHAUS, 2005, p. 133), it is also a fact that, some 200 years later, many of them cause astonishment and aversion in today's audiences. Moreover, people with dwarfism were still very far from having any rights considered, let alone being worthy of any care in fictional representations.

Dwarfs, or magical beings of short stature, are present in 17 of 156 Grimm's tales, and in the original German text they are referred to in seven different ways: *Männlein* (little man), *Wichtelmänner* (elves), *Zwerg* (dwarf), *Daumenling* (little thumb), *Männchen* (little man), *Erdmännchen* (literally little man of the earth) and *kleiner Mann* (little man). In addition to naming the different nomenclatures, the aim was to observe whether there were any recognizable patterns among them.

Starting with the rarest appearances, *little man* appears only in *Master Cobbler's Awl* (*Meister Pfriem*) and presents a kindly natured figure who gifts the characters with magical objects. The *little man of the earth* appears only in *The Two King's Children* (*Die beiden Königskinder*), and corresponds to an entity of a kind nature that performs helpful work, such as clearing a forest and cleaning a river by responding to the commands of the princess. The denomination *elves* appears in *The Elves* (*Die Wichtelmänner*), a tale in which the narrator varies between calling these characters *elves* and *little men*. Unlike what we have seen so far, they are mischievous, and do not have a character marked by kindness or justice, some of their actions may even seem random or unjustified. The word *Zwerg*, whose exact translation is dwarf, appears in two tales: *Snow White* (*Schneewittchen*) and *The Water of Life* (*Das Wasser des Lebens*). As in most of the previous tales, they have a good nature and a sense of justice, as they offer magical gifts according to their judgment of the figures' character.

The nomenclature that appears most often, *little man*, features in six tales: *The Wishing-Table, the Gold-Ass & the Cudgel in the Sack* (*Tischchen deck dich, Goldesel und Knüppel aus dem Sack*), *Rumpelstilzchen*, *Hurleburlebutz*, *The elve* (*Das Erdmännchen*), *The king of the golden mountain* (*Der König vom goldenen Berg*), *The devil's sooty brother* (*Des Teufels rußiger Bruder*), *The Jew among thorns* (*Der Jude im Dorn*) and *The blue light* (*Das blaue Licht*). In most of the tales, the character has a kind nature, with the exception of the tales: *Rumpelstilzchen*, *The elve* and *The devil's sooty brother*, where they present a violent character or offer exchanges of dubious nature. It should be noted, however, that although they are all described as *little men*, the figure of the *elve* is repeated here, seeming to be an indication that this particular type of mythical figure would be more prone to mischief. The *elve* (*Wichtelmann*), therefore, seems to be the only word⁴

⁴ The word is nowadays linked to an imagery of good-natured figures with pointed hats, especially used for Christmas decorations. On the other hand, there is still in German the word *Bösewicht*, a compound word that, sectioned, means something like evil gnome, which is used to refer to people of bad nature or criminals, and today is also used metaphorically to refer to someone naughty.

that indicates in the tales of this selection the bad character of the figure, while the other words seem to be interchangeable.

After briefly analyzing the different appearances of the dwarfs, we can see that, despite some variations, there is always a pattern in their performance in the tales. They appear when it is convenient to the hero's needs, perform their function by assisting the protagonist and leave the scene when they are no longer necessary for the narrative. What is expected of this character is that he has some distinction, such as great wisdom or some magical ability, which serves the hero to achieve his goal or hinders the path of the villains.

These figures are recurring in marvelous tales and fantastic literature, often dating back to the medieval imaginary, and represent a specific archetype, which can be called a *donor* or (*magical*) *helper*. This is the nomenclature used by Vladimir Propp (2002, p. 4) to define some characteristics of the generic structure of a marvelous folktale. In it, there is the hero, who must depart and enter a new and unknown world, where he will find the *donor*, or (*magical*) *helper*, who will provide some kind of resource, magical or not, for the protagonist to find his destiny and/or fulfill his goal. An example is the tale *The Water of Life*, which presents a trio of brothers who leave the kingdom, one after the other, in search of the water of life to cure the illness of their father, the king.

