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Reconstructing profane womanhood through analysis of selected fairy tales and artworks

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MAGISTER TECHNOLOGIAE: FINE ART

In the
Department of Fine Art
FACULTY OF ART, DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE
UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the dissertation, which I herewith submit for the research qualification

MAGISTER TECHNOLOGIAE: FINE ART

to the University of Johannesburg is, apart from the recognised assistance, my own work and has not been previously submitted by me to another institution to obtain a research diploma or degree.

Hilary Keegan _______________________________

Date _______________________________

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For Joan, Paul and Erica Keegan
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Abstract

My research investigates how fairy tales construct a specific feminine identity that is related to the profane and it seeks to formulate the means by which I might reconstruct an alternative identity that integrates the profane with the sacred. This study is embedded in my family’s dependence on strict Christian religious principles. It is also embedded in the fact that I was raised to deny any part of my character or any motivation that was deemed offensive, so that I could aspire to the stereotype of spirituality manifest in the Virgin Mary. It unpacks the appearance of the Virgin Mary and Eve, within the fairy tale genre and its illustrations, as dichotomous religious stereotypes, with the purpose of deconstructing the didactic message that they have imposed on female children. I utilise critical discourse analysis within a feminist paradigm to interrogate concepts of the sacred, the profane and the feminine identified in these two stereotypes. Both of these are evident in the protagonists of the Grimm Brothers’ *Snow White* (1857) and *The Red Shoes* (1845) by Hans Christian Andersen. Analyses of illustrations for these stories support my study and reveal a pattern of religious allusion that underscores the profane female identity, intended to compel obedience and devotion to a ‘pure’ feminine ideal. I compare the social behavioural codes illustrated in fairy tales with selected works by Paula Rego (*Snow White Swallows the Poisoned Apple*, 1995) and Diane Victor (*The Eight Marys*, 2004) both of which reveal the use of feminist strategies to undermine the prescriptive promulgation of rigid Mary and Eve stereotypes.

My practical work engages with the deconstruction and reconstruction of my female identity through a series of paintings and constructed altarpieces. The work is formulated to mirror Arnold van Gennep’s (1960) theoretical structure of rites of passage. The resulting three cycles of artworks act as metaphors for my reconstruction through a fairy tale journey. The first cycle draws on the theoretical framework established in Chapter One, and my analyses in Chapter Two. The second cycle initiates the process of reconstruction in a liminal space, drawing on Gilbert and Gubar’s (1979) theories of a composite protagonist, to replace the restrictive binary Mary/Eve stereotypes. Finally, Kristeva’s (1982) recognition that the composite is abject motivates a self-constructed personal space able to accommodate my reconstructed, composite identity that culminates in a three-part mixed media altarpiece.
## Contents

**Declaration** 

**Dedication** 

**Acknowledgements**

**Abstract**

**List of illustrations**

### Introduction

1. **Chapter One: Fairy tales and the profane feminine identity**
   1.1 Introduction
   1.2 The sacred, the profane and the feminine
   1.3 Mary and Eve: sacred and profane womanhood
   1.4 Morality, power and consent
   1.5 Abjection, sin and redemption
   1.6 Conclusion

2. **Chapter Two: Illustrating and subverting stereotypes in fairy tales**
   2.1 Introduction
   2.2 Part One: Historical and social function of fairy tales
   2.3 Part Two: Illustrating fairy tales
      2.3.1 Illustrating *Snow White* and *The Red Shoes*
      2.3.2 Karen as the jettisoned object
      2.3.3 Karen in a state of abject humility
      2.3.4 Mary and Eve in *Snow White*
   2.4 Part Three: Shifting paradigms: reimagining the model
      2.4.1 Strategies for change in action: *Snow White swallows the poisoned apple*
      2.4.2 Strategies for change in action: *Eight Marys* panel four
      2.4.3 Strategies for change: iconoclasm, abjection and parody
      2.4.4 Abjection and the female body
   2.5 Conclusion
   2.6 Illustrations

3. **Chapter Three: Reconstruction**
   3.1 Introduction
      3.1.1 Use of altars and altarpieces
   3.2 Part one: Deconstruction cycle
      3.2.1 Ironing board altars for Mary and Eve
      3.2.2 Mary (panels one, three and five)
      3.2.3 Bloodied Eves (panels two and four)
      3.2.4 Shoes
   3.3 Part Two: Reconstruction cycle
      3.3.1 Narrative series: Prologue
      3.3.2 Protagonist, antagonist, composite
      3.3.3 Reconstructed Narrative
   3.4 Part Three: Incorporation cycle
      3.4.1 Central panel
      3.4.2 Side panels
   3.5 Conclusion
   3.6 Illustrations
### List of illustrations

#### Chapter 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 2.1:</th>
<th>Illustration by Vilhelm Pedersen, for Hans Christian Andersen's <em>The Red Shoes</em> from <em>Eventyr</em>, 1850. Engraved by the Dalziel brothers. (Haney 2015:3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.2:</td>
<td>Illustration by Vilhelm Pedersen, for Hans Christian Andersen's <em>The Red Shoes</em> from <em>Eventyr</em>, 1850. Engraved by the Dalziel brothers (Haney 2015:3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.3:</td>
<td>Illustration by A. W. Bayes, for Hans Christian's <em>The Red Shoes</em> came from <em>Stories for the Household</em>. H. W. Dulcken (translator), 1889. London: George Routledge &amp; Sons (Heiner 20062)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.4:</td>
<td>Masaccio, <em>Expulsion from Eden</em>. Fresco, 1425, Fresco, Brancacci Chapel, Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence (Kleiner &amp; Mamiya 2005:586)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.5:</td>
<td>Robert Leinweber, <em>Adam and Eve cast out of the Garden of Eden</em>. Biblical illustration. Old Testament (Getty images culture club)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.6:</td>
<td>Illustration by Katharine Cameron, for Hans Christian Andersen's <em>The Red Shoes</em> from <em>The Enchanted Land: Tales Told Again</em>. Chisholm, Louey. London: TC &amp; EC Jack, 1909 (Heiner 2006:3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.7:</td>
<td>Illustration by Katharine Cameron from <em>The Enchanted Land: Tales Told Again</em>. Chisholm, Louey. London: TC &amp; EC Jack, 1909 (Heiner 2006:3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.8:</td>
<td>Michelangelo, <em>Pitti Tondo</em>, 1503-1504, marble bas-relief, Museo nazionale del Bargello in Florence (Kren 1996a [sp])</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.9:</td>
<td>Titian, <em>Assumption of the Virgin</em>, 1516-18, oil on panel, 690 cm × 360 cm (270 in × 140 in), Basilica Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari (Kleiner &amp; Mamiya 2005:643)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.10:</td>
<td>Granger, <em>Grimm: Snow White</em>, 2012, Photograph digital image (Granger 2012:1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.11:</td>
<td>Photograph of Teresa Margaret of the Sacred Heart taken from <em>Religion: top ten incorrupt corpses</em> (Frater 2007:1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.12:</td>
<td>Paula Rego, <em>Snow White swallows the Poisoned Apple</em>, 1995, Pastel on paper, mounted on aluminium, 178 x 150 cm (Mc Ewen:1997:235)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.13:</td>
<td>Paula Rego, <em>Snow White and her Stepmother</em>, 1995, Pastel on paper, mounted on aluminium, 178 x 150 cm (Mc Ewen:1997:235)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.14:</td>
<td>Diane Victor, <em>Eight Marys</em>, panels 1 – 4, 2004, charcoal and pastel on paper,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
each panel 170 x 51 cm. Hollard Collection (von Veh 2008:60)

**Figure 2.15** Diane Victor, *Eight Marys*, panels 5 – 8, 2004, charcoal and pastel on paper, each panel 170 x 51 cm. Hollard Collection (von Veh 2008:61)

**Figure 2.16** Titian, *The Venus of Urbino*, 1534, oil on canvas, 119 x 165 cm (47 x 65 in), Uffizi Florence (Kleiner & Mamiya 2005:646)

**Figure 2.17** Giorgione, *The sleeping Venus*, c. 1510, oil on canvas, 108.5 x 175 cm (42.7 x 69 in) Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden (Chicago & Lucie-Smith 2004: 101)

**Chapter 3**

**Figure 3.1:** Hilary Keegan, *Deconstruction Cycle: Ironing board series*, panels 1-5, 2018, oil on canvas with burnt felt and wax decal. (collection of artist)

**Figure 3.2:** Catalogue photograph of *Mary hands out: statue of Our Lady of Grace* taken from the online catalogue Catholic statues of Jesus, Mary, saints, angels, plaques, pedestals indoor or outdoor. [Sa]. Fiberglass resin and paint (Catholic statues [Sa]:2)

**Figure 3.3:** Hilary Keegan, *Not so happily ever after*, Digital photo-collage, 2016 (collection of artist)

**Figure 3.4:** Hilary Keegan, *Middle-aged Venus*, Digital photo-collage, 2016 (collection of artist)

**Figure 3.5:** Photographer unknown, *Photograph of artist’s mother preparing to leave for her honeymoon*, 1963 (collection of artist)

**Figure 3.6:** Hilary Keegan, ‘Selfie’ *Photograph of the artist*, 2016 (Photograph by author)

**Figure 3.7** Hilary Keegan, *Photograph of the artist’s sister*, 2018 (Photograph by author)

**Figure 3.8:** Orcagna, *Dormition and Assumption of the Virgin*. 1359. Marble, lapis lazuli, gold and glass inlay Church of Orsanmichele, Florence, Italy (Kren, E 1996c [sp])

**Figure 3.9:** John Roddam Spencer Stanhope, *Eve Tempted*, 1877, tempera on panel, 161.2 x 75.5 cm, Manchester Art Gallery (Eve Tempted:1)

**Figure 3.10:** Melisa Cadel, *Rebirth again*, 2011, White Earthenware, String, Pencil, and Encaustic (Cadel [Sa] 8)

**Figure 3.11:** Hilary Keegan, *First shoe experiment*, 2016, found shoes, paint and nails
Figure 3.12: Hilary Keegan, *Second shoe experiment*, 2016, gauze bandages, fabric offcuts, embroidery thread and wax (collection of artist)

Figure 3.13: Hilary Keegan, *Red Shoes I and II*, 2017, felt, Melton fabric, wax and oil paint (collection of artist)

Figure 3.14: Hilary Keegan, *Blue Shoes I, II and III*, 2018, felt, Melton fabric, wax and oil paint (collection of artist)

Figure 3.15: Hilary Keegan, *Narrative series: Prologue*, 2017-18, oil on canvas with cotton stitching (collection of artist)

Figure 3.16: Scan of page 115 of *Spellbound: art and film*. Edited by Ian Christie and Phillip Dodd. London: British film institute (Pointon 1996:115)

Figure 3.17: Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Ecstasy of Saint Theresa*, 1647-52, marble, life size, Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome (Chicago and Lucie-Smith 2004:37)

Figure 3.18: Hilary Keegan, *Reconstructed Narrative*, panel 1, 2018, oil on canvas (collection of artist)

Figure 3.19: Hilary Keegan, *Reconstructed Narrative*, panel 2, 2018, oil on canvas (collection of artist)

Figure 3.20: Hilary Keegan, *Reconstructed Narrative*, panel 3, 2018, oil on canvas (collection of artist)

Figure 3.21: Hilary Keegan, *Reconstructed Narrative*, panel 4, 2018, oil on canvas (collection of artist)

Figure 3.22: Hilary Keegan, *Reconstructed Narrative*, panel 5, 2018, oil on canvas (collection of artist)

Figure 3.23: Hilary Keegan, *Reconstructed Narrative*, panel 6, 2018, oil on canvas (collection of artist)

Figure 3.24: Hilary Keegan, *Reconstructed Narrative*, panel 7, 2018, oil on canvas (collection of artist)

Figure 3.25: Hilary Keegan, *Reconstructed Narrative*, panel 8, 2018, oil on canvas (collection of artist)
Figure 3.26: Hilary Keegan, *Reconstructed Altarpiece*, 2018, mixed media on three panels (collection of artist)

Figure 3.27: Hilary Keegan, *Reconstructed Altarpiece*, detail of left panel 2018, mixed media on panels (collection of artist)

Figure 3.28: Hilary Keegan, *Reconstructed Altarpiece*, detail of left panel 2018, mixed media on panels (collection of artist)

Figure 3.29: Giotto, ca. 1332-34, *Polyptych of Bologna*, Tempera and gold on wood, from the Rocca di Galliera, National Picture Gallery, Bologna (Giotto: the great pictorial art begins with the master 2016:1)

Figure 3.30: Bernardo Daddi, *Madonna Enthroned*, 1334, Tempera on wood, 56 x 26 cm, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence (Kren, E.1996a:Daddi)

Figure 3.31: Bernardo Daddi, ca 1330, *The Virgin Mary with Saints Thomas Aquinas and Paul*. Tempera and gold leaf on panel, 121.6 x 113 cm, The J. Paul Getty Museum (Giotto & Pacino 2012:1)
Introduction

My experience of personal tragedy has led me to believe that artmaking can aid in reconstructing a fractured identity that results from trauma. My own ability to assimilate and process the turmoil of trauma is grounded in the concept of a personally constructed metaphorical journey. That journey is echoed in the structure of many fairy tales and, for me, has also been part of my experience of making art. This is why I have chosen to investigate the fairy tales The Red Shoes by Hans Christian Andersen (1848) and Snow White by the Grimm brothers (1857), in this study, and to link them with the Biblical notion of profane womanhood. The direction of my research is rooted in my family and their dependence on strict religious principles. My grandmother was a devout Catholic,1 an aunt was a nun and another family member was a priest. On account of the dictates of religious dogma, I was brought up to repress personal desires and cut away or discard unacceptable aspects of my character following the biblical injunction in Matthew 18:82 (NIV) (Thompson 1983:1005) to “cut away, and throw…from [me] … my hand or foot if it [caused me] to stumble”. I was brought up, therefore, to deny or excise any part of my character or any motivation that was deemed offensive so that I could aspire to a stereotype of spirituality manifest in the Virgin Mary.

My brother committed suicide fifteen years ago, and his death triggered ‘forgotten’ layers of complex trauma in my subconscious that ultimately led me to reconsider who I was and what I wanted from life. The effect of complex trauma is that I felt compelled to strictly separate experiences into categories that I could assimilate and those that I could not. I entered therapy to be able to unpack some of these categories and to re-assimilate the suppressed parts of my psyche. My therapy focused on journaling (language) and some form of visualisation through making or drawing and painting. The journal was a place to pour out all the pain and eventually to piece fragmented memories back together, while the visuals were about rebuilding and reclaiming what had been broken or cut away.3 The idea of re-integrating aspects of my self has emerged from this journey and I have begun to understand the rejected impure aspects of my psyche (the ‘profane’) as something that is necessary to embrace for a

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1 My brother and I subsequently became members of a Charismatic Christian church. Many of the members were, like us, lapsed Catholics who had conformed to the new dogma by renouncing the Virgin Mary. Ironically, this new church promoted a version of womanhood that was eerily similar to the Virgin Mary stereotype. Their teaching about the role of women in the church was, if anything, more patriarchal than the Catholic Church in the 1970s.
2 As I read Hans Christian Andersen’s Red Shoes, I was aware of how strongly the story echoed Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 18:8.
3 I undertook a process of sorting out what was mine to carry, and what had been imposed by my mother or my grandmother, which resulted in more cutting and removing. There was, however, a new process of discovery and reintegration. Much of that reintegration seemed to happen finally in dreams after the process of removing or letting go. I had worn my mother’s shame as a mantle and been borne down by my grandmother’s weighty disapproval. At the beginning of the process, I had made what I termed library cards bearing images that denoted strengths, and particular tools that would assist me throughout the journey. A pair of scissors featured frequently, as did others such as a tall tree.
holistic and integrated identity. Part of the integration process during therapy was to recreate a personal narrative in my journal. The resultant story reminded me somewhat of a mythical journey or a fairy tale.

Fairy tales and the Bible were ever present growing up and both operate for me as metaphors for the journey of an individual. I have often thought of fairy tales as a microcosm of the psyche in that each character could be seen as an aspect of the self. Fairy tales also expose and engage with the 'impure' in a way that reinforces both biblical and social messages of good behaviour, by rewarding obedience and punishing transgression. As Jack Zipes (2012:10) explains, they operate as powerful ideological tools for the 'civilisation' of children in a similar manner to the ideology of obedience promoted by the Bible that prescribes certain behaviours to create a docile and obedient population. The conjunction with Biblical teaching is reinforced in some tales by allusions to Christian religious imagery.