The eldest

came across a dwarf on the road, who said to him, 'Where are you going in such a hurry?' 'You little rascal,' said the prince haughtily, 'this is none of your business,' and rode on. The little man was furious and cast a spell on the prince. (GRIMM, 2018, p. 413)

As his brother did not return, the second son set out to find a cure for his father. He

went on the same way and met the same dwarf, who also made him stop and asked him, "Where are you going in such a hurry?". "You little rascal," said the prince, "that is none of your business," and rode on proudly. Then the dwarf cursed him, and, like the other, he came to a precipice and could neither go forward nor backward. That's what happens to arrogant people. (GRIMM, 2018, p. 414)

Finally, the youngest sets off in an attempt to fulfill the mission in which his brothers failed. When he met the dwarf on the road, he asked him the same question he had asked the other brothers and the prince replied: "I am looking for the water of life, for my father is about to die". "But do you know where to look?" "No," said the prince. "Then I will tell you, since you answered me politely." (GRIMM, 2018, p. 414-415)

The two eldest were cursed, while the youngest, polite and humble, received guidance on how to achieve what he wanted, as well as gifts that helped him on his way to the water of life. Often, the narrative function of dwarfs in fairy tales is to educate the reader/listener, as in the case presented here, showing that generosity or good treatment is rewarded, encouraging children to follow suit.

This punctual appearance of the folkloric figure of the dwarf is useful for thinking about his performance within the marvelous tales, because, with a few exceptions, once they exercise the function of donor, they disappear. There is no narrative behind these characters. It is not known where they came from, where they acquired their powers and where they go after the hero's departure.

In addition to what has already been said about the prototype of the dwarf, another expectation about this figure is that it has a moral nature. Although there are dwarfs belonging to dark archetypes, their nature serves to cast curses against people of bad temper, in which case, according to Propp's terminology (2002), they start to act as *guardians of the treasure*, that is, as an element that will be the filter between the character deserving to reach the treasure and those who are not.

3 *Snow White* and its adaptations

Snow White is just one of many tales collected by the Grimm brothers, which's repercussion is due to Disney's adaptation - the first princess movie of the company. On its own, *Snow White* does not stand out from many others in the compilation and has many characteristics in common with folk tales in general. As in several other tales, the premise is the expulsion (and supposed death) of the children from home, with a stay in a house in the woods until their return - another example from the Grimm's tales is *Hansel and Gretel*, in which the parents abandon their children in the forest to starve to death. Moreover, being a story focused on a girl, the return of *Snow White* occurs only when she finds her romantic partner, a pattern we also know from *Sleeping Beauty*. Vladimir Propp (2002, p. 51ff.) considers that this pattern in folktales is related to ancient puberty rituals, in which young people were supposed to leave the house and go to the woods, spend days in a hut - or years in a larger house, as will be mentioned later - and return as a reborn person. The hut was often used to teach adult activities, such as hunting, and to performing rituals

(PROPP, 2002, p. 54). It is not necessary to know the tale of *Snow White* deeply to recognize the similarities, but here we are interested in the details of her relationship with the dwarfs.

In Grimm's tale, the magic mirror recognizes Snow White, at the age of seven, as someone who will soon be more beautiful than her own mother, arousing her envy, so that she orders the huntsman to take her to the forest and kill her. The act of asking for her daughter's organs (but receiving the organs of an animal) and eating them resembles symbolic rituals of childhood death and passage into adulthood. Then, the girl arrives at the house of the seven dwarfs, located behind the seven mountains. This house and its structure have many resemblances to the *house in the woods*, as proposed by Propp (2002, p. 125). While in a smaller house rituals such as circumcision would take place, there would also be a larger house, in which young people would spend years until entering adulthood. This house, which is represented in many tales, usually has a description of the arrival of its new resident that follows these patterns:

Upon entering, the hero finds the table set: "In one of the rooms the table is set; there are twelve plates and cutlery, twelve loaves of bread and as many bottles of wine." [...]. The hero encounters here a different way of serving food than usual. Each person has his own portion and the portions are equal. The newcomer, who does not yet have his own, takes a little food from each plate. In other words, they eat as a community. We will see that here not only eating, but also living are communal activities. (PROPP, 2002, p. 132)

This communal pattern is no different in *Snow White*:

When it was almost dark, she found a small hut. There lived seven dwarfs, but they were away working in the mountains. Snow White decided to go in and saw that everything inside was very small, but very neat and tidy: there was a little table with seven little plates, seven little spoons, seven little knives and forks, seven little cups and seven little beds next to the wall, one next to the other, very tidy. As Snow White was hungry and very thirsty, she ate a little of the vegetables and bread from each plate and took a sip of wine from each of the little cups; and as she was very tired, she wanted to lie down to get some sleep. She tried six beds, one after the other, but could not get comfortable in any of them until she lay down on the seventh, where she fell asleep. (GRIMM, 2018, p. 204-205)