In my study of the sacred and the profane, I employ the term ‘profane’ as an adjective for womanhood to highlight the historical conflation of women with defilement. I then explore the patriarchal construction of the Virgin Mary as the feminine ideal. This results in an extremely narrow definition of purity, characterised by a code of sexual chastity, passivity and silence, while contained and controlled within the walls of the home or a convent. Conversely, Eve embodies the opposing qualities of rebellion, disobedience and most importantly seduction through deceitful speech and sexual wiles.

In this paper, I explore how fairy tales construct a specific feminine identity that is related to the profane and I seek to formulate the means by which I may reconstruct an alternative identity that integrates the profane with the sacred. As this study is located within a Christian context in which the categories are firmly delineated, it is my intention to unpack the use of the two specific religious stereotypes that seem to be embedded within the fairy tale genre, namely the Virgin Mary and Eve. I refer to Mary Douglas’s (2002:200) assessment of the “search for purity” as the basis for my argument. Hans Christian Andersen, in particular, expresses an uncompromising search for purity in his fairy tales. That is why I employ The Red Shoes to exemplify the imposition of a code of purity that can only lead, as Mary Douglas (2002:199) argues, to barrenness and contradiction. I chose the Grimm Brothers’ Snow White because the Mary and the Eve stereotype are both present, with Snow White being caught between the two. Her choice is the sterile purity of her mother or marginalised profanity personified by her stepmother; neither is tenable because both are binary extremes. My art is about deconstructing that sort of conundrum and proposing an alternative through integration. In The Red Shoes, I identify with Karen, the protagonist, who is also required to cut the profane away from herself to satisfy repressive social and religious requirements for purity in young women. The profane is symbolised by her ‘sinful’ red shoes.
My strategy in Chapter One is to utilise critical discourse analysis around the concepts of the sacred, the profane and the feminine which I relate to the use of the religious female stereotypes, the Virgin Mary and Eve. I then show how these same religious stereotypes are used to reinforce the well-documented stereotypes of the passive and pure young heroine and the actively evil older woman. As a feminist paradigm encompasses this study, I refer to Kate Millet’s *Sexual politics* (2016) to demonstrate the pervasive operation of socialisation in both religion and fairy tales. Studies on the Virgin Mary by Julia Kristeva (1985) and Marina Warner (1976) as well as an exposition of fairy tale stereotypes and how they function to socialise women frame my initial analyses. These studies are based on the work of Karen E. Rowe (1987), Jack Zipes (1987, 2002, 2005, 2006, 2012) and the writing partnership of Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979). Finally, I examine each stereotype through the lens provided by Kristeva’s (1982) theory of abjection.

In part one of Chapter Two, I focus on Zipes’ (1987, 2002, 2005, 2006, 2012) and Warner’s (1994, 2014) extensive social and historical analyses of fairy tales to establish the specific context in which *The Red Shoes* and *Snow White* were written. In part two, I analyse illustrations for Hans Christian Andersen’s *The Red Shoes* and the Grimm Brothers’ *Snow White* and demonstrate that religious allusion has been employed to underscore the profane female identity and, thus, compel obedience and devotion to the feminine ideal. Analyses of Paula Rego’s, *Snow White Swallows the Poisoned Apple*, (1995), and Diane Victor’s *Eight Marys*, (2004), reveal feminist strategies that foreground the lived experience of women and oppose the didactic promulgation of rigid Mary and Eve stereotypes identified in Chapter One. Furthermore, I identify a range of visual approaches that I employ in Chapter Three to subvert the Mary and Eve stereotypes, and then positively reconstruct the profane female identity.

I analyse three cycles of artworks that chart the course of my journey in Chapter Three. Each cycle corresponds to Arnold van Gennep’s (1960) theoretical structure of the rites of passage. The first cycle, comprises five altarpieces with corresponding altars and constructed felt and wax shoes, deconstructs both stereotypes. I draw on the theoretical framework established in Chapter One and my analyses of Chapter Two to deconstruct the impossible binary conundrum that the stereotypes embody for women. My second cycle of nine paintings initiates the process of reconstruction in a liminal space. These works draw on Gilbert and Gubar’s (1979) theories of a composite protagonist that encompasses the mother, the step-mother and the young girl, the passive and the active, the good and the evil.

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4 Feminists have unpacked the use of stereotyping in the construction of gender roles and identity. The Virgin Mary and Eve featured among those stereotypes, which research identified as cultural constructs that arose within the Christian faith to counter the threat of an older matriarchal culture, perceived to be a threat by patriarchs of the church.
Additionally, Kristeva’s (1982) identification of the composite as abject precipitates the creation of a self-constructed personal space that is able to accommodate my reconstructed, composite identity. In the final three-part mixed media altarpiece the symbolism of the body is positively reconfigured and reintegrated with the mind.
Chapter One: Fairy tales and the profane feminine identity

1.1 Introduction

This study is set within a feminist framework and considers notions of the sacred and the profane feminine. Grizelda Pollock and Victoria Turvey Sauron’s (2007) volume of essays, entitled The sacred and the feminine, addresses the question of the relationship between the feminine and the sacred, bearing in mind that concepts of the sacred have in patriarchal cultures such as Christianity relegated the feminine to the realm of the profane. For example, Christian feminine stereotypes that originate in the Catholic Church present Eve as profane and construct a feminine ideal in the guise of the Virgin Mary that is impossible to attain. In so doing, patriarchy seeks to control women. It is in this context that Pollock and Turvey Sauron (2007) construct the title of their book to allude to Titian’s popularly but incorrectly titled “Sacred and profane love”. Pollock (2007:4) explains that their reference to the traditional oppositional pairing of the sacred and the profane in their title The sacred and the feminine, provides a forum, in which they might interrogate Julia Kristeva’s (Pollock & Turvey Sauron 2007: 2) assertion that there is a particular connection between the feminine and the sacred. I argue that the placement of the feminine in the position typically held by the profane is a political act through which the authors recognise and challenge the patriarchal construction of the feminine as profane.

Further to the subversion of the traditional binary, Pollock (2007:1) suggests the need to redefine the feminine ideal which negates female subjectivity and vilifies sexuality in women. I agree with Marion Arnold (1996:2) who notes that the word ‘subject’ has opposing uses. In the first instance, the subject refers to a person who lacks agency and is under someone else’s control. In a grammatical sense, however, the subject is the agent of the sentence. The subject acts, while the object is passive. In feminist terms, it is the male who is the subject, or in the words of Simone De Beauvoir (2009:21), “[h]e is the subject; he is the absolute. She is the other.” This leaves women in the position of passive object, the other, or as Cynthia Willet, Ellie Anderson and Diana Meyers (2016) argue a mere body. Furthermore, the philosophical subject refers, according to Arnold (1996:2), to the self or the ego that has the capacity for emotion, cognition, perception and agency. Feminists critique that philosophical subject as a construction of a white, financially privileged patriarchy (Willet, Anderson, Meyers, 20161). To replace it, they propose that feminine identities should be reclaimed and reconceptualised. These

1 Willet, Anderson and Meyers refer to two western philosophical models of the self, namely “the Kantian ethical subject” and the utilitarian “homo economicus”. The primary quality of the ethical subject is reason, which he uses to discern truth and to rise above the dictates of culture. Reason is also favoured by homo economicus but to a different end. He employs reason to clearly prioritise his desires to maximise their satisfaction “within the instrumental rationality of the marketplace” (Willet, Anderson, Meyers 2015:2).
reconstructed identities should reflect what patriarchal paradigms omit: identity includes “personal and social relationships [as well as] biological forces” (Willet, Anderson, Meyers 2016).

In this chapter, I explore how female sexuality is systematically vilified as profane by Catholic patriarchs and how a similar construction of a profane feminine identity appears to manifest in fairy tales written by male authors for a young female audience. My study focuses on the Virgin Mary and Eve, both constructs of the sacred and the profane respectively in a Catholic context. I begin by unpacking Emile Durkheim’s (2008) use of the sacred and the profane as combatant and heterogeneous categories. I then reflect on the implications of Mary Douglas’ (2002) more nuanced consideration of the same categories and the role of taboo in dealing with a third category relating to ambiguity. This provides a theoretical context for the discussion of Mary and Eve that follows.

1.2 The sacred, the profane and the feminine

The sacred and profane dichotomy is considered by sociologist, Emile Durkheim (2008:47) to be the fundamental property of religion. He defines it as “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden”. In this context, Durkheim (2008:41) describes the sacred and the profane as mutually exclusive classes or categories; thus the significant defining principle for these terms is their “heterogeneity” or extreme difference. Durkheim (2008:37-39) posits that this difference is so marked that they do not even occupy opposing poles of the same category; instead, they belong to entirely different categories and this results in extreme antagonism. This radical distinction is exemplified in various religions in different ways. For example, some religions separate the sacred and the profane by locating them in different physical spaces, while for others the disparity is so pronounced that they idealise the sacred, remove it from the physical world and place it in a perfect heavenly realm. The remaining material world is then defined as profane (Durkheim 2008:39). I would argue that in the books of the Apocrypha, the gradual idealisation of the Virgin Mary,² from ordinary woman to the bodily assumption of the ‘sinless’ mother of Christ into heaven³ represents this (Kristeva 1985:136,138). According to Warner (1976:119) the myth of the Assumption is recounted in the Pseudo-Melito⁴, which culminates in an account of Jesus saying that because Mary had not been corrupted by conception and childbirth, she would be free of the corruption that comes from the grave.

² The doctrine of Virgin Mary was constructed over several hundred years. At first, she was just the mother of Jesus who was only mentioned twice in the Bible. In the apocryphal text, Mary’s life story was subsequently idealised and written to reflect a similar structure and path as Christ. Each generation of Catholic theologians seems to have debated and added to the mythology that culminated in the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. I unpack this process in the section on Mary and Eve.

³ The Assumption of Mary was proclaimed as an article of faith by Pope Pius XII in 1950 (Warner 1976:116)

⁴ The Pseudo-Melito is a second century account of the myth of the assumption of the Virgin Mary. It is one of the most popular versions of the myth (Warner 1976:119).
The danger of contact between the sacred and profane realms is illustrated by Durkheim’s (2008:39) use of initiation rites as an example. He explains that the initiate leaves the world of his birth behind to enter the religious world and that such a transition is not considered without the mediation of some form of rites that ensure the metamorphosis of the participant’s entire being. Through enactment of the initial phase of the rite, the initiate is believed to have died symbolically to the world of their birth and to have ceased “to exist” (Durkheim 2008:39). In the final phases of the rite, they are “re-born under a new form” (Durkheim 2008:39). In this way, the initiate passes safely from the world of the profane into the sacred realm without the danger of either realm coming into contact with the other. The apostle Paul (Romans 6:4 NIV) (Thompson 1983:1153-1154) shows that the same principle of metamorphosis or rebirth operates in Christianity through baptism. He writes that “we were therefore buried with him [Christ] through baptism into death”, which is understood to mean that when the participant is lowered into the baptismal water, they have symbolically died and been buried with Christ (Romans 6:4 NIV) (Thompson 1983:1153-1154). This death occurs so that the participant may also mirror Christ’s resurrection from death when the apostle extends the metaphor by stating “just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the father, we too may have a new life” (Romans 6:4 NIV) (Thompson 1983:1153-1154). This same metaphor of life and death is evident in the ritual and symbolism of a nun’s final vows, which I describe in more detail below when I discuss the sacred symbols traditionally associated with Snow White in her glass coffin.

The second principle in Durkheim’s (2008:47) theory deals with the social function of religion which seeks to unite a community within a cohesive moral code. Mary Douglas (2002:24) explains Durkheim’s argument stating that it is the moral code that unites the community into a single body known as a church. She adds that church members demonstrate a commitment to a common set of values which Douglas describes as a “collective conscience”. Durkheim’s (Douglas 2002:26-27) intention in The elementary forms of religious life (originally written in 1915) was to provide a rational theory for religion in which he theorised that the “gods are only material emblems of immaterial forces generated by social process”. It is, therefore, not the gods that initiate the formation of churches, but rather the social need of a community that gives rise to the god or gods. The gods thus exist as an embodiment of the group’s collectively projected moral code. That same moral code gives rise to the sacred which becomes the basis for social conscience. Policing the group’s behaviour within the confines of that code falls to the

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5 Durkheim (2008:39) supports his claim in a footnote in which he refers to two studies the first by Sir James Frazer entitled On Some Ceremonies of the Central Australian Tribes in Australian Association for the Advancement of Science, which was published in 1901. The second study, Essai sur le Sacrifice, printed in the Année Sociologique, was completed by Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss in 1899 entitled Essai sur la nature et la function du sacrifice.

6 Rebirth also appears as a motif in fairy tales such as Snow White when Snow White dies as a result of eating the poisoned apple and then she is ‘resurrected’ into the sacred state of matrimony.
mythical deities. Based on this understanding of religion as a system of man-made morality and control, it is possible to conceptualise the forces of the sacred as Douglas (2002:27) sees them, not as universally absolute but rather as “rootless, fluid, [and] liable to become unfocussed and flow into other experiences”. The caveat being that if the sacred is not absolute it is in danger of losing its uniqueness, and must be protected from contamination by a system of prohibitions.

As previously stated, Douglas’ (2002:xi) approach to the sacred and the profane is more nuanced than Durkheim’s. In *Purity and Danger* (originally written in 1966), Douglas (2002:xi) deals with the subject of contagion or dirt, which she describes as common to both contemporary and early cultures. She explains that behaviour that transgresses the boundaries of the sacred, in both old and new cultures, is subject to taboo and is defined as dangerous or ‘dirty’. Taboo is the first theme in Douglas’ (2002:xi) study and is identified as “a spontaneous device for protecting the distinctive categories of the universe.” She identifies ambiguity as her second theme which she recognises as a threat to certainty in the group. Consequently, ambiguity is managed through the application of taboo which she explains functions to “[shore] up wavering certainty” and to decrease “intellectual and social disorder” (Douglas 2002:xi). In other words, anything that is deemed to be threatening or ambiguous is, as Douglas (2002:xi) argues, pushed safely out of harm’s way and cordoned off through the mechanism of taboo.

Douglas also makes an important link between the sacred and the concept of holiness as it relates to Judaism or Christianity. Initially Douglas (2002:10) traces the term sacred to the notion of restriction that relates to the gods through the Latin term *sacer*. In the same paragraph, she also mentions the Hebrew *k-d-sh* which is often rendered as holy but which appears to be a problematic translation. Ronald Knox’s (in Douglas 2002:10) use of ‘set apart’ in his translation of the Old Testament suggests that while it may not have the same gravitas as “be holy, for I am holy” (Leviticus 11:45 KJV) (in Douglas 2002:10), it is perhaps more accurately translated in Knox’s version as “I am set apart and you must be set apart like me.” Thus holiness is linked specifically to the idea of separating things into specific categories. Furthermore, wholeness of body is equated with worthiness to serve the holy God. This is exemplified by the command to those of Aaron’s line who would serve: “None . . . who [have] a blemish may approach to offer the bread of his god” (Leviticus 21:17 KJV)(in Douglas 2002:64). Douglas (2002: 65) concludes that the outward expression of holiness was “the wholeness of the body seen as a perfect container”. The notion of the perfect container recurs in the Christian dispensation with the Virgin Mary and the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, which I discuss below in the section on Mary and Eve.

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7 I understand these categories to be the sacred and the profane given that Douglas (2002) refers to the sacred as the category that is protected from the danger of anomaly.
To arrive at a working definition of dirt, Douglas (2002:43) dispenses with the modern notion that dirt relates to hygiene and bacteriology. Instead, she (2002:44) proposes that we revert to an earlier understanding of dirt as “matter out of place.” She explains that dirt results from systematic classification or ordering and that dirt is then understood as elements that are rejected as inappropriate to particular categories. Thus, one understands that dirt threatens purity not only on a material level but on a symbolic level as well. A lack of orderliness or dirt is managed through what Douglas calls pollution behaviour,\(^8\) which she describes as the means by which the purity of categories such as the sacred and the profane are protected. Douglas (2002:197) provides a concrete example of how dirt operates as a threat to order not only materially but also on a metaphorical level, as something that is ambiguous in its half identity.\(^9\) She does so by explaining that dirt has a two-phase cycle. In the first cycle, dirt is first half-identifiable as the scraps or waste material left over from their original source, such as hair or food. These scraps are viewed as offensive and a threat to “good order” because of their residual connection to their source. They thus retain a half-identity through their visible relationship to their origins, but they are also visibly unwanted, and so they obscure the clarity of the context in which they occur. It is only in the second phase that they become innocuous, once the scraps have been broken down by processes such as rotting and dissolving. The visible connection to the source is lost, and they belong to their own category, rubbish. The act of trying to recover something from the rubbish, however, reactivates the half identity of the bits and so Douglas (2002:197-198) concludes that “so long as identity is absent, rubbish is not dangerous. It does not even create ambiguous perceptions since it clearly belongs in a defined place, the rubbish heap of one kind or another.”