In addition to being a repetition of the pattern of learning a communal life, where everything is divided equally, it is important to note that the dwarfs are presented as hardworking, and organized in terms of their domestic life as well, since everything is in good order and the food is made. Although the group does not have any magical characteristics, as one would expect from short characters in fairy tales, the wonder is given by Snow White's amazement at the objects in the

house. Even if the dwarfs are responsible and hardworking, there is an expectation that the residents of the house are cute figures. This is confirmed when they arrive at the house:

When night fell, the seven dwarfs came home from work, and as soon as they lit the seven lamps, they realized that someone had entered their house. Then the first said: "Who sat in my little chair?". The second: "Who ate from my little plate?" The third: "Who took my little bread?". The fourth: "Who ate my little vegetable?". The fifth: "Who used my little fork?". The sixth: "Who cut with my little knife?". The seventh: "Who drank from my little cup?". Then the first looked around and said: "Who stepped on my little bed?". The second: "Oops, someone else has been lying on mine too!", and so it went on until the seventh, who, looking down at his bed, found Snow White lying there, asleep. All the dwarfs came running, shouted in surprise, immediately went to get lamps and stood looking at Snow White. "My God! My God!" they all exclaimed. "How beautiful she is!" They were overjoyed and let her go on sleeping in the little bed. The seventh dwarf slept in his companions' beds, an hour in each bed, and so the night soon went by. (GRIMM, 2018, p. 205)

The description is a parallel to Snow White's arrival, where not only is the reader's amazement at the diminutive size of the objects repeated, but also the equal division, since the seventh dwarf sleeps a little in each of his companions' bed.

If we return to Propp's description of the house in the woods, this is a house that is intended for the transition of men into adulthood. Here, these men are represented by the dwarfs. Although not a place for women, this house, in its tribal structure, allowed women to stay, who were responsible for domestic chores and who usually also had relationships with the men of the house (PROPP, 2002, p. 137ff.). These women were respected in tribal society, but, since not only Grimm's tales, but also the Russian tales studied by Propp, were recorded at a very different time, these women are usually treated by the men of the house as sisters, without reference to the possibility of a carnal union.⁵

Snow White can be recognized as a tale about the female transition from childhood to womanhood. From this perspective, by making the deal that she will be able to live in the house if she takes care of it for its residents, it is as if Snow White is training in miniature conditions for adulthood. She must perform these household chores until the narrative is concluded with marriage, just as it is in *Sleeping Beauty*. In these tales, the story seems to report the importance of a period of waiting before the woman enters adulthood and, with that, the marriage bonds and

⁵ Propp mentions a single Russian example, in which the girl, welcomed into the men's house after being expelled by her stepmother, gives birth to "their" child, in plural (PROPP, 2002, p. 140), but this is an exception among folktales.

motherhood (NEUHAUS, 2005, p. 141). From this perspective, the dwarfs serve as helpers and guardians of Snow White. They not only protect her from danger - for they always alert against strangers and save her from the first attacks of the mother/witch - but also guard her until the arrival of the prince, not without making a distinction of her origin and her nobility: "So they had a glass coffin made, put her in it so that they could look at her, then wrote her name and ancestry on it in golden letters" (GRIMM, 2018, p. 209). In the tale, the princess is not chosen by the prince only because she is beautiful, but also because he reads these golden letters and recognizes her as the daughter of a king.

Roughly speaking, the 1937 Disney adaptation is similar to Grimm's tale, the essential differences being that the villain is the stepmother and not the mother, Snow White has a desire to marry and has even seen the prince once at the beginning of the narrative, and she is waken up by a kiss - instead of a slap given by the prince's servants, tired of carrying the coffin. As for the dwarfs, what stands out is a strong division regarding their gender role and their consequent infantilization. Upon arriving at the house in the woods, the protagonist no longer finds an organized house, but a messy and dirty one, from which she understands that untidy children live there. Snow White immediately cleans the house, while singing and getting help from the animals - this connection with nature beings is also characteristic of the movie. Note that when housekeeping becomes a female function, these men, who in the original tale are orderly and do not depend on a female figure, are infantilized by not being able to take care of themselves. With these decisions in Disney's adaptation, the role of donors is only partially maintained since they become dependent on female care, and this is no longer an exchange they could give up, such as in the tale. The group of seven thus has little to teach or offer.