On a symbolic and intrapersonal level, dirt can be understood as those elements that the individual seeks to reject or negate to maintain order or purity. An example of this would be an attempt to live up to the ideals represented by the Virgin Mary, which would result in large portions of the ‘self’ having to be rejected. Unfortunately, those rejected elements do not go away no matter how much they are denied, as Douglas (2002:202) explains:

> Whenever a strict pattern of purity is imposed on our lives it is either highly uncomfortable or it leads to contradiction if closely followed; and if not, hypocrisy. That which is negated is not thereby removed. The rest of life, which does not tidily fit the accepted categories, is still there and demands attention.

\(^8\) Pollution behaviour is a powerful negative reaction that censures an object or an idea that is experienced as confusing, or, contradictory of revered classifications and order. These responses are designed to protect what is deemed to be precious from contamination by the presence of ambiguous objects and ideas (Douglas 2002:45).

\(^9\) The half identity of dirt is relevant to my later discussion of abjection at the end of this chapter. I then relate this to my argument that elements of the self or the psyche have to be cut away and discarded to try to fit literally into a sacred model of purity. Those unwanted elements are still related to the self through a half identity that induces a feeling of revulsion precisely because there is still a visceral connection to the self.
This “rest of life” or dirt relates directly to Julia Kristeva’s (1982) theory of the abject, and it is this rest of life that unbalances and threatens identity particularly in very strict communities. The attempt to expel the threat of “the rest of life” results in an increasingly strict spiral of pollution behaviour which, according to Douglas (2002:203), is separation and avoidance of an anomaly on the part of both the individual and the community.

The site of the struggle for purity is often found in the body which Douglas (2002:202) argues “provides a basic scheme for all symbolism.” She supports her statement saying that “[t]here is hardly any pollution which does not have some primary physiological reference,” which creates a paradox for an individual or a community whose absolute aim is the attainment of purity. If the body is associated on multiple levels with impurity, how does one attain purity while living in the body? As Douglas states (2002:202), “life is in the body it cannot be rejected outright”. She goes on to explain:

> Where sexual purity is concerned it is obvious that if it is to imply no contact between the sexes it is not only a denial of sex, but it must literally be barren (Douglas 2002: 200-201).

Sexual purity leads to contradiction as it would ultimately result in the demise of humankind.

### 1.3 Mary and Eve: sacred and profane womanhood

Durkheim’s (2008) heterogeneous categories seem to operate in the Church’s construction of Eve as the originator of sin and the sinless Virgin Mary as the second Eve who redeems women, particularly from the burden of Eve’s sin. Redemption is only accessible to women through emulation of the Virgin Mary who is the ‘embodiment’ of all that is sacred and pure. As we have seen in Douglas (2002:200-202) discussion of the “quest for purity”, the attempt to live out an absolutely pure life is a contradiction. Instead, such a quest results in a destructive cycle of excision which not only endangers the body and physical life but, I would argue, endangers the mind through the negation of self. If Durkheim is to be believed, the only way in which a real woman can be entirely pure, is to psychically split the pure from the impure because the sacred and the profane cannot come into contact with one another.

In a Christian context, the realm of the sacred is described as heaven and is the home of the Holy Trinity, known separately as God the father, Jesus Christ the son, and the Holy Spirit. The Virgin Mary, who is one of the subjects of this study, also occupies this realm. This dwelling place of God is understood to be so holy that it cannot come into contact with the ordinary world that humans and all other forms of life occupy. When the universe was first created, there was no need for such a separation between God and Adam and Eve because they had not yet sinned. However, once they ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge, they were banished from the Garden of Eden and could no longer
tolerate direct contact with the sacred. From that point, the Catholic Church taught that humanity had to atone for their sin, and that woman, in particular, must bear a particular burden, because it was she (Eve) who had seduced Adam into eating the forbidden fruit. The Catholic Church then presented Mary as the “second Eve”\(^\text{10}\) (Warner 1976:94) and it was through emulating her that women could atone for the sin of Eve. The difficulty was that the Virgin Mary was an idealised construct that no woman could ever embody (Kristeva 1982:141) as she evolved over time into a perfect woman/god who was free from sin and a virgin.

It should be noted that Mary only appeared in the Bible in a handful of places and, in each instance, Jesus put a distance between himself and his mother (Kristeva 1985:136). The image that we have of the “pious young woman” (Kristeva 1982:137) has its origins in the first century apocryphal writings of pseudo Mathew and James in which we are presented with the story of a virgin who became pregnant despite being “pure before [God]” and ‘undefiled’ by a man. She has since become what Karen von Veh (2011:88) terms the impossible feminine ideal that women are expected to emulate. Kristeva (1985:139) states that significant changes to her status in church doctrine seemed to coincide with moments at which the church sought ways to control women. For example, the rise of the feminist movement, in Protestant nations, corresponded with the declaration of the Immaculate Conception as dogma in 1854. This perfect construction of the feminine ideal was built on an error in translation. According to Julia Kristeva in *Stabat Mater* (1982:135), the Semitic word referring to the socio-legal status of an unmarried girl had been replaced with the Greek word ‘Parthenos’ denoting the “physiological and psychological fact, virginity” (Kristeva 1985:135).

In contrast to the Virgin Mary, the Catholic Church fathers associated womanhood (through Eve) with the profane. For them, “Woman [was] the cause of the fall, the wicked temptress, the accomplice of Satan and the destroyer of mankind” (Warner 1976:53). This belief goes back to Adam, who in Genesis, refused to take responsibility for his choice of eating the forbidden fruit. He complained to God that the woman God had put with him in Eden had given him the fruit and he had eaten it (Genesis 3:12 NIV) (Thompson 1983:3). That blame was entrenched by the time the Apostle Paul (in Warner 1994:52) wrote to Timothy. Paul insisted that women remain silent and under control\(^\text{11}\) because it was woman

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\(^\text{10}\) The Virgin Mary is presented as the second Eve by Catholics such as St Jerome (A.D. 383-384) who wrote that because the virgin had given birth from a virginal womb, the curse of the Eve was broken. In the place of the death and sin that came from Eve, Mary had brought life to humanity (Warner 1976:89).

\(^\text{11}\) Warner (1994:52) explains that the apostle Paul was very clear in his instructions about women and their role in the church. They were instructed specifically to be silent and utterly submissive in public meetings. He also instructed that women must not hold any authority in the church or over any man for two reasons: first because Adam was made first which he argues gives Adam authority over Eve; and second because they were easily deceived like Eve. Paul ends with the admonition that if a woman wanted to remain safe in childbirth she should “continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety” (Timothy 2: 11 – 15).
who had caused Adam to sin and it was Eve who had been deceived. Marina Warner (1976:93) cites Tertullian who was even more forceful in his view: he equated Eve and women with Satan describing them as the “devil’s gateway”. He demanded that women bear the hardships of God’s curse because it “[weighed] heavily on the world”.

Death was the consequence of the fall (Genesis 3:2 NIV) (Thompson 1983:3), but according to Augustine (cited by Warner 1976:88) that was not the only outcome. In City of God (A.D. 413-426), Augustine (cited by Warner 1976:88) argued that as Adam and Eve had covered their genitals rather than their hands or mouths which had actually “done the deed”, they must have gained knowledge of an “inner force” which he called concupiscence12. Ascetic church fathers such as John Chrysostom linked sexuality to death when he declared that “where there is death, there too is sexual coupling; and where there is no death, there is no sexual coupling either” (quoted by Warner 1976:52). Warner (1976:86) prefaced Chrysostom’s words by explaining that in Christian symbolism, sex, sin and death are linked and “spiritual corruption mirrors bodily dissolution”, so just as the body rots in death so the soul dies in lust. Virginity, therefore, became the means to escape the penalties of the fall.

The concept of wholeness and the integrity of boundaries are linked by church fathers to ideas about virginity. Warner (1976:108) explains that for these men virginity was holy because God created it. Therefore, to patriarchs such as Ambrose, the loss of virginity was “to deface the work of the creator” (1976:108). The fathers conceptualised the Virgin Mary’s body as “seamless”, a condition that young women were encouraged to emulate. St Methodius of Olympus (in Warner 1976:108), for instance, linked physical wholeness to spiritual integrity stating that:

It is imperative that anyone who intends to avoid sin in the practice of chastity must keep all his members and senses pure and sealed – just like pilots caulk a ship’s timbers – to prevent sin from getting an opening and pouring in.

This notion of boundary integrity is an important aspect of my discussion about the theory of abjection, which I use to draw the threads of this argument together at the end of this chapter.

From the apostolic period (ca A.D. 64) until the peace of the church in A.D. 313, Christians in the early Church showed their devotion to their God through the act of martyrdom (Warner 1976:104). The benefit of this supreme sacrifice was the martyr’s crown which opened the way to heaven and unity in the church. However, after the Emperor Constantine dispensed the edict of toleration in A.D. 313, the external threat of martyrdom receded (Warner 1976:105). As a result, the external struggle of the early

12 Concupiscence is defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as a “strong desire; especially sexual desire”(Merriam-Webster 2016:[sp])
martyrs was transformed into a battle with the “enemy within,” and this took the form of concupiscence. Virginity was a new battleground on which virgins were encouraged to ‘crucify’ the flesh. As Marina Warner (1976:103) states, “The life of self-denial was seen as a form of martyrdom, and the virgin was encouraged to suffer physically”. Through that suffering and self-denial “a woman could relieve part of her nature’s particular viciousness” just as “the Virgin Mary had done through her complete purity” (Warner 1976:103). Saint Jerome, for example, encouraged women to observe a regime of all night vigils, along with extended fasts and physical discipline which included the use of hair shirts and the scourge (Warner 1976:109). One of the side effects of this regime was amenorrhea, the loss of the menstrual cycle, or as it was described in the church “the elimination of the curse of Eve” (Warner 1976:110). That this was an intended side effect can be argued when one considers Jerome’s statement that: “nothing is so unclean as a woman in her periods, what she touches, she causes to become unclean” (in Warner 1976:111). Consequently, women were persuaded by their confessors to emulate a feminine ideal embodied by Mary and follow the example of female saints described in the popular text, The Golden Legend (De Voragine 2015). Accounts of the lives of virgin martyrs such as Saint Margaret of Cortona (1247-1297) have been recorded in the Golden Legend which is written in simple Latin and was often used for sermons (De Voragine 2015:15). These stories follow a particular formula in which a virgin of particular grace and beauty is “tempted by evil well placed youths”; as the virgin refuses she is, in Warner’s words, “butchered for it” (Warner 1976:113). Saint Margaret of Cortona’s story is marginally less disturbing. Her mother died when she was seven. Her father neglected her and her step-mother despised her. At eighteen she left home but because she was so beautiful, she fell into ‘temptation’ and ‘sin’ by living with a man out of wedlock. It was only after her partner was killed in the woods that she feared for her soul and repented. She performed many humiliating acts of penance, but her father and stepmother refused to welcome her home. She died after 23 years of rigorous penance. She is one of the many examples of incorrupt saints on display in churches throughout Europe. The bodies of these saints are presented in glass coffins that are reminiscent of Snow White’s glass coffin. An incorrupt saint is a saint whose body is believed not to have been corrupted in death because of the purity of the saint’s soul. Miracles are said to be associated with these Catholic relics with thousands making pilgrimages to

13 The Golden Legend compiled by Jacobus de Voragine in about 1275, is an extensive collection of stories about Jesus and approximately 170 Catholic saints. It was written in Latin and also translated into the regional languages of Europe (De Voragine 2015:13,15). Alterations and additions were made according to the preferences of each region (De Voragine 2015:15). It was reprinted several times between the years 1470 and 1530, which indicates how popular the book was (De Voragine 2015:15)

14 The body of Saint Margaret of Cortona can be viewed at the Fransiscan church in Cortona.
pray before and venerate these saints. I relate the phenomena of incorrupt saints to images of Snow White in her glass coffin in the second chapter of this thesis.

In the thirteenth century, the threads of Christian asceticism and the cult of Mary began to merge with the conventions of courtly love\(^\text{15}\) (Warner 1976:166). Kristeva (1982:140) states that “the fundamental features of Western love converge in Mary”. Kristeva cites two causes: the first being that women had become more vulnerable as a result of the promulgation of Salic laws which forbade daughters from inheriting property and power and the second being the rise of ascetic forms of Christianity (Kristeva 1985:141). As a result of this increased vulnerability, “the virgin explicitly became the focus of courtly love” and the “desired lady” becomes perfect and inaccessible as she is a combination of the lady and the Virgin Mary (Kristeva 1985:141). Warner (1976:166) points out, however, that the cult of the virgin was not a causal factor in the development of courtly love, stating that the two strands were quite distinct until the early thirteenth century. Warner explains that in twelfth century troubadour\(^\text{16}\) poetry, the courtly convention focused on earthly pleasures such as conversation, music, poetry, dance and fashion. Mariology during the same period emphasised the sacrifice of earthly pleasure for the deferred reward of union with Mary after death. It was only at the beginning of the thirteenth century that the Marian tradition began to merge with the courtly tradition (Kristeva 1985:136; Warner 1976:166). Warner argues, however, that the one point of commonality between the two systems was the courtly system of Europe. In other words, courtly love was restricted to the aristocratic class of Europe, and Christians imagined that heaven was structured like a court in which Christ and the Virgin Mary rule as king and queen. It was in her role as queen of heaven that Mary began to assume the mantle of the beloved lady of the courtly convention or, in Marina Warner’s (1976:176) words, take on “character and functions of the original beloved of Languedoc poetry and to rob it and its many descendants of its dangerous hedonism and permissiveness”. In this way, the church was able to subvert the profane exultation of the troubadours and replace it with the Christian pursuit of other worldliness (or the sacred) instead of the pursuit of profane pleasure.

I concur with Kristeva’s argument that the essential features of love in the western tradition find their focus in Mary; and in so doing the dichotomy of sacred and profane womanhood enter popular culture. As discussed in the section below, I argue that this portrayal of the ‘loved object’ as both desirable but pure (sacred) is eventually disseminated though fairy tales and literature by the use of Mary as a

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\(^{15}\) Courtly love relates directly to fairy tales and I will pursue this connection again later in this chapter.

\(^{16}\) Warner argues that acceptance of adultery by the aristocratic class relates to the convention of arranged marriage which precluded love. As a result, the conventions of courtly love evolved and were expressed in the poetry of the troubadour poet of the twelfth century.
template for the ‘good’ female protagonist or the ideal to which females should aspire. In opposition, the figure of Eve becomes a template for ‘evil’ or profane characters.

### 1.4 Morality, power and consent

It may be argued that the inculcation of a Christian ideology is premised on principles that Hannah Arendt explains in *Speculations on violence* (1969) (in Millet 2016:57). Arendt (in Millet 2016:57) argues that there are two processes through which governments or patriarchies such as the church might seek to maintain power. She explains that power is upheld either through the consent of its subjects or, if a government is losing its authority, force might be employed (Millet 2016:57). In her book *Sexual Politics* (1969) Kate Millet (2016:57) cites Arendt’s principle of consent and explains that the relative status, roles and temperaments of each gender are determined by the patriarchy. Millet argues that the patriarchal system constructs stereotypical expectations along the lines of masculine and feminine sex categories with the intention of maintaining the patriarchal status quo. She explains that temperament implicates the development of personality according to stereotypical categories of sex. Furthermore, she explains that the powerful determine which qualities to ascribe to themselves and to their subordinates. In a patriarchal society, therefore, the male assumes power and ascribes to himself the qualities of reason and intelligence as well as force, aggression and agency. In contrast, the ideal temperament of women is restricted to subordinate qualities such as ignorance, passivity and most importantly for this study, virtue. In terms of ideal sex roles, women are confined to domestic service and childcare, while in the words of Millet (2016:57) “the rest of human achievement, interest and ambition [is assigned] to the male”.

Simone De Beauvoir (2009:95) author of the seminal feminist text, *The second sex* (originally published in 1949), cites the example of Clothilde De Vaux, who was married to the sociologist Auguste Comte. De Beauvoir points out that Comte valued De Vaux for her morality alone, which seems to evoke echoes of the ‘virtuous beloved’ that was valorised in thirteenth century courtly convention. De Vaux was the wife of the sociologist, August Comte, who codifies the patriarchal ordering of society through a hierarchical system in which women are infantilised. Comte argues that as, women lack the intellectual capacity of men, they are only ‘fit’ for the role of wife and mother. He goes on to argue that women are

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17 Kate Millet’s book on sexual politics exposes the subjected position women occupy in literature and art. Her analysis showed how subjection is passed off as following nature.

18 Kate Millet (2016: 57) describes sex roles that refer to roles that are sex specific, while Judith Butler (1990:XXX) questions the binary nature of gender norms that stipulate what types of behaviour might be appropriate based on a person’s actual or perceived sexuality.
“incompetent to govern in the domestic sphere”, which is why the governing role of the family belongs to the father. And yet, Comte purports to idolise his wife for her virtue.

Thus, De Vaux’s morality and her prescribed role as loving minder of the home suggest that the ‘virtuous beloved’ of the thirteenth century is a mere smokescreen (De Beauvoir 2009:95). A similar restriction of role and temperament seems to apply to Mary in Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort’s religious books (Warner 1976:218). The author equates Mary’s virtuous submissiveness to poverty and a domestic role, while Joseph is presented as protector and breadwinner (Warner 1976:218). This image of the virtuous, childlike minder of the home has become so pervasive that it almost seems to have been ‘lifted’ and overlaid onto the Grimm brothers’ portrayal of Snow White. In short, it has become a cultural stereotype that perpetuates what, I argue, are distinctly inappropriate gender roles.

Liesbet van Zoonen (in Meyers 1994:29) describes the interplay of socialisation through stereotypes and ideology which she applies to popular culture, but I would argue that the same process is applicable to the study of fairy tales. She explains that:

In research on stereotypes it is thought that children and adults learn their appropriate gender roles by a process of symbolic reinforcement and correction . . . in research on ideology a process of familiarisation with the dominant ideology is assumed leading finally to its internalisation and transformation into common sense (in Meyers 1999:8).

So, while the stories that I refer to were written in nineteenth century Europe, they are still being read by young children and the female identity that they construct is still relevant. I, therefore, concur with Jack Zipes’ (1987:23) position that socialisation is the intended process in fairy tales, and that such social correction is managed through the application of symbolic stereotypes such as the Virgin Mary or Eve. These templates are applied to fairy tale characters such as the childlike but virtuous female protagonist Snow White or her binary opposite the evil step-mother, the evil older woman who, like Eve, tempts the virtuous Snow White with an apple, leading to her ‘death’. In the case of The Red Shoes, the female protagonist takes on characteristics of both Eve and Mary. She is initially presented as the wilful and wanton Eve-like figure; and later presented as a pious chastened and redeemed figure who reflects many of the virtues of the Virgin Mary. The passage from Eve to Mary is, however, only achieved through the imposition of cruel and visually memorable punishment. Such binary pairings present the child with specific choices and identifications that reward socially correct choices and punish the bad choices in the most graphic manner. In this way, compliance with the dominant patriarchal ideology is obtained through symbolic modelling and reinforcement by beloved fairy tale characters. The Grimm

19 Karen E. Rowe (1987:309) concurs stating that folklorists argue that fairy tales are more than just entertainment and that fairy tales “have always been one of culture’s primary mechanisms for inculcating roles and behaviours”.

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brothers reinforce the binary positioning of the two main protagonists or stereotypes by manipulating the language in their stories. They use carefully constructed, short simple sentences that plainly define the good and bad binary oppositions (Zipes 2005:56). This structure allows the reader to understand right from the beginning that the narrative favours the protagonist who will overcome all odds in the end (Zipes 2005:56).

Karen E. Rowe (1987:309) explains that the socialising task of fairy tales is further accomplished through narrative formulae that elevate and idealise the primary virtues of the heroine such as passivity, dependency and self-sacrifice. These are the same qualities, I would argue, demanded of devotees of the Virgin Mary. The idealistic portrayal of the fairy tale heroine communicates social approval for choices such as marriage and motherhood and a menu of aspirations restricted to a woman’s real sexual functions within the patriarchy,” (Rowe 1987: 310). The good and evil binary is completed by an older aggressively evil female character, often identified as the evil step-mother or a wicked witch who exemplifies qualities that are ascribed to Eve. As Rowe (1987:311) explains, the evil female antagonist is not only set in aggressive opposition to the heroine, but also represents a predatory form of female sexuality. The same sexuality that Catholic patriarchs such as John Chrysostom and others sought by all means to control through interdicts to women that they should emulate the virtue and purity of the Virgin Mary (Warner 1976:52,103, 108, 109). I therefore identify the young virtuous female protagonist as an exemplar of the Mary stereotype and the older predatory female as the Eve stereotype.

Warner (1976:218) describes eighteenth century exhortations to young women to emulate Mary who is characterised as being “obedient respectful, humble, quiet and modest.” In the same passage, Warner states that even Mary’s silence in the gospels was applied as an example for women to follow. That same pattern of silence is perpetuated as a virtue and femininity in fairy tales, according to Warner (1994:433) who cites Ruth Bottigheimer’s analysis of speech patterns of heroines and villains in the Grimm’s fairy tales. She examines the evolution of specific stories such as Snow White from the Grimm’s source material through to the final editing process. To this end, she focuses in particular on the editing process of Wilhelm Grimm. In her findings, Bottigheimer (in Warner 1994:433) describes virtuous female characters that become increasingly silent while villainous characters are increasingly vocal, noting that witches and evil stepmothers are amongst the most articulate. Thus, she concludes that silence is equated with virtue and with femininity. Following the same argument, Warner (1994:433) adds that virtue is associated with the virtue of forbearance.\(^\text{20}\) In the same vein, it should be noted that

\(^{20}\) According to the Cambridge online dictionary Forbearance is a specifically Christian virtue that is equated with patience, the ability to forgive and employ self-control (Cambridge 2018: [sp]).
silent forbearance is a quality prized not only in the Marian tradition but also in the thirteenth century manifestation of courtly love which, as I have already noted, merged with the cult of the Virgin in the thirteenth century.

Romance thus masks the heroine’s inability to act or assert herself enough to solve the difficulties that she invariably faces (Rowe 1987:310). Instead, she bears her suffering at the hands of her evil antagonist in silence. As Rowe (1987:308,311) points out, external rescue in the form of the prince is her only recourse. The rescue that she waits for and dreams about echoes the patient suffering of the virgins of the cult of Mary. Adherents to the cult revelled in suffering on earth in the belief that their earthly suffering would earn them the martyr’s crown in heaven (Warner 1976:103-104; 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; James 1:12; Revelation 2:10) (Thompson 1983:1171, 1235, 1256). The fairy tale heroine, therefore, takes on the role of the martyred saint waiting for her Christ-like bridegroom who, in *Snow White*, raises Snow White from a death-like sleep to enter the state of holy matrimony.

The splitting of the mother is a further mechanism of the socialisation process for the intended young female reader. In keeping with the polarised structure of the Grimm’s fairy tale, Wilhelm Grimm replaced the original violently jealous mother of the seminal *Schneewitten* with Snow White’s homicidal step-mother (Warner 1888:241–242). Grimm (Warner 1888:241–242) reasoned that he could not allow the mother’s purity to be polluted by impurity. So, the mother was split, becoming the inaccessible and virtuous ‘ideal’ contained in a tower, and only viewed through a window, on the one hand; and, on the other hand, “the godless” and tormented step-mother (Grimm Brothers 1857:4). Grimm was therefore able to orchestrate the battle between the pure and the impure wherein evil lost and was graphically punished. The story presents Snow White and the reader with a choice between a mother who mirrors the passive purity of the Virgin Mary, and a mother who echoes the deceptive wiles of Eve. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979) acknowledge the splitting of the mother. In *The Queen’s Looking glass* (1979), they propose that the split might be dealt with by viewing each of the three female characters, the mother, Snow White and the stepmother, as different aspects of the same character. I propose that these examples lay the foundation for the argument that Snow White is dealing with an internal conflict between the sacred, exemplified by her saintly mother, and her own self-destructive profanity. In other words, she must solve the contradiction of trying to live up to an impossible ideal or face death as a result of her natural exploration of her sensuality.

Finally, in *The Red Shoes*, Andersen (1848) presents us with his rebellious young protagonist who is jettisoned from her community so that it might preserve its sense of integrity and identity. The story

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21 As *The Red Shoes* is perhaps not as well-known as Grimm’s *Snow White*, I am including a short precis of the story here.
(Andersen 1848) is about an impoverished orphan Karen who mistakenly imagines that her adoption by a wealthy older woman is resulted from the red shoes she is wearing. Zipes (2005:65) explains that these shoes are identified with Christian transgressions such as “vaniy, sexuality and sin”. To Karen’s dismay, her red shoes were burnt because her foster mother found them repugnant. Instead, they were to be replaced by sensible black shoes for church. At the cobbler’s shop, however, Karen is irresistibly drawn to another pair of red shoes and she tricks her patron, whose eyesight is failing, into buying them for her. The community is scandalised when Karen brazenly flaunts her new red shoes at the next communion service and, after being warned not to wear them again, she later disobeys and wears them to a ball instead of staying at home to care for her ailing guardian. Andersen then demonstrates the alarming consequences of her vanity and insubordination (Zipes 2005:124). The shoes take on a life of their own against which Karen is completely powerless. They force her to dance incessantly on a journey that conveys her symbolically to her death as it passes through the cemetery. She also dances past a church guarded by a forbidding angel with a sword who confirms that she will indeed dance until she dies. Additionally, the angel tells her that her death will be a warning to wicked children. Karen’s only recourse after weeks of dancing is to implore an executioner to cut off her feet and to replace them with wooden feet. She reforms her ways and goes to live with a minister and his wife. She becomes the model of humble and pious womanhood. She listens quietly to the pastor reading the Bible and shuns her past transgression of vanity (Zipes 2005:125). When the family attends church she remains at home praying for God’s help. The angel appears once again, this time to grant her entry to the church and therefore the community. The didactic nature of this story is unambiguous – it is a moral tale against vanity and disobedience promoting the submission of women to a higher (religious and patriarchal) power.

Karen’s banishment is reminiscent of the rejection that Kristeva (1982:1) describes as an integral process of abjection. Thus, I contend that Karen, Andersen’s protagonist, is the “jettisoned object” who is banished to dance to her death in the forest (Kristeva 1982:2). Access to grace through the community church is denied by an angel bearing a fiery sword. The community and the sacred nature of the church are therefore protected from the profane threat that Karen, like Eve, embodied. On the material level, the integrity or wholeness of the virgin’s body mirror the integrity of the boundaries set by the community to maintain its purity. The community therefore protects itself through the act of rejection. Conversely, the adherence of the devilish red shoes to Karen’s feet suggests the consequence of giving in to or actively seeking out the pleasures of the flesh or concupiscence. Ironically, though, it is a different type of harm to Karen’s body that brings her back into the community.

22 Shoes that had been made for an aristocratic client who rejected them
She is only allowed to return to her overtly religious community once her feet, clad in the dancing red shoes, are chopped off. She may only return once her body and her psyche have become utterly wretched or abject.

1.5 Abjection, sin and redemption

Kristeva (1982) describes a characteristic of abjection as:

\[\ldots\text{ an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsion places the one haunted by it literally beside [herself]. (Kristeva 1982:1)}\]

This quote is reminiscent of Warner’s (1976:86) description of the contradictory web that is created by conflating the concepts of sin, death and sex in Christian doctrine. In her description of the consequence of this overlapping, Warner (1976) reasons that if desire is as normal as breathing or sleeping, but is deemed to be sinful, then a Christian must be comparable to someone who is at the mercy of a ruthless usurer. The only relief for a Christian is that they return endlessly to church and the source of grace. Thus, a Christian is first summoned by desire, but is simultaneously repulsed by it because of the fear of falling out of grace with God. Kristeva’s ascription of the same phenomenon to abjection, a summoning on one hand and an absolute repulsion on the other, suggests that there is a correlation between sin and abjection. Kristeva (1982:17) states that abjection takes on a “threatening otherness” when it merges with the concept of Christian sin and the “Christian Word”. This indicates that she is cognisant of the religious nature of the abject. Kristeva’s (1982:65-67) reference to Douglas’ Purity and Danger further cements the notion of the religious origins of her theory.

I understand sin to refer to the doctrine of original sin, as defined by Saint Augustine (Warner 1976:88), which states that all of humanity is born in original sin but cleansed through baptism. Concupiscence, which is a penalty of Adam’s fall, remains an issue on earth despite baptismal cleansing, and redemption in heaven. According to the Church, the only remedy is God’s grace. Owing to Kristeva’s (1982:17) use of the capital ‘W’ in the “Christian Word”, I understand that she is referring to Jesus as the embodiment of the Word and grace as described in John 1:1, 14 NIV (Thompson 1983:1083).

Thus, the “Word” is the embodiment of the grace that humanity requires to deal with concupiscence or

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23 Warner (1976:86–88) explains that Adam and Eve’s rebellion against God’s command in the Garden of Eden is the source of original sin. Christians believe that all of humankind is born with the stain of that rebellion which is only removed through baptism. The problem of desire remains as does the threat of concupiscence, which Christians believe is only relieved through the strength of will and God’s grace.

24 The Apostle John (John 1:1 NIV) (Thompson 1983:1083) establishes that the word existed at the time of creation and was God. In verse 14 of the same chapter, the apostle states that the Word was made “flesh and lived among us . . . the one and only Son who came from the father, full of grace and truth.”
desire. Kristeva (1982:17) goes on to say that the "various forms of purifying the abject – the various catharses – make up the history of religion."

The term abjection is rooted in the Latin *abicere* which means "to throw away" or to "cast off, away or out"; while the theory itself functions on two levels. Rina Arya (2014:13-14) uses the *Oxford English Dictionary* to demonstrate these two levels. In the first instance, abjection is an ‘operation’ that is exemplified by the urge to ‘reject’. For example, on a material level a person would reject or push away rotting food or bodily waste\(^{25}\) because an autonomous gag reflex operates to protect the body from what it perceives to be harmful. In the second instance, Arya (in Hopkins 2014:3) describes the utterly shameful or wretched condition that the subject may experience or be reduced to, and yet in Christian teaching such abasement is ironically acclaimed. An example of this can be found in Elizabeth of Hungary\(^{26}\) who turned the condition of abjection, or “abjection of the self” into a testimonial of godly humility (Kristeva 1982:5).

Both examples cited allude to the paradoxical functioning of abjection. In the first example, abjection functions to protect the identity of the subject or society, for example, the identified sacredness of Eden was ‘protected’ from the pollution of Adam and Eve’s rebellion by their expulsion (Foster cited by Arya 2014:3). In the second example, abjection disrupts the former aggrandised identity of Elizabeth of Hungary as a princess and replaces it with the abasement of a sinner (Kristeva 1982:5). One could also argue that Adam and Eve were both reduced to such shame that they hid first from God and then, on becoming aware of their nakedness, they hid their bodies from God and from one another. To follow the logic of the story of Eden in the moment of their rebellion, their sense of self in relation to their context shifted to such an extent that they realised they had no option but to hide. They therefore abjected themselves as the ‘monstrous other’ before they faced God.

The continuing paradox of the abject is that it is never assimilated and so it hovers perpetually at the margins as a threat to the stability and integrity of the subject and society. Thus, the virgin rejects her body and the shame of its drive to live through its sexual nature. The cultural framework that has shaped her provides her with one of two options. She can identify with the concupiscence of Eve and be expelled from society as a threat, or she can identify with Mary and remain secure within her

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\(^{25}\) Kristeva uses bodily waste such as menstrual blood, urine and faeces as examples of abject materials. Her example relates to Douglas’ example of dirt which goes through a two-phase cycle. In the first phase, waste causes revulsion because it retains a connection to its source. However, once the dirt has been processed it loses its identity and is no longer deemed to be a threat. As a consequence, dirt in the second phase of existence no longer causes revulsion (Kristeva 1982:3; Douglas 2002:197-198).

\(^{26}\) Elizabeth of Hungary (2004:3) as a princess abased herself by renouncing material wealth. She lived in a small cottage and earned a living through spinning. She endured beatings at the behest of her spiritual advisor, and even in her reduced circumstances continued to give to the poor and to serve the sick.
community. Her choice is to reject the teaching of the church and give up the meaning her religion provides, or to stay, which means she must give up selfhood and the body that she can only truly escape through death. In both cases, she moves to “the edge of existence” (Kristeva 1982:2). In the first instance, she becomes abject, a threat to the community that must be physically expelled. In the second instance, she must reject her body to stay. But, before she reaches her ultimate reward of death and eternal life in the company of the Virgin Mary, she must reject herself, her ‘id’ and its drive to live (Eros), honour the death drive (Thanatos) and become a living corpse (Reber 1985:248,768).

Precedent for the abject female body within the framework of religion has its roots, according to Kristeva, in Judaic and Christian teaching. Religious rituals of purification outlined in Leviticus 12 suggest that women are inherently defiled (Kristeva 1982:100). The law stipulates that a woman who has given birth is regarded as unclean “just as she is unclean during her monthly period” (Leviticus 12:2 NIV). To be purified, these women must wait 33 or 66 days after giving birth to either a male or a female child respectively. Only once she has been purified from the bleeding of childbirth may she go to the entrance of the meeting tent with sacrificial animals that will be offered on her behalf by the male priest. She may only come into contact with anything sacred once atonement has been made, again on her behalf (Leviticus 12:7 NIV) (Thompson 1983:111). These laws make it clear that the fertile female body with its secretions of blood and urine emanating from childbirth is considered abject. Under this system, women are subject to laws regarding their bodies which are not theirs to govern. Instead, they are subject to patriarchal control. Kristeva (1982:99) explains that Leviticus 12 has been strategically placed between chapters on dietary taboos and subsequent chapters on the sick body; a placement that I suggest emphasises the status of the female body as abject.