The infantilization of the characters continues in their characterization. While in the tale we only know that there are seven of them, in the movie, they have names that correspond to their personal characteristics: Doc, the leader of the group - going against the idea of an equal division, since there is a clear leader -, Grumpy, who questions Snow White's permanence, Happy, Sleepy, Bashful, Sneezy and Bashful. Despite a greater appearance in the movie compared to the tale, they do not have very relevant actions, so the names Sneezy or Dopey are enough to characterize them. In the group, Dopey, who does not speak and is the only one without a beard, stands out. He clearly represents a baby. This infantilization can be perceived even in Doc, who, despite being the leader of the group, has the main characteristic of switching words. While learning to be an adult, Snow White not only takes care of household chores, but she also takes care of little people

who resemble future children. She comes in already assuming the role of the mother to the whole group, what is quite clear before the first meal, when she demands to see their hands to make sure they are clean, scolds them and orders them to bathe. Disney transports the dwarfs from a magical world of wonder to infantilization due to stature: the magic of these characters is that they can never belong in a fully adult universe. Even in their own home, they must accept taking orders with the arrival of a stranger of standard height.⁶

The various adaptations of *Snow White* are usually based on Disney rather than the Grimm's tales. Nowadays, it is possible to speak of a fever of retellings of Disney's works, especially the re-signification of the princesses. Two works that stand out in the case studied here are *Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012), directed by Rupert Sanders, and *Mirror, Mirror* (2012), by Tarsem Singh. Although the basis of the narratives is the same, these films have different proposals, especially regarding the narrative genre and the representation of gender roles. One of the characteristics that the works have in common is the representation of Snow White as a strong woman who protects herself and those she loves. If, on the one hand, it is possible to note that relevant changes were made in the construction of characters, in order to adapt the works to the time to which they belong, that is, an adaptation that follows feminist ideals, breaking with the stereotype of the princess who waits for salvation by the prince on a beautiful white horse, on the other hand, the same cannot always be affirmed with regard to the representation of people with dwarfism, as will be seen below.

The universe presented in *Snow White and the Huntsman* is built from medieval features established as a standard of fantasy narrative, in a style that refers mainly to J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy and its adaptation by Peter Jackson. An example of this is the inclusion of a whole cavalry that reproduces codes of honour that are not quite medieval, but rather as idealized in contemporary fantasies. In addition, the aesthetics and soundtrack by James Newton Howard, a kind of neo-medieval, are evocative of Peter Jackson's work. The genre of Sanders' film is adventure. We follow the heroine in her fight against the Queen, who uses magic to suck the youth out of young women in order to maintain her own beauty and youthfulness. Just like in the Disney movie, Snow White has a unique and magical connection with nature. The animals are guides and

⁶ It should be noted that the article keeps referring to the characters as dwarfs, not only because of the title of the Disney movie, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, but also because Disney presents what can be understood as a distinct, magical species. One detail that points to this is the fact that Snow White is surprised when they speak, something only *humans* should do.

help her when she needs it, as, for example, when Snow White escapes from her prison and a white horse appears in an inaccessible place to help her, demonstrating that it is not a casual or random presence. Therefore, animals also play the role of magical helpers in this movie. However, they do not replace the dwarfs, who are also present in the narrative.

The dwarfs appear for the first time as thieves about to rob the protagonists, Snow White and the Huntsman. To do so, they tie them upside down. The way they immobilize their potential victims is relevant, since the difference in size is cancelled out and everyone is at the same eye level. This trick avoids a hierarchization that places people of greater stature as superior. A particularity of this encounter is that they are not charmed at first sight by Snow White, on the contrary, they distrust her until they get confirmation that she is the chosen one and that she is protected by the nature beings. In addition, unlike what happens in the Disney classic, there is no amazement at the short stature of these characters. This is because, in the fantastic universe in which they find themselves, their presence is not something extraordinary. This can be seen through some details in the narrative: 1) there were encounters with other supernatural beings, such as the troll; 2) the dwarfs and the Hunter already knew each other, showing that they are inserted in that community; 3) they tell about their past working in the mines and point out that, although they are the only ones left, there have been many others like them. On the one hand, the dwarfs seem to be inserted in the community - something that does not occur in the representation of the trolls -, removing them from the sphere of the purely fantastic or magical, on the other hand, the way they talk about themselves indicates that they belong to a distinct species, in which dwarfism would not be a disability, but a characteristic of the group.