Borders define and protect the outer limits of the body by allowing waste to be expelled and acting as a barrier to harmful intrusion. The same concept is applicable to personal and community identity. Yet, as Kristeva (1982:2) explains, the abject hovers at the margins as a “jettisoned object” that lies outside of the “borders of the set”, no longer agreeing with the rules that would grant it access to that set. The abject no longer belongs, but as Kristeva indicates it continually confronts authority and clamours for re-entry. Judith Butler (2007:181-182) uses the concept of “external” and “internal” to write about the margins or borders of the body. She demonstrates that the operation of these categories can render

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27 One should also bear in mind that Christian writers such as the apostle Paul were steeped in Judaic law. He claimed that he was “a Hebrew of Hebrews, in regard to the law a Pharisee” (Philippians 3:5) (Thompson 1983:1202), which supports my argument that abjection of the feminine body in Judaic law is the basis on which the profane female identity is built, and then perpetuated through Eve and other Biblical women such as Mary Magdalene.

28 Early in Chapter Two I elaborate further on how, and why, women are relegated to the status of a mere body or matter, while men are equated with the mind and reason. I base my explanation on Plato’s mind/body dualism, and Aristotle’s theory of reproduction which he bases on Plato’s Dualism.
something that was integral to identity as ‘other’ through ejection. Iris Young (in Butler 2007:181-182) suggests that repulsion is the next step after expulsion. She explains that repulsion fortifies identities that are determined by cultural hegemony using sexuality, race and sex as modes of differentiation. Butler (2007:182) points out that according to Young “repulsion can consolidate ‘identities’ founded on the institution of the ‘Other’ or a set of ‘Others’ through exclusion and domination.” In other words, the cultural hegemony of the patriarchal Catholic Church fostered categories of the sacred and the profane which can be defined as inside and outside. The church’s teaching on original sin, and the particular burden women carry, serves to exclude them and designate their bodies as ‘abject’ and their being as ‘other’.

1.6 Conclusion

Durkheim (2008) and Douglas (1982) demonstrate that the notion of the sacred and the profane are underpinned by the desire to control. These categories are about creating order in society and relegating anomalies to the category of dirt or the profane. In the context of the Catholic Church, the doctrine of original sin places a particular burden upon Eve and her ‘daughters’ that relegates women to the category of the profane. The patriarchs of the Catholic Church offered instead an idealised (sacred) construction of the Virgin Mary who is purported to provide women with the means of redemption. However, the construct is so idealised that in the words of Kristeva (1985:149)

An actual woman worthy of the feminine ideal embodied in inaccessible perfection by the virgin could not be anything other than a nun or a martyr; if married, she would have to lead a life that would be free from her ‘earthly’ condition by confining her to the uttermost sphere of sublimation, alienated from her own body.

The construct of the Virgin Mary and the fallen Eve are, however, not confined to the sphere of the church; these constructs are prevalent in the secular sphere in the form of cultural stereotypes. These stereotypes appear in children’s fairy tales and perform the function of shaping the temperaments of young girls so that they may fit into the roles available to young women in a patriarchal society. I acknowledge that society has changed significantly since the writing of Snow White and The Red shoes and that stereotypes seem to have shifted somewhat. It is, however, important to note that the notion of the profane female identity prevails. In Chapter Two, I deal specifically with the mind/body split that is alluded to in this chapter. I show how this split is not only inherent in The Red Shoes and Snow White but is relevant to the illustrations for those stories too. I demonstrate through my analysis of Paula Rego’s Snow White swallows the poisoned apple (1995) (Figure 2.12) and Diane Victor’s Eight Marys (2004) (Figure 2.14 & 2.15) that feminist artists seek to mend the mind/body split.
Chapter Two: Illustrating and subverting stereotypes in fairy tales

2.1 Introduction

This chapter comprises three parts. In Part one, I introduce Plato and Aristotle’s mind/body dichotomy to contextualise the polarisation of the good and bad stereotypes that emerged in Chapter One. I then explore the historical development and social functions of fairy tales that led to their use as a didactic tool for the education of young girls. I extend my exploration of the Mary and Eve stereotypes in Part two, through my analysis of illustrations produced for Hans Christian Andersen’s The Red Shoes and the Grimm brothers’ Snow White. These analyses demonstrate that the motif of the expulsion of Adam and Eve informs these illustrations and reinforces the patriarchal notion of profane womanhood. Analysis of the iconic Snow White in her glass coffin also uncovers a visual congruence with the display and veneration of incorruptible Catholic saints. In Part three, I analyse Paula Rego’s Snow White swallows the poisoned apple (1995) (Figure 2.12) and selected panels from Diane Victor’s Eight Marys (2004) (Figures 2.14 & 2.15). I have selected each work on the basis that both artists actively undermine the notion of the feminine ideal by subverting traditional images of Snow White and the Virgin Mary.

2.2 Part One: Historical and social function of fairy tales

In her description of the stereotypical female fairy tale protagonist and her attendant plot structure, Jane M Usher (1997:8) explains that fairy tales prescribe a mandatory transformation of the female protagonist from “base matter” into the feminine ideal. I relate the term “base matter” to the Platonic hierarchy that distinguishes between two related binary sets, mind/body, and matter/form, in which form and reason are elevated above body and matter (Grosz 1994:4). Elizabeth Grosz explains in Volatile bodies (1994) that Plato conceives of the mind as captive of the body. Furthermore, Plato contends that the body should rather be subject to the control of the reasoning mind (Grosz 1994:4). Additionally, Grosz (1994:4) explains that Aristotle’s theory of the reproductive process is based upon the Platonic distinction between form and matter which reinforced patriarchal views of sex roles. In his theory, Aristotle (Grosz 1994) contends that the mother’s passive contribution is formless matter while the father, as active agent, translates base matter into a human form. Thus, one may conclude with Grosz (1994:4) that, passivity, matter and body are associated with the feminine, which is viewed negatively, while masculinity is related to reason and form and is viewed as both positive and active. I draw on Grosz’ observation when I argue that this Aristotelian hierarchy is fundamental to the drive to transform young female characters into an image of femininity sanctioned and controlled by the patriarchal ideal. That same ideal is exemplified by the Mary and Eve stereotypes which are described in detail in
Chapter One. The theme of obligatory metamorphosis from one opposing category to another alludes not only to the opposing categories of the sacred and the profane, but also suggests the stereotypical binaries of Eve and Mary. Both sets of binaries are operational in church dogma, and also function within the ambit of fairy tales. The purpose of these overlapping stereotypes is to socialise women or to bring them into line with the ideal prescribed by the church and the prevailing social order.

To understand the forces of socialisation, one must place each fairy tale within their specific socio-historical context. Jack Zipes (1987)\(^1\) argues in *Don't bet on the prince* that fairy tales cannot be discussed in isolation. He states that:

> It is no longer possible to ignore the connection between the aesthetic components of the fairy tales, whether they are old or new, and their historical function within the socialisation process which forms taste, mores, values and habits (Zipes 1987:23).

Zipes (1987:23) makes it clear that he does not confine the need for contextualisation to the era in which fairy tales were produced. He explains that feminist discourse on fairy tales seeks to dissect the actual psycho-sociological conditions in which fairy tales operate. The intention of such a debate is to alter “our gaze” and therefore to transform our perception not only of the tales themselves, but also with regard to society both past and present (Zipes 1987:23).

As this study focuses on two nineteenth century literary fairy tales, I confine my discussion to the milieu of the Grimm Brothers and Hans Christian Andersen, who respectively wrote *Snow White* (1857) and *The Red Shoes* (1848). Both fairy tales were written by a male author for a young female audience with the intention of providing a ‘script’ of what was acceptable behaviour for young women.\(^2\) The fairy tales that I have identified for this study fall into the tradition of literary\(^3\) fairy tales, which means that while they may have had their origins in folklore, they were substantially altered to promulgate the value system of the rising Christian middle class of nineteenth century Europe. This emerging class emphasised utilitarian principles and Christian virtues such as sexual abstinence and obedience. These virtues bear striking resemblance to those stressed in ecclesiastical publications such as *The Golden Legend*\(^4\) (c.1260) and the *Gesta Romanorum*\(^5\) (13\(^{th}\)/14\(^{th}\) C) which Zipes (2006:56-57) includes in his

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1. *Don’t bet on the prince* is an anthology of feminist fairy tales from North America and England that includes critical feminist essays on traditional fairy tales as well as Zipes’ introduction.
2. It should be noted, however, that fairy tales were not always intended for a juvenile audience. Between the eighteenth and the middle of the nineteenth centuries, fairy tales had been regarded as irrational and pagan by educators and clerics and, therefore, unsuitable for children (Zipes 2005:54).
3. The appellation literary fairy tale refers to the “literary production of tales adapted by bourgeois and aristocratic writers in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries” (Zipes 2002:57).
4. Details pertaining to the *Golden Legend* are located in Footnote 13 of Chapter One.
extensive list of influential sources for literary fairy tales. Both publications were used as primers for children (Zipes 2006:57). Zipes (2006:57) explains that The Golden Legend and the Gesta Romanorum incorporated folklore as well as elements of fairy tale.

As Zipes (2005:54) notes, the folk tales from which these literary tales were developed had been transmitted through a rich oral tradition that can be traced back thousands of years. Specific sourcing and dates are difficult to deduce as many of these tales were never recorded (Warner 1994:20). Folk tales related directly to the lives of the people who told them through ritual and custom to induce awe and the hope of magical transformation. Zipes (2006:21-23) explains that despite the fluidity of culture, important cultural events such as harvests, initiations, marriage, births and death were framed within a "symbolic order" provided by repeated conventions, themes and motifs within the folk tale. In Chapter One, I referred to Durkheim’s (2008:39) description of the danger of contact between the sacred and the profane and its application to initiation rites. I was able to establish that ritual is concerned with transformation and the safe transition of the participant from childhood to adulthood. It, therefore, stands to reason that the clear conventions of folk tales would afford the ritual's participant with a well mapped route for the perilous crossing. Zipes (2006:23), however, is careful to note that such maps are fraught with hegemonic interests.  

Zipes (2006:52) argues that because oral wonder tales relied on “memory, repetition and resolution”, different groups of people overlaid their particular experiences and aspirations onto specific characters and plots. The central premise of these tales was the protagonist’s survival and ultimate triumph under trying conditions, while the means of deliverance is often magical (Warner 2014:15-16). In the Middle Ages, magic was treated as real and literature that chronicled supernatural occurrences proliferated (Zipes 2006:54). The church, however, sought to suppress secular tales of magic as it consolidated its power throughout Europe. As a result, wonder tales were deemed to be “sacriligious, heretical, dangerous and untruthful” by the church (Zipes 2006:54). Ironically, at the same time, the church worked to codify magic through its own miraculous tales (Zipes 2006:54). Furthermore, Zipes (2006:54) states that religion “feminized” wonder tales and fairy tales because the male guardians of canonical literature viewed them as trivial. The church viewed women as the originators of these stories which added to the dubious status of the tales they told (Zipes 2006:54). There is, however, according to

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5 According to Alastair Bennet (2017:1) the Gesta Romanorum was a collection of allegorised anecdotes about the "deeds of Roman emperors or events that took place during their reign”. It was probably assembled in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century with the purpose of providing priests with anecdotal material for use in sermons (Knight 2012).

6 The relationship between folk tales and literary tales is the subject of dispute. Some authors argue that a direct link exists between the two, while others treat the two as entirely separate traditions (Zipes 2006:49 -51).

7 I unpack some of these concerns later in this chapter.

8 Marina Warner (2014:15) explains that wonder tale is another term for fairy tale which originates from the German wundermärchen. The term acknowledges that magic permeates these stories and is, therefore, a more apt term.
Zipes (2006), no proof that women are the primary source of these tales. Instead, he states that both male and female storytellers contributed to the oral tradition.

Literary fairy tales, which are the focus of this study, differ from the oral tradition, as they were originally written by highly literate authors to entertain an aristocratic audience. The Italians Straparola and Basile, as well as French authors such as Perrault and Mmes De Aulnoy and de Murat, all wrote subversive fairy tales. Their fairy tales dealt with real issues such as sex, power and the plight of women in a patriarchal society, and these were raised under the guise of improbable tales of transformation (Zipes 2006:58-65; Warner 2014:54). It was only in the nineteenth century that the Grimm brothers and Hans Christian Andersen began to write for children. Wilhelm Grimm was a devout Christian and, once he had made substantial changes to the moral content of stories in the published collections of his books, the same voices that decried fairy tales began to promote them as suitable for the education of children. A strong counter campaign was, therefore, mounted at the beginning of the nineteenth century when the Grimm Brothers made fairy tales respectable. The first translated volumes were published in England and America in the 1820s.

Andersen’s fairy tales were also among the first to be regarded as “suitable and proper enough for . . . nurseries and households of respectable nineteenth century middle class families” (Zipes 2005:55-54). Zipes (2005:92) explains that Andersen adapted folk tales specifically to suit the strong religious moralism of his bourgeois audience, and these perpetuated essentialist notions of the proper place for women while at the same time applauding the virtue of the devoutly Christian protagonist. Thus,

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9 These literary fairy tales were told within a courtly setting and observed many of the courtly conventions which can be identified, for example, in the framing plot of La piacevoli notti by Straparola (Zipes 2006:59,63). The rules for an entertaining evening stipulate a dance first, which is followed by a sequence of stories separated by song and riddles set in verse (Zipes 2006:59). The stories of both Straparola and Basile were critical of political intrigue and corruption and eschewed the didactic piety that characterised the nineteenth century fairy tales of the Grimm brothers (Zipes 2006:58,63-64). Like the Italians, the French authors used their stories to critique socio-political conditions such as the impact of Louis XIV’s devastating wars that resulted in famine and social discontent (Zipes 2006:68). These stories combined courtly conventions of the French salon with “folk idiom” (Zipes 2006:68).

10 While women do occupy space as authors in the recorded history of literary fairy tales, Zipes makes the point that the field is almost exclusively the preserve of educated male writers (2006:53). Women such as Mme De Aulnoy, Mlle. Lhéritier and Mme de Murat occupied privileged positions in society which allowed them access to education, a privilege not usually accorded to women in the lower estates. Evidence of their privilege is borne out by the fact that their fairy tales were commentaries on culture and life at the French court in Versailles and in Paris (Zipes 2006:65).

11 Marina Warner (1994:42) notes that many of the “most inspiring and prolific sources” of the Grimm’s fairy tales were sisters or wives of close relations and friends. The stories had been related to the women by nurses and governesses. For example, Dorothea Wild, sister of Wilhelm’s wife, Dortchen, provided thirty-six stories (Warner 1994:42-43). I describe how Wilhelm Grimm altered the original trajectory of Schneewittchen. In the first edition published in 1812, Snow White’s mother suffered from “murderous jealousy” which led to her persecution of her daughter. The mother was, however, replaced by the step-mother in the 1819 edition because Wilhelm Grimm could not allow a mother to persecute her daughter (Warner 1988:241–242).
Andersen’s fairy tales follow a moral trajectory that enlists highly idealised stereotypes that act as imperatives toward proper moral behaviour (Zipes 2005:12). Threads of Christian essentialism can be clearly identified in specific areas of stories such as The Red Shoes (as demonstrated above in the summary of the story on Page 19).

2.3 Part Two: Illustrating fairy tales

2.3.1 Illustrating Snow White and The Red Shoes

Similar threads of Christian piety and essentialist notions of womanhood are identifiable in the illustrations that accompany the published stories. This strain of piety is expressed in the form of didactic stereotypes that clearly allude to religious motifs. In my analyses, I demonstrate that reference to historical religious motifs strengthens the coercive force of the patriarchal agenda. In making these connections, I argue that the fairy tale illustrations in question perpetuate the binary stereotypes of Mary and Eve. Thus, the impossible standard of perfection embodied by the sacred Virgin Mary and Eve’s opposing base-ness are clearly illustrated in a pictorial language that children can understand. To demonstrate my argument, I refer to selected illustrations for The Red Shoes and Snow White posted on SurLalunefairytales.com.

2.3.2 Karen as the jettisoned object

The clearest example of religious allusion is found in Figures 2.1 and 2.3. In each image, the protagonist of The Red Shoes, Karen, dances past an angel who is understood through its original placement within the text to be guarding a church door (Andersen 1845:4). Vilhelm Pedersen’s (Haney 2007:2) illustration precedes the twenty-first paragraph, which begins as follows:

She danced out into the open churchyard; but the dead there did not dance. They had something better to do than that. She wanted to sit down on the pauper’s grave where the bitter fern grows; but for her there was neither peace nor rest. And as she danced past the open church door she saw an angel there in long white robes, with wings reaching from his shoulders down to the earth; his face was stern and grave, and in his hand he held a broad shining sword. (Andersen 1845)

Karen has, at this point in the story, put on the red shoes and dressed for the ball instead of looking after her guardian. The consequences of her action are clearly spelled out in image and text. The shoes

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13 Zipes (2005:12) argues that Andersen’s fairy tales appear to be projections of an internal struggle to quash his own sexual impulses; a struggle for purity that coincided with the moral strictures of the rising middle class in Denmark. His fairy tales were consequently often overtly religious, didactic and punitive, as is the case in The Red Shoes.

14 This particular motif seems to recur as an illustration in many publications. I have included two examples to illustrate the point.

15 The sacred space referred to in Figures 2.1 and 2.3 is a church which is not directly illustrated in either image. The viewer infers its presence behind the angel because the church is described in the story, and the illustration is integral to the story of The Red Shoes.
have assumed control of Karen's feet and she is powerless to prevent them from dancing her to her death. The author's description of Karen's path through the cemetery provides a graphic warning to the impressionable young reader. That warning is reinforced by Figures 2.1 and 2.3 which depict Karen dancing past an angel in her party dress and the red shoes. As Zipes (2005:65,124) suggests, she has lost control. She is subject to the influence of shoes that signify the fleshly transgressions “vanity, sexuality and sin” (Zipes 2005:65).

The presence of angels in each image alludes to a biblical theme, while the balance of the composition specifies the theme as the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden. A simple visual comparison between Figure 2.4, Massaccio's *Expulsion from Eden* (1425) and Figures 2.1 and 2.3 clarify the relationship. Each image employs the sword-bearing angel as a motif, which refers to the angel that forbade Adam and Eve re-entry into the sacred space, Eden. A similar theme is explored in Figure 2.5, which illustrates the same Bible story. It is an image that is similar to the artwork published in the children's Bible I shared with my brother as a child. It was, for me, one of the most memorable pictures from that Bible, and one of the easiest to identify with its given story. Again, the sacred is identified as Eden. Any story that made use of similar elements, such as the wrathful angel and the banished figures of Adam and Eve, would readily be associated with the consequences of rebellion against God.

Each image includes the wayward female figure in the role of the profane transgressor. Massaccio's wailing Eve hides the shame of her transgressive nakedness. In contrast, the images intended for children depict both Eve and Karen, the protagonist of *The Red Shoes*, as clothed. However, their role as transgressor does not change because their bodies are covered. Each girl child or woman is rebuked and turned away by the angel’s pointing finger or warning sword. As Karen assumes the role of Eve through her visually oppositional relationship to the angel, it follows that she also embodies the qualities of the profane. The portrayal of Karen in Figure 2.1 as a floating figure repulsed by the force of the angel’s interdict also supports the notion of the female protagonist, in Kristeva’s (1982:2) terms, as a “jettisoned object”. As I mention in Chapter One, Julia Kristeva (1982:2) uses this term to characterise an aspect of the abject. The angel’s pointing finger acts not only as a warning not to enter the church, but it also actively repels her (jettisons her) from the church. The diagonal placement of Karen on the left of the image is indicative of the force of the angel’s gesture.

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16 I have included the stock photo in Figure 2.5 to demonstrate the prevalence of the image of the Expulsion from Eden in Christian popular culture. It is reminiscent of an illustration in the children’s Bible that we had in our home. This image was also one of the first and most powerful images we encountered when paging through the Bible.

17 I deal with the issue of the portrayal of the female nude later in this chapter when I discuss the work of Diane Victor.
In an illustration for *The Red Shoes* taken from the 1889 edition of *Hans Christian Andersen: Stories for the household* (Figure 2.3), A.W Bayes has used scale to emphasise the angel’s banishing power. This is achieved by rendering Karen as half the size of the angel and smaller than the sword that forms a barrier between them. Karen’s inferior status as a female and the embodiment of the profane is further emphasised by the stone step that elevates the angel as an exemplar of the sacred realm. The visual (and textual) link in these illustrations to Massaccio’s (and other artist’s) *Expulsion from Eden* imagery, establishes the gravity of the message that both the writer and the illustrator wish to convey. As has already been established in Chapter One, the expulsion from Eden opened the door to sin and death. We are reminded that Eve bears particular and historical blame for the fall. Thus, the establishment of the relationship between Eve and Karen is a clear warning to young female readers: rebellion, identified by the selfish focus on vanity and pleasure, will result in expulsion from the community.

Interestingly, even though angels are understood to be genderless, the angels shown in the selected illustrations have distinctly male characteristics. This further perpetuates the view that wayward females must be managed by men. The classical male musculature and toga of the angel in Figure 2.1 is reminiscent of classical portrayals of men. Thus, we are presented in Figure 1 with the firmly grounded angel who is reminiscent of Greek and Roman sculptures and the ungrounded, dancing and active female figure. The stability of the angel, coupled with the toga seems to allude to the male faculty of reason, which is contrasted with the loss of control of the rebellious and, therefore, base female. She has lost control because she did not submit to patriarchally instigated social rules. In essence, her inability to control her body has set her in opposition to the theoretical stability of the patriarchal order embodied by the toga-clad angel. She quite literally, hovers at the margins to which she is jettisoned by the force of the angel’s gesture, and consigned to the realm of the abject.

### 2.3.3 Karen in a state of abject humility

For Karen to make her way back from the periphery and classification as abject, she must *become* abject in herself. She must find a way of cutting the shoes off her feet; failing that she must be willing to sacrifice her feet so that she might live. Andersen does not allow Karen to cut her feet off though. She must petition a male executioner and she is required to repent before the executioner relieves her of the afflicting shoes. The images that follow portray Karen after her feet have been removed. In these images, Karen is shown as striving toward the Christian ideal of godly womanhood.

In Figure 2.7, text embedded in Katharine Cameron’s illustration, which reads “Alone she read from the good book”, indicates that this picture indeed relates to the part of the story after Karen’s feet have

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18 Chapter one established that the patriarchy viewed the active female as dangerous.
been chopped off. The violent act of severing Karen’s feet from her body purportedly saves her from death as a consequence of her rebellious vanity. Karen resolved to go to church after her feet were removed but she was too afraid to enter. She was, however, taken into service as a maid by the parson’s wife. Cameron’s illustration depicts Karen seated at prayer in her room at the parsonage because she is still too afraid to go to church.

On the following Sunday they all went to church . . . she went alone into her little room . . . Here she sat down with her hymn-book, and as she was reading it with a pious mind, the wind carried the notes of the organ over to her from the church, and in tears she lifted up her face and said: “O God! help me!” (Andersen 1845:5).

In this illustration, Karen is seated for the first time and this reinforces the stillness of this portion of the story. Karen’s immobility is notable when set against the constant motion induced by the shoes and her rebellion. I suggest that Andersen uses the relief that this contrast provides to infer that stillness or passivity is a reward in itself. Furthermore, he portrays this lack of motion as the means by which the penitent Karen is to be transformed to comply with the Christian ideal of womanhood. Karen’s appearance in Figure 2.7 is significantly different to Cameron’s earlier depiction of Karen in Figure 2.6. In the earlier illustration Karen is clothed in a child’s white party dress and surrounded by goblin-like creatures which allude to the magical nature of Karen’s affliction. As has already been established, magic is not sanctioned by the church. In contrast, in Figure 2.7, Karen is soberly dressed in a practical, dark dress which is protected by an apron. Bearing in mind the Christian essentialism of the rising Danish middle class, as well as Andersen’s own religious zeal, I argue that Karen’s sober style of dress conveys the puritanical nature of Andersen’s vision. Thus, the apron and dark cloth reinforce not only the rejection of the vanity of pretty clothing and shoes but also an acceptance of the domesticated ideal exemplified by the apron.

While I acknowledge that Karen’s style of dress clearly conveys a protestant aesthetic, and that Andersen writes for a protestant audience, I argue that the patriarchal suppression of women remains. It should also be noted that the Marian ideal is still present in the form of the mother and child tondo in the top left register of Cameron’s illustration (Figure 2.7). I therefore argue that while Karen conveys a puritanical sense of soberness, her upward gaze toward the tondo can be interpreted as an aspiration toward the Marian ideal. Interestingly, the tondo seems to be reminiscent in pose and format of Michelangelo’s *Pitti Tondo* (1503–1504) (Figure 2.8), which depicts Mary and her infant son, Jesus, leaning toward one another. As the image is placed high above Karen’s head, the implication seems to

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19 In Appendix A, I have embedded illustrations in the text of The Red Shoes, where I have been able to. The intention is to give an indication of what the visual relationship of the text and the image might have been.
be that she must reach upward toward the sacred realm of the Christian heaven, which is popularly believed to be located ‘on high’. The story itself does not specifically state that Karen must aspire to be like the Virgin Mary. It does, however, describe her transformative experience when she stays in her room to pray and read her hymn book rather than go to church. In the story, the angel appears and transports her back into the congregation. The scene culminates with a description of Karen’s soul flying on “sunbeams to heaven” (Andersen 1845). Such an image, I suggest, evokes catholic depictions of the assumption of the Virgin Mary into heaven. For example, in Titian’s Assumption of the Virgin (1516-18) in Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari (Figure 2.9), the Virgin Mary is haloed in light as she is raised up towards God.

Curiously, even though this story emphasises shoes and feet, this image does not include Karen’s feet, nor does it make any reference to her having had her feet cut off. I argue that this omission is significant especially when one reflects that other elements of this image are intended to encourage the young viewer to aspire to the patriarchal ideal of Mary. To this end, the strategy of both author and illustrator shifts from warning and punishment, to enticement and reward. I suggest therefore that the long skirt covering Karen’s legs serves the purpose of signifying Karen’s newfound status as a woman, which is perhaps regarded by the author as reward in and of itself. Karen has successfully navigated the treacherous crossing from childhood to adolescence. Cameron’s illustrations, Figures 2.6 and 2.7 chart Karen’s transformation from a recalcitrant and profane adolescent to the pious duty of adulthood quite simply through the use of costume. I argue that the intention to present an enticing reward would be undermined by any suggestion of the abject in the form of crutches or wooden feet. Instead, the message is that Karen is forgiven and about to be transformed from the base matter of adolescent girlhood into a woman who has transcended the sins of her flesh. As a transformed woman, Karen is rewarded further when she is ushered back into the community. She transitions away from the profane margins back into the sacred confines of the church and the community. However, to achieve this repositioning, Karen had to sacrifice or abject an aspect of herself.

2.3.4 Mary and Eve in Snow White

Corresponding themes of purity and abjection are encapsulated within the ubiquitous image of Snow White in her glass coffin. This image elucidates the presence and functioning of the Mary and Eve stereotypes. It is important in this context to remember that the story of Snow White essentially concerns a young girl navigating the transition from the innocence of childhood to the knowledge of womanhood (Rowe 1986:319). In the story of Snow White, as in other fairy tales, the problematic

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20 I relate adolescence and the re-awakening of the libido and the body to the profane; while the piety of adulthood suggests the sacred.
nature of adolescence is glossed over through the use of death as its metaphor (Rowe 1986:319). Drawing on Rowe’s example, I argue that the rebellion of adolescence is neatly contained within the glass walls of Snow White’s coffin. My analysis of the Snow White story and its allusions to Eden in Chapter One underpin my analysis and comparison of Figures 2.10 and 2.11.

Snow White, in Figure 2.10, is viewed through the glass of her coffin. We observe the length of her body which is modestly covered from neck to ankle by a pure white robe. A garland of flowers crowns her dark hair while a posy of flowers is clasped in one of her hands that are crossed at her waist. The coffin itself bears four floral wreaths and a crown surrounded by foliage. A dwarf leans on a tall axe at the foot of the coffin. All of these elements are presented on a rocky surface that evokes a sense of the mountain on which Snow White’s coffin is displayed. The image itself is black and white and the use of line to suggest tone and texture suggests that it is a woodcut. Interestingly, this image is strikingly similar to the image of Saint Theresa Margaret in Figure 2.11 who is also laid out in a glass coffin. The difference is that her corpse is real. Saint Theresa Margaret’s white robe is a nun’s habit and the garland on her head crowns her nun’s veil instead of the dark hair in Figure 2.10. Thus, we can conclude that traditional illustrations such as this one seem to draw from iconography that is remarkably similar to images of incorruptible saints.21 Such an overlap would, I argue, reinforce the argument that the Marian ideal underpins illustrations of Snow White in her glass coffin.

As indicated in Chapter One, each figure is dressed in white for her suitor, and the posy identifies each woman as a bride, albeit a bride who is deceased. The difference lies only in that the saint’s hair is covered, in accordance with the Apostle Paul’s instruction, by a veil;22 which is mirrored by the dark shape of Snow White’s long hair. The crowning garland evokes for the nun her consecration ceremony during which the garland is placed on her head, along with the words, “Receive this sign of Christ on your head that you may be his wife” (Warner 1976:160). Margaret Theresa is the virginal bride of Christ while Snow White awaits her bridegroom in a virginal sleep. The glass coffin is, however, a reminder that these two images represent corpses. The question arises as to how these images of dead women could possibly be held up as an ideal to which women should aspire? How is the abjection of these corpses circumvented?

Kristeva observes in Powers of Horror (1982:4) that “[t]he corpse seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost abjection.” She goes on to explain that such a corpse, outside of its proper

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21 The concept of an incorruptible saint was introduced in Chapter One.
22 In 1 Corinthians 11: 6 – 7 (Thompson 1983:1173), the apostle Paul tells women that they should not cut their hair and that they should always cover their hair with a veil: “If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head. A man ought not to cover his head since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man.”
sphere, is “death infecting life”. Figures 2.10 and 2.11 have nothing to do with science, but as I have already shown, they do fall within the ambit of the sacred. Incorruptible saints are displayed within the walls of a church and glass provides a safe barrier between the realms of the living and the dead. Thus, the danger of life being infected by death is avoided. It stands to reason that the image of Snow White in her coffin might draw on the sacred iconography of the incorruptible saint. This would immediately suggest an element of holiness, despite the fact that Snow White is a secular fairy tale. Thus, the sacred and the secular merge and so the Marian ideal, represented by the saint, is mirrored by the virginal fairy tale heroine, Snow White. Both women are held in a submissive and silent ‘death’, a perfect way to control the contentious and vocal conflicts of female adolescence.

Carina Hart (2012:204) describes the use of glass in fairy tales in general, and specifically in Snow White, as metaphorical. She explains that in its substance it is paradoxical. On the one hand, it allows, the viewer to behold what it protects through its transparency; while on the other, it forms an impenetrable barrier. Glass acts not only as a barrier against the infection of death, but it transforms the corpses of Snow White, and the incorruptible saint into artworks through the conceit of display (Hart 2012:208). In this way, the threat is removed one degree further away. Hart describes how Snow White becomes the virtuous but unattainable beauty whose glassy isolation renders her cold and inhuman. Hart (2012:209) explains that she views the glass coffin as the means by which such an abstract, unattainable beauty “might be pursued with religious fervour” or indeed, “contemplated at a safe distance.” I draw on Hart’s notion of display and contemplation to argue that the dwarves act on behalf of the patriarchal imperative to carefully prepare Snow White’s body for display. She is contained and under control. The disobedience that led to her death is curtailed, and she is piously silent.

2.4 Part Three: Shifting paradigms: reimagining the model

In the introduction to The Power of Feminist Art (1994) Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (1994:12) explain the significance of women’s experience as a visual strategy that exposes the hegemony of the male experience in aesthetic discourse:

[F]eminism [has] created a new theoretical position and a new aesthetic category – the position of the female experience. In so doing, it [has] reduced what had previously been considered universal in art to its actual essence: the position of male experience. (Broude & Garrard 1994:12)

As a case in point, my earlier analyses of the Mary and Eve stereotypes and their manifestation in fairy tale illustrations reveals the (masculine) intention to control and shape young women. The promise of a

23 I extend Hart’s metaphor to include the incorruptible saint on the strength of my earlier argument that connects Snow White and the incorruptible saint both visually and symbolically.
reward on one hand and the threat of expulsion and death on the other achieve this by encouraging conformity to the self-annihilating Mary stereotype. Contemporary female artists, such as Paula Rego and Diane Victor, however, refuse to give credence to patriarchal notions of sacred and profane womanhood as separate categories. Instead, they insert the lived experience of women into reconstructed narratives that parody the Mary and Eve stereotypes. To this end, they employ real models for their protagonists. Rego (McEwen 2008:40) makes use of her long time model Lila while Victor (von Veh 2011:91) uses herself as source for her Marys. I, therefore, concur with von Veh (2011:9) who argues that by layering in the lived experience of real women, Rego and Victor “[raise] awareness of prejudices promoted by current power structures.” In this section, I also demonstrate that each artist uses the theory of abjection to disrupt and challenge the operation of Mary and Eve stereotypes as mechanisms of control. Furthermore, I describe how these stereotypes are employed and subverted by analysing Rego’s *Snow White swallows the poisoned apple* (Figure 2.12) and selected panels from Victor’s *Eight Marys* (Figure 2.14 & 2.15). In so doing, I establish that the insertion of real women into the traditional visual and cultural narratives of Snow White and the Virgin Mary provokes a reassessment of the past and advocates for a reconstructed present/future.