There is no attempt to do away with negative prototypes: even if they have characteristics closer to those of real people, dwarfs are still magical figures and different from humans. It is possible that even this trait is a kind of mention to Tolkien, in whose work dwarfs are a species distinct from humans, as well as elves and other marvelous beings, and who originally live inside the mountain, but in the second volume of the trilogy, the heroes discover that their reign has been decimated by Sauron. They are not only distinguished by their stature, but also by their fearlessness and skills. Thus, one can understand that the dwarfs of *Snow White and the Huntsman* are much closer to the figures present in fantasy and action works made for adults than the nice and cute miners of the Disney movie.

In this adaptation, the appearance of the dwarfs is not only punctual, but there are notable participations - such as the tragic death of a member of the group and their performance in the final

battle – however, the dwarfs are not of great relevance, as they do not affect the course of the story. Their participation in the final battle is reduced to opening the gates for Snow White's army to enter. To do so, they must pass through the sewer to enter the castle, a path that had already been traveled by the protagonist in the opposite direction, to escape. The main difference between these two moments is the pitch of the representation: Snow White's passage is dramatic, emphasizing the contrast between the filth and the beauty of the princess, while the same location scene takes on comedy tones at the turn of the dwarfs, denoting that the presence of characters of short stature in that environment should be something more acceptable. Dwarfs are originally underground dwellers - more specifically mines - which would somehow resemble the sewer. In this way, the film reinforces prejudices against people of short stature, as it is understood that they are naturally destined for less noble and more unhealthy jobs because they are closer to the ground or, in this case, to the underground. It is also important to note that none of these characters are played by people with disabilities. They are the result of visual effects. Thus, Sanders missed the opportunity to save on chroma key and build an environment favorable to the visibility of actors with dwarfism.

Despite a few similarities in the general aspect of the adaptation, *Snow White and the Huntsman* differs strongly from *Mirror, Mirror*, released in the same year, 2012. Analyzing the Brazilian researches, it is possible to say that the main focus of the adaptations and their studies is the issue of female representation (SILVA, 2013; MOTA, 2019; MORAES; MARTINS, 2022) and that there is no thematization of the issue of dwarfs or dwarfism. However, a brief analysis of Silva's (2013) monography demonstrates that the disparity in the representation of this group in the two films is great: while the researcher uses the word *dwarf* seven times in the analysis of *Mirror, Mirror*, they are not mentioned once in the analysis of *Snow White and the Huntsman*, which reinforces the idea of their lack of relevance in this narrative, since it is possible to tell and analyze the plot of the film without mentioning them.

Mirror, mirror is a comedy and has, consequently, a much more cheerful and light tone, reinforced by the costumes with bright colors, present even in the representation of the villain. In this adaptation, after becoming of age, Snow White decides to venture out of the castle and meet the inhabitants of her kingdom, which leads her to discover that they live in misery, as the queen is bankrupt and charges higher and higher taxes to afford her own luxuries. Meanwhile, a prince appears in the region and, before he can reach the castle, he is approached by a gang of thieves who take even his clothes and those of his servant. This first encounter with the gang is similar to

the one in the film analyzed earlier: the characters are tied upside down by the robbers, who turn out to be people with dwarfism who use mechanical devices, which not only make them tall, but also offer extra abilities, such as extraordinary jumps. The prince feels humiliated to have been robbed by people of short stature and hides this fact in his accounts. The movie represents typical prejudices that people of short stature go through, and the irony is all centered on the insecurity of the prince who does not accept superiority both in technique and cleverness coming from people of smaller stature

In both works, the protagonist shows a lot of strength, both physical and psychological. However, while these are innate characteristics in *Snow White and the Huntsman*, in *Mirror, Mirror*, Snow White is trained by the characters with dwarfism so that she can assist in the robberies. Through contact with the gang, she acquires fighting skills and develops confidence becoming a fearless person. Therefore, as previously mentioned, it is not possible to summarize the film without mentioning these characters, since they are an essential part of the story and the development of the heroine's intrinsic characteristics. Moreover, unlike *Snow White and the Huntsman*, where it is implied that the dwarfs are a distinct species or race, each of the characters in *Mirror, Mirror* has a story of their own, with different origins and destinies, implying that they should not necessarily be limited to living together. They are not a tribe. One can understand that they are just people with dwarfism who ended up together in a moment of adversity. In fact, the actors in *Mirror, Mirror* are people with dwarfism. As in Grimm's tales, they act as helpers, figures who ensure the heroine's development, but are not limited to that, as can be seen in their final development that illuminates their individuality beyond the relationship with the princess.