### 2.4.1 Strategies for change in action: *Snow White swallows the poisoned apple*

Rego quite literally turns convention on its head and challenges patriarchal stereotypes in *Snow White swallows the poisoned apple* (1995) (Figure 2.12). To this end, Marcia Pointon (1996:112) explains that Rego has reconstructed the Snow White story. She portrays Snow White lying diagonally across the format with her head in the lower left register while her feet occupy the top right. Rego’s dynamic composition disrupts the viewer’s expectation of the static horizontals of the original schema which I described earlier in this chapter. Instead of being neatly composed, this Snow White is fully embodied and seems to be in danger of falling beyond the picture plane into our space, in a manner that evokes the dynamism of Baroque compositional devices. Her closeness to the viewer is unlike the remote portrayals of the unattainable ideal in Grimm’s image of Snow White. I would argue that the border of the picture is activated because Snow White’s head is in such an unexpected position at the bottom left hand corner of the format. The fact that she has obviously fallen off the couch in a heap of dishevelled

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24 In *Snow White and her step-mother* (1995)(Figure 2.13), which is also part of this series of paintings, Rego portrays a real rite of passage in the lives of actual women which is the onset of menstruation. She, thus, provides a second example of how the artist has reconfigured the traditional fairy tale to accommodate the real experience of a young woman.

25 The dramatic diagonals of Baroque composition disrupt static Renaissance framing by providing movement and suggesting involvement with the space beyond the pictorial or sculptural frame. For example, in Carravaggio’s *Conversion of St Paul* (1601), the saint lies diagonally on his back with his head in the lower right register and his feet in the upper portion of the lower left register. His right foot, left arm and head all encroach on the picture’s boundary which draws the viewer into a more direct relationship with the subject. In a more dramatic example, Bernini’s *David* (1623), the twisting pose suggests that the action continues beyond the sculpture to the target of the stone he is about to launch (de la Croix & Tansey 1970:560).
(or disordered) bedding puts that border under threat and brings abjection into play. Instead of being contained in the traditional glass coffin, Rego’s Snow White is presented as a disordered corpse that is “out of place” (Douglas 2002:44). Rego’s dead Snow White is made abject because she has not been contextualised by religious iconography or scientific paraphernalia (Kristeva 1985:4).

Rego’s Snow White occupies a body that is strong and evocative of an active character rather than the passive virginal delicacy of Disney’s Snow White or the Mary stereotype. Instead, she is, according to Pointon (1996:115), evocative of a “fallen angel in a biblical scene or Eve with the apple this time stuck in her throat.” Pointon’s reference to Eve relates on one hand to the upside down or fallen pose, and on the other to Snow White’s attempt to preserve her modesty by holding her skirt down as she falls. Her modest gesture ironically, draws attention not only to the area that she endeavours to hide, but also to the implied gaze of the viewer. In this way, Rego’s Snow White is sexualised. She loses her innocence and, in becoming aware of her nakedness, she moves out of the Mary stereotype and references Eve instead. Thus, in feminist terms, Rego has reclaimed the profane as an integral part of womanhood and in so doing undermined expectations of feminine spirituality. Instead, she highlights Kristeva’s (1985:149) argument that only a “nun or a martyr” might hope to live up to the state of perfect purity exemplified by the Virgin Mary.

2.4.2 Strategies for change in action: Eight Marys panel four

In a similar vein to Rego’s inversion of Snow White, Victor employs an upside down composition in panel four of her Eight Marys (2004) (Figure 2.14). In this charcoal drawing, Victor deliberately inverts the viewer’s expectation of a traditional portrayal of Mary which dictates that she should stand or be seated upright, and that she should also be depicted as a submissive virgin who is completely contained by her enfolding robes. Victor’s Mary, however, is utterly naked and therefore uncontained. She is depicted upside down on a ‘naked’ mattress with a pillow beneath her head. Her feet thrust against the upper frame/boundary of the image in the top right register. At the same time, her body twists at the hips and waist allowing her to push her right arm and breast against the left hand boundary of the stone frame and her right hand explores the space between her legs. This pose suggests that she is engaged in an autoerotic act which inevitably challenges the notion that female sexuality should only be activated by men (De Beauvouir 2009:248). The emphasis is therefore placed on her freedom from patriarchal control rather than submission.

von Veh (2011:96) points out that the inverted pose relates to “the overturning of everything held dear in traditionally male representations of women, where aesthetic controls of the body, sexuality, taste and value were considered male prerogatives.” Thus, Mary/Victor gazes boldly out at the viewer in
contravention of art historical precedent that dictates that the female nude looks modestly away from the viewer. The bold gaze and the placement of her hand are, according to von Veh (2011:96), a deliberate reference to Titian’s Venus of Urbino (c. 1534) (Figure 2.16). The precedent for Titian’s image is Giorgione’s Sleeping Venus (c.1510) (Figure 2.17) in which the gaze of the model is veiled through the motif of sleep while her relaxed hand covers the pubic area. In contrast, von Veh (2011:96) describes Titian’s Venus as highly sexual due, firstly, to her seductive gaze and, secondly, because the hand that is meant to deflect attention actually focuses the viewer’s gaze on the concealed area. She also suggests that the hand may not be so innocent, by quoting Daniel Arasse (1997:102) who explains that the hand that is relaxed in the Sleeping Venus appears active in the Venus of Urbino. Rona Goffen (1997:77) states that Titian’s Venus “does not merely conceal, she caresses herself”. Goffen (1997:77) supports her argument by referring to the “contraction” of the Venus’ fingers which, she argues, renders the hand active rather than passive. I argue that Victor blatantly depicts her Mary in the midst of an autoerotic act to challenge the coy allusion to masturbation in Titian. Victor makes the erotic content clear and in so doing, she also addresses a “relationship of desire, visual representation and the nude” (Nead 1992:56).

Victor’s decision to make these drawings specifically for the exhibition entitled Personal affects: Power and poetics in contemporary South African art (2004), held at the Cathedral of St John the Divine in New York, speaks to her intention to challenge the rigidity of church law. The specific placement of these works, in stone niches three meters above ground, in the ambulatory behind the main altar situates them on the margins, outside and behind the main church. They literally hover at the margins of the sacred and challenge the boundaries that define sacred and profane womanhood.

2.4.3 Strategies for change: iconoclasm, abjection and parody

I argue that the works discussed above are inherently iconoclastic because they question and challenge socially constructed categories of sacred and profane womanhood embodied by the Mary and Eve stereotypes. Dario Gamboni (1997:257) defines iconoclasm as the confrontation and questioning of the legitimacy of beliefs or institutions that are traditionally viewed as sacred. Artists such as Rego and Victor confront and question these ecclesiastical categories by highlighting how

26 Interestingly, art history allows the almost nude male subject, the crucified Saint Peter by Michelangelo, to challenge the boundary of the picture plane and gaze directly at the viewer. I would suggest that this uneven treatment of the male and female nude relates to the underlying patriarchal premise that womanhood is profane, and must be controlled.
27 Both elements, closed eyes and concealing hand, are employed to convey a sense of modesty. This sense of modesty is belied by the open and confident display of the body.
28 In her argument, Goffen also refers to Gorgine’s Sleeping Venus. Goffen acknowledges that, as Giorgione’s Venus is asleep, the active nature of the hand might be doubtful, as any motion in sleep could be construed as unconscious.
29 I am indebted to von Veh’s (2011:9) discussion of Gamboni’s writings in her PHD thesis entitled Transgressive Christian iconography in Post-Apartheid South African art.
impossible and destructive it is for a real woman to occupy such narrow categories. Instead, they replace the ‘icons’ that represent these narrow stereotypes in an effort to:

[R]edefine ‘woman’ out of women’s experience [by] reintegrating parts of the social and natural whole that is human . . . and that have been dualistically torn apart by the masculine mind/body split – the patriarchal strategy that has literally conquered by dividing (Broude & Garrard 1992:5).

Both artists make use of the theory of abjection to undermine the operation of the mind/body binary in the Mary and Eve stereotypes. Rego transgresses the heterogeneous boundaries that insist on the radical separation of the sacred, feminine Mary from the profane, base Eve. Instead she presents the viewer with a Snow White who fits neither category. Her status is ambiguous. On one hand, she is fully embodied and therefore affiliated to Eve who is associated with the body as well as with forbidden fruit that causes death when ingested. On the other hand, she is dressed as Snow White who is associated with the Virgin Mary.

The entire *Eight Marys* series (Figures 2.14 & 2.15) undermines the idea that Mary’s identity is fixed. Victor achieves this by presenting the viewer with eight Marys at eight visibly different stages in her developmental journey. In so doing, Victor draws on Kristeva’s (Nead 1992:55) theory that identity is never fixed but is always provisional. The rationale for this argument is that Kristeva (cited in Nead 1992:55) states that the process of abjection is ongoing, and that the subject abjicts the “corporeal functioning” of the body to attain a “clean and proper self”. The abjection of “corporeal functioning” involves the rejection of what is socially defined, or in this case, ecclesiastically deemed to be filthy or anti-social. By drawing Mary as an ever-changing, profane woman and giving her the trappings of sanctity (the title Mary and placing them in a church) Victor draws attention to the fact that real womanhood is complex and messy.

I would also argue that she is a composite of many of the qualities that have been split according to the patriarchal mind/body binary. That is to say that each of the eight Marys constitutes an aspect of an identity that encompasses categories that were formerly designated as child (panels 1 and 2 in Figure 2.14), mother (panels 3 and 5 in Figures 2.14 & 2.15) and old woman/witch/step-mother (panel 8 in (Figure 2.15) in fairy tales such as Snow White. As I have already shown, these categories allow for the separation of the innocence of childhood and the domestic submission of motherhood from the knowledge and life experience of older women. Victor has, in effect, depicted her Marys as they

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30 I elaborate on this ambiguity in my practical work by referring to Bernini’s *Ecstasy of Saint Theresa* (1647-52) (Figure 3.16) which places her squarely on the boundary between the sacred and the profane.
traverse these stages, but she has woven the quality of active reason into each character which belies the notion that their identity is restricted to the body.

Each work is layered and ironically subversive. Both include qualities of parody. Linda Hutcheon (1985:6,32) describes parody as a form of imitation that is characterised by “critical distance”. She explains that in contemporary art forms, parodic imitation is often identified by difference rather than by sameness. For example, in Diane Victor’s *Eight Marys*, the parody lies in the fact that her Marys are identifiable as the Virgin Mary, but they are, however, anything but virginal. Victor’s intent, however, is not simply to play a shallow visual game. Her intent is political. Her aim is to challenge the patriarchal and ecclesiastical systems that are historically encoded in the visual representation of the Virgin Mary. Accordingly, Hutcheon (1988:22) asserts that parody is a significant element of contemporary art as it has the potential to confront the problematic relationship between the “aesthetic world of significance” and “socially defined meaning systems” in both historical and contemporary contexts. In other words, Victor’s parody, or imitation, with “critical distance” of the Virgin Mary in the *Eight Marys* enables her to activate the relationship between the visual realm and the political, historical and ecclesiastical realms. In so doing, Victor brings about a “critical or ironic re-reading of the art of the past” (Hutcheon 1988:23). Parody might therefore be employed as a means by which artists such as Rego and Victor might critique and re-invent the way in which women are viewed not only in art but also within the socio-political matrix of the past and the present.

Ironic inversion is one of the methods used to create critical distance in parodic artwork. As the term ‘invert’ (Cambridge Dictionary 2018) literally means to turn upside down, it is not unexpected that both Rego and Victor invert their subjects in *Snow White swallows the poisoned apple*, (1995) and panel four of Victor’s *Eight Marys*, (2004) respectively. In so doing, they also disrupt the traditional way in which we view a subject, and force the viewer to see differently. That is to say, the viewer must discard the traditional symbolic binary system that conditions us to accept stereotypes without question. Instead, the viewer must regard the subject as the artist presents her to us, as she actually is. She is a real woman, who challenges an aesthetic history that reduces her to the narrow confines of two stereotypes.

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31 By way of example I suggest that this practice is similar to a process that Betty Edwards describes in her book, *Drawing on the right hand side of the brain* (2001). Edwards describes the way in which a person views the world as being reliant on a series of shorthand symbols which facilitates the hundreds of thousands of computations the brain must make to recognise faces, for example. This shorthand, however, interferes with processes like drawing which require a different mode of seeing, a mode that Edwards calls R-mode. In the drawing practice that Edwards teaches, new artists are advised to turn their subject matter upside down so that the right brain may be engaged. This process allows the artist to see the subject matter as a series of formal elements such as shape, line and tone in relationship with one another.
As is evident, parody promotes a rich layering of concepts associated with the original use of an image as well as the added layers of meaning related to its contemporary ironic intent (von Veh 2011:11). In other words, these works by Rego and Victor comprise a background layer, or the original image/schema, against which “the new creation is implicitly to be measured and understood” (Hutcheon 1985:31). For example, Rego retained the iconic Disney costume for her Snow White. This retention allowed her audience to recognise Snow White along with the cultural encoding that links her to stereotypical views of virtuous, submissive and childlike womanhood. Rego’s imposition of a model who is a mature woman sets up an ironic tension that undermines the stereotype in question. Victor sets up a similar tension in panel seven (Figure 2.15) in which the viewer is presented with a middle aged and disgruntled domestic drudge who is an inversion of the perpetually youthful, serene and submissive Mary. The mundane tea towel on her head displaces the traditional blue veil of Mary. Instead of holding the Christ child, she wields a whisk in one hand and an electric iron in the other. A circular array of clothes pegs is painfully attached to her body in a rough circle around her heart. Victor (von Veh 2011:99) explains that the pegs allude to images of the suffering Mary who is often depicted in images with a circle of swords piercing her heart. In this image, Victor pulls the veil away from the sacred image of Mary, the queen of heaven, to reveal instead the true nature of the stereotype and the agenda that it promulgates. To this end, Victor replaces all of the trappings that make her the queen of heaven with the trappings of domesticity (von Veh 2011:99).

2.4.4 Abjection and the female body

In her book The female nude: art, obscenity and sexuality (1992) Lynda Nead (1992:55) explains that even the “classical high-art tradition of the female nude plays on the ideal of wholeness and contained form”. She suggests that a feminist assessment of how the female body is represented within patriarchy might offer different ways of presenting the female body in art. I argue that Rego and Victor each present not just the real experience of women when they use real models, they also emphasise the importance of the unaestheticised female body in feminist strategy.

Nead (1992:13-22) bases her analysis of the conventions surrounding the female nude on Kenneth Clark’s theories in The nude: a study of ideal art (1956), which she views through the lens of Mary Douglas’ Purity and Danger (2002) and Jacques Derrida’s The Truth in painting (1987). Douglas, as I have already shown in Chapter One, provides the theory that boundaries and containment maintain purity. Derrida (1992:20) provides the concept of the frame, which is itself “the site of meaning” that stipulates fundamental distinctions between “outside and inside” and “proper and improper”. Clark (Nead 1992:19), on the other hand, emphasises the importance of the aesthetic perfecting of the female body before it can become art. To this end, all orifices must be sealed so that the body is
presented as whole and under (patriarchal) control (Nead 1992:21). Nead (1992:21) explains how art performs the function of transforming the female body into the nude:

If the female body is defined as lacking in containment and issuing filth and pollution from its faltering outlines and broken surface, the classical forms of art perform a kind of magical regulation of the female body, containing it and momentarily repairing the orifices and tears.

It is clear that Victor’s Marys actively challenge patriarchally sanctioned, aestheticised representations of women by challenging all forms of containment and control. Panel two (Figure 2.15) provides a concrete example of the abject body. In this panel, a young Mary stands with blood pouring down her legs. This abject fluid being the result one suspects of a backstreet abortion indicating that she is sexually active. I argue that the fact that she is or was pregnant alludes to Kristeva’s (Nead 1992:55) assertion that a woman who is pregnant is also in a state of abjection. A pregnant woman, according to Kristeva (Nead 1992:55), is in a state of ambiguity because she is a composite; both subject and object, life and death, inside and outside. Thus, I would argue that these Marys are, at their core, abject and that the rules that govern not only the portrayal of Mary, but also the depiction of the female body, have been broken.

The entire series of the Eight Marys (2004) (Figures 2.14 & 2.15) stands in stark contrast to traditional depictions of the Virgin Mary that were designed to educate women about their subordinate role within the patriarchal order (von Veh 2011:92). Rather than depicting her Marys as tightly controlled, remote and submissive virgins, Victor presents her viewer with a series of eight separate drawings of Mary that are sharply present in their sexualised bodies. These Marys expose the reality of a woman’s lived and embodied experience through the imposition of her own body and face onto the theme of the Virgin Mary. Because Victor has been candid about her identity or performance as a sexualised Mary, she is able to parody apocryphal accounts of the life of the Virgin Mary. Her Marys develop from the sexual awakening of pre-adolescence through to the sexual maturity of womanhood and then into the decline of old age. Rather than being transformed by the intervention of the male angel and God from base matter into the divine being known as the Virgin Mary, Victor’s Marys are fundamentally human.

2.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, I reiterate my argument in Chapter One that the mythology of Mary and Eve underpins the construction of the fairy tale binaries. In this chapter, I employ that foundation to facilitate my

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32 Kristeva writes extensively on the maternal body and the state of pregnancy. I have chosen to use the Nead reference as it encapsulates the point that I wish to make. Kelly Oliver (2002:330) has also condensed some of Kristeva’s thoughts from Stabat mater and Women’s time (1979). Kristeva describes how the body is divided and becomes a “co-existence of self and other.” Kristeva argues that during pregnancy control does not belong to the mother or the foetus (Oliver 2002:330).
argument that the Platonic/Aristotelian mind/body split underpins the construction of sacred and profane womanhood. I argue, therefore, that the polarisation of the fairy tale protagonist and antagonist to reflect only ‘good’ and ‘evil’ qualities is founded on similar reasoning. Analysis of illustrations for *The Red Shoes* and *Snow White* support the argument that women are indeed negatively related to the category of the body; while reason (and spirit) remains the domain of the patriarchs. These same illustrations reveal that while women might occupy the space of the body, their agency within that space is severely curtailed. Consequently, women are immobilised within an extremely narrow space in which they might exist, an existence that is circumscribed by absolute silence, submission and virtue. A young woman in such circumstances might choose to rebel, but the threat of expulsion to the margins, and out of her community, and very possibly death, are employed to reduce that possibility. Artists such as Rego and Victor have, however, embraced those margins. They employ the theory of abjection as a tool through which they begin to open up spaces in which women might “transcend [the] limitations of polarised opposites” (Broude & Garrard 1992:6). In so doing, they use their own lived experience and bodies of real women to engage “patriarchal discourses that produced these definitions” and thereby begin to redefine womanhood (Broude & Garrard 1992:5).
2.6 Illustrations

She was frightened, and wanted to throw the red shoes away; but they stuck fast. She tore off her stockings, but the shoes had grown fast to her feet. She danced and was obliged to go on dancing over field and meadow, in rain and sunshine, by night and by day—but by night it was most horrible.

Figure 2.1

Illustration by Vilhelm Pedersen, for Hans Christian Andersen's *The Red Shoes*, from *Eventyr*, 1850. Engraved by the Dalziel brothers. (Haney 2015:3)

She danced out into the open churchyard; but the dead there did not dance. They had something better to do than that. She wanted to sit down on the pauper’s grave where the bitter fern grows; but for her there was neither peace nor rest. And as she danced past the open church door she saw an angel there in long white robes, with wings reaching from his shoulders down to the earth; his face was stern and grave, and in his hand he held a broad shining sword.

"Dance you shall," said he, "dance in your red shoes till you are pale and cold, till your skin shrivels up and you are a skeleton! Dance you shall, from door to door, and where proud and wicked children live you shall knock, so that they may hear you and fear you! Dance you shall, dance—!" (Andersen 1845:3)
"it was a mercy, said she.

And the organ sounded and the chords of the chorus sounded so soft and delicious! The clear sunshine flowed so warmly through the window into the chair where Karen was sitting; her heart was so full of sunshine, of peace and joy that it burst; her soul floated on the sunshine to God, and nobody asked about the red shoes. (Andersen 1845:5)

Figure 2.2

Illustration by Vilhelm Pedersen for Hans Christian Andersen's *The Red Shoes*, from *Eventyr*, 1850. Engraved by the Dalziel brothers. (Haney 2015:3)
She danced out into the open churchyard; but the dead there did not dance. They had something better to do than that. She wanted to sit down on the pauper’s grave where the bitter fern grows; but for her there was neither peace nor rest. And as she danced past the open church door she saw an angel there in long white robes, with wings reaching from his shoulders down to the earth; his face was stern and grave, and in his hand he held a broad shining sword.

Related text

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Figure 2.3


Figure 2.4

Masaccio, Expulsion from Eden, Fresco, Brancacci Chapel , 1425, Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence (Kleiner & Mamiya 2005:586)

Figure 2.5

Robert Leinweber, Adam and Eve cast out of the Garden of Eden. Biblical illustration. Old Testament (Getty images culture club [Sa]:1)
Figure 2.6

Related text:
But when she wanted to go to the right, the shoes danced to the left, and when she wanted to dance up the room, the shoes danced down the room, down the stairs through the street, and out through the gates of the town. She danced, and was obliged to dance, far out into the dark wood. Suddenly something shone up among the trees, and she believed it was the moon, for it was a face. But it was the old soldier with the red beard; he sat there nodding his head and said: “Dear me, what pretty dancing shoes!”

Figure 2.7
Illustration by Katharine Cameron from The Enchanted Land: Tales Told Again. 1909, Chisholm, Louey. London: TC & EC Jack (Heiner 2006:3)

Related text:
On the following Sunday they all went to church, and she was asked whether she wished to go too; but, with tears in her eyes, she looked sadly at her crutches. And then the others went to hear God’s Word, but she went alone into her little room; this was only large enough to hold the bed and a chair. Here she sat down with her hymnbook, and as she was reading it with a pious mind, the wind carried the notes of the organ over to her from the church, and in tears she lifted up her face and said: “O God! help me!”
Figure 2.8
Michelangelo, *Pitti Tondo*, 1503 – 1504, marble bas-relief, Museo nazionale del Bargello in Florence (Kren 1996b [sp])

Figure 2.9
Titian, *Assumption of the Virgin*, 1516-18, oil on panel, 690 cm × 360 cm (270 in × 140 in), Basilica Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari (Kleiner & Mamiya 2005:643)
Figure 2.10
Granger, Grimm: Snow White, 2012, Photograph digital image (Granger 2012:1)

Figure 2.11
Photograph of Teresa Margaret of the Sacred Heart taken from Religion: top ten incorrupt corpses (Frater 2007:1)
Paula Rego, Snow White swallows the Poisoned Apple, 1995, Pastel on paper, mounted on aluminium, 178 x 150 cm (McEwen 1997:235)

Figure 2.12

Paula Rego, Snow White and her Stepmother, 1995, Pastel on paper, mounted on aluminium, 178 x 150 cm (McEwan 1997:235)

Figure 2.13
Figure 2.14


Figure 2.15

Figure 2.16
Titian, *The Venus of Urbino*, 1534, oil on canvas, 119 x 165 cm (47 x 65 in), Uffizi Florence (Kleiner & Mamiya 2005:646)

Figure 2.17
Giorgione, *The sleeping Venus*, c. 1510, oil on canvas, 108.5 x 175 cm (42.7 x 69 in) Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden (Chicago & Lucie-Smith 2004:101)
Chapter Three: Reconstruction

3.1 Introduction

As the title of my dissertation suggests, this study seeks to reconstruct the notion of profane womanhood. To this end, Chapter One and the first part of Chapter Two deal with the deconstruction of the Mary and Eve stereotypes that underpin the notion that womanhood is essentially profane. In the second part of Chapter Two, I analysed the work of Rego and Victor to come to terms with the strategies these women apply in their work, so that they might expose the degree to which the male perspective still permeates aesthetic traditions. Each artist inserts the lived female experience of real women into stereotypical representations of women and so draws attention to the utterly unrealistic nature of the stereotype. The viewer is left with the realisation that the traditional fairy tale heroine, and the Mary stereotype on which it is based, lacks credibility on account of its absence of complexity. Their interventions can thus be seen as an insertion of the profane to reconstruct a more nuanced vision of woman. In this chapter I undertake my own reconstructive journey, which I have based on my lived experience as well as on the aforementioned research.

My aim is to reintegrate or reclaim elements of my identity as a woman that have, in my experience, been categorised as profane. In the introduction to this study, I refer to the biblical exhortation, by which I was raised, to “cut away and throw...from [me] ... my hand or foot if it [caused me] to stumble” (Matthew 18:8 NIV) (Thompson 1983:1005). The excision of body parts that Jesus describes through Matthew is clearly echoed in Andersen’s *The Red Shoes* (1848). I conceptualise my journey as an attempt to reconstruct the damage caused to Karen in Andersen’s *The Red Shoes*. Furthermore, I have expressed the profane in terms of the body because my research has revealed the extent to which women are reduced through the mind/body dialectic to mere bodies (von Veh 2011:69). Ironically, at the same time, female bodies are so strictly regulated by the quest for purity that women must contend with the conundrum of rejecting their bodies as the “devil’s gateway” while still inhabiting them (Tertullian cited by Warner 1976:93; Douglas 2002:202). To reconceptualise the female body, I return to Douglas’ (2002:202) assertion that the body provides “a basic scheme for all symbolism” with the stipulation that most types of pollution have some sort of reference to the body. Despite the body’s relationship with pollution, Douglas (2002:202) debunks the notion that the body be cast aside, arguing instead that “life is in the body.”

To effect the transition of the polarised binary stereotypes into a whole and composite character, I present three cycles of paintings and related objects. These cycles are echoed in Durkheim’s description of baptism, which I outline in Chapter One. I argue that baptism, and the general description...
that Durkheim provides of initiation rites, might be aligned to Arnold Van Gennep’s (1960:33) stage descriptors for rites of passage. Van Gennep proposes that rites of passage comprise three stages, namely, the preliminal (separation from the world of one’s birth), liminal (transition stage between the sacred and the profane) and postliminal (incorporation into a new phase of communal life). I argue that Durkheim asserts that in the rite of baptism the initiate departs from or dies to the world of his birth in the pre-liminal phase (Durkheim 2008:39). Owing to the danger of contact between the sacred and the profane, an interstitial or “liminal” phase of the rite is required. I equate this in-between space with the burial phase of baptism during which the supplicant is entirely transformed from profane matter and becomes sacred, thus rendering him/her acceptable within the realm of the sacred (Durkheim 2008:39; Van Gennep 1960:33). Once the metamorphosis has been affected, the subject emerges, or is reborn, having incorporated the sacred. Furthermore, I argue that the structure of the fairy tales in this study, as well as their link to communal rites of passage, reflects these same stages. For instance, in Chapter Two, I describe Snow White as a tale that chronicles a young girl’s transition from girlhood through adolescence and into the early phases of womanhood. The same structure applies to The Red Shoes wherein Karen experiences two separations. She is separated from the “world of her birth” when her mother dies and she is taken to live with her guardian. Her second separation occurs when she rebelliously dons the red shoes, and is forced out of the community by the shoes themselves. Thus, she enters an interstitial, or liminal phase in which she is taught the perils of disobedience. As I showed in Chapter One, Karen is only reincorporated into the community once she repents of her sins and asks the wood-cutter to remove her feet with his axe.

In my first cycle of painted ironing boards and related table altar, collectively entitled The Deconstruction Cycle, I engage with the constrained body which attests to the necessity of separation from my world of birth (Figure 3.1). I identify and deconstruct the Mary and Eve stereotypes to problematise the patriarchal Catholic ideology of my childhood. The second series of paintings, The Reconstruction Cycle (Figures 3.15-3.24), comprises a nine panel narrative series. These works exemplify the transitional or liminal phase in which my characters transition from the binary modality into the composite. This is achieved by ‘repurposing’ aspects of fairy tale mythology such as the older female antagonist, as seen in both fairy tales, and the punitive angel from The Red Shoes. I explore the unrestrained body in this cycle, expressed through the metaphor of a pig. In so doing, I articulate the purportedly profane nature of the body. This porcine character must, however, be understood in relation to each of the other characters that appear in the paintings, as together they form part of a composite whole. I refer to Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s article entitled The Queen’s looking glass (1987) to facilitate the development of this more complicated character. In it, Gubar and Gilbert (1987:297-304)
argue that the three main female characters are each aspects of the same composite character. Their argument addresses the binary splitting of female fairy tale characters in *Snow White* by the Grimm Brothers, which I discussed in Chapter One. Thus, instead of the traditional binary division between the aggressive, older step-mother and the virtuous, young but passive Snow White, the main character becomes much more complex and human. Complexity, such as this, however, cannot exist within the polarised categories of the sacred and the profane, as is evident in Kristeva's (1982) elaboration of the abject. Kristeva (1982:4) classifies the composite as abject, along with the notion of the “in-between.” I concur with Kristeva’s assessment as a ‘composite’ is derived from disparate sources, thus ruling out the prospect of purity. I, therefore, adopt Kristeva’s (1982) interpretation of the composite and view it as a denizen of the in-between.

In the final altarpiece, the third *Incorporation Cycle* (Figures 3.25, 2.26 & 3.27), I address the purportedly profane construction of the female body by reconfiguring its symbolism, which I then reconfigure to reflect a new positive symbolic framework. Each part of the body is related to the faculties that I seek to reclaim. For instance, the feet, which were sacrificed to cut away concupiscence, become emblematic of recovered agency. This work marks the completion of the three-phase cycle, but it does not complete the journey. Instead the adventure continues, as this painting also signals the beginning of the next cycle.

Process is important in each cycle. I, therefore, describe relevant aspects of the artmaking process as part of my analysis. The act of making these art works has in effect been a physical manifestation of the journey that this project elucidates. For example, as I engage with materials and images that evoke the sacred and profane binary, I deliberate on ways to integrate such disparate positions. As is evident in this body of work, the process is slow and painstaking, as it entails transgression into deeply embedded systems of taboo. The impact of this transgression might be understood in terms of Douglas’ (2002:197) contention that the attempt to recover something from the rubbish heap reactivates its abject qualities and the threat that it embodies. I referred to this in Chapter One. For example, later in this chapter, I describe the psychic difficulty of placing an image of myself inside a cut out of the Virgin Mary. The childhood taboo of placing myself, a profane girl/woman, on the same level as the holy virgin creates in me an automated, emotional, gag reflex. My reaction to the boundary created by the taboos surrounding Mary echoes, on an emotional level, Kristeva’s (1982:2-3) visceral, and physical response to the sensation of the skin of milk on her lip.¹

¹ Kristeva (1982:2-3) describes the involuntary gag reflex that she experiences when she feels the skin of the milk she is drinking in the *Powers of horror.*
3.1.1 Use of altars and altarpieces

The altar has featured prominently in my journey thus far as a child growing up in a religious home, and this suggests that physical incarnations of these altars are appropriate. Kay Turner’s (1999:11) *Beautiful necessity: the art and meaning of women’s altars*, explores a range of home altars, kept mostly by women, and provides exemplars of how I might combine found and painted images, objects and my hand-made felt and wax shoes. Kay Turner (1999:7) initially associates the term “altar”, with formal altars located in churches or temples, devoted to a patriarchal God, and officiated over by a “priest, rabbi or minister”. I was exposed to two types of altars as a child, both consecrated to a male God. The first appeared in Old Testament stories that cite conflict between the Hebrew God and ancient fertility goddesses (and gods) such as Asherah (and Baal). The lesson I inferred from these stories was that God required absolute obedience and sacrifice if I was to win His approval. That same sacrifice is mirrored in Andersen’s *The Red Shoes*. That notion of sacrifice extends to the New Testament iteration of altars that I encountered every Sunday when attending the Catholic mass as a child.

In contrast, Turner (1999:27) describes a woman’s altars as private, even intimate spaces that are unique to their maker. Turner (1999:7) explains that each altar is devoted to a deity chosen by the individual concerned, as opposed to the “male determined” and “dogma-bound” altars of the Catholic Church. Despite the fact that these home altars do not enjoy the same status in the official anthropological canon, Turner (1999:12) states that home altars date back as far as the Neolithic era.² Turner (1999:12) asserts that these early altars were dedicated to a female deity and comprised a low platform upon which images of a goddess and ritual objects would be gathered. A contemporary home altar might, however, occupy a room of its own or might simply reside on a table, a mantle-piece or even a bookshelf.³ Each altar functions as the focal point for the devotion and petition of the individual votary (Turner 1999:13).

Turner (1999:19) argues that woman