At the end of the movie, after the wedding that determines the *happily ever after*, photos are presented with a lettering that indicates the ending of the gang members. Two characters in the group do not differ much from what is expected of prototypes, neither by their names (which are linked to personality traits as in the Disney classic), nor by their fate: Grub "ate his lunch" and Chuckles became a member of the royal circus. Butcher, whose name we understand must have a connection to his former occupation, became a flyweight box champion. And we will see that Wolf has returned to his pack, but the photo shows that he domesticates wolves. That is, the movie plays with the idea that people with dwarfism are savages, but he only has a profession linked to animals. It is noteworthy in both of the last two cases that the fate of these characters has to do with physical skills that they had and that were already demonstrated as they survived from robberies. Grimm, named after the brothers "wrote a book of fairy tales" - from the photo presented in the movie, we

also have information about his original professional activity: teacher. Napoleon became a hairdresser. And finally, Half-Pint, the only one who bears a name that is a pejorative nickname given to people of short stature, has realized his dream of finding love. He is the character markedly in love with Snow White, and generally a great romantic. The woman presented next to Half-Pint at the end of the film signals, once again, to the inclusion of these figures - despite the pejorative name -, because she is a person of standard height, which does not reinforce the idea of race of the other films.

It is common for these characters to be portrayed as in love with Snow White, but without any hint that it is possible to break out of Platonism. The narratives do not consider that they can marry a princess or that they are worthy of love. That the physical issue is seen as a greater impediment than questions of nobility is especially evident in the film adaptation *Black Forest* (1997), a horror film. In it, Snow White falls in love with one of the men from the gang who helps her when she is lost in the woods. In this group there is only one character with dwarfism, and he is not the person for whom she develops affection. Her romantic partner presents characteristics that distinguish him from his companions: besides being very kind, he is very handsome, having only the scars on his back as a trait that would characterize him as belonging to the grotesque group. This shows that, even when trying to deviate from the approach that presents Prince Charming as the ideal match for the princess, a normative standard of the gallant is maintained.

Mirror, mirror is a good example of the beginning of an evolution in the representation of dwarfism, but it is not yet possible to say that it has become a rule. We have a good example of this when extending the analysis of comic book adaptations. Coleen Doran's 2019 adaptation of Neil Gaiman's short story *Snow, Glass, Apples* (1993) still features the old negative prototypes of dwarfs. The horror tale, in which Snow White is actually a vampire and her stepmother the victim, has a strong grotesque character. The original tale refers to the gang as *dwarfs* and *pygmies*, i.e. with the use of pejorative vocabulary, and states that they are *stunted*, i.e. a group possibly relegated by the fact that they are composed of people with physical disabilities. Although Gaiman's text does not present them as magical figures - and is antiquated, predating the widespread discussion of Disability Studies - Doran not only makes no adjustments to the text, but draws characters from the gang with pointed ears indicating that they belong to the magical sphere. Such figures are still very present in the imagery of adult fantasy works to this day.

Final remarks

In the analysis of the movies, the adaptation to the social values of the time becomes evident. The focus of these changes is usually the female character: Snow White becomes stronger, more active and independent, reflecting the progress of the feminist movement since the 1970s. Updates in the representation of the gang of seven helpers, however, do not usually take into account disability rights issues. In all instances, they are translated into a group of outcasts, people on the margins of society, living illegally, and the grotesque aspect varies according to the target audience: the more adult, the more grotesque the characters. At the time of writing this article, *Mirror, Mirror* is still an exception. Not only does the film distance itself from the grotesque - which is natural, after all, it is a comedy aimed at children and pre-adolescents - but it also thematizes prejudice, inclusion, and the question of identity independence: people with dwarfism may share an agenda due to exclusion problems, but they have personal tastes and interests, and can (and should) develop independently of these common traits.

While it is not possible to predict which paths will be taken in Disney's upcoming live action, and whether more positive representations can be expected from then on (if dwarfism will be thematized in the movie at all), unfortunately, it is not yet possible to say that *Mirror, Mirror* ends the negative representations of dwarfs. Apparently, children's works seem to be more malleable to this type of alteration and adaptation, while works aimed at adults still end up reinforcing prejudices, either because of the interest in the grotesque and the tendency to relate physical disabilities to this universe, or because of the tradition of adult fantasy, especially that originated from the work of J.R.R. Tolkien, where the wonderful dwarfs are one of the classic prototypes. The road to the end of negative representations is, of course, still long, but at least it has begun.

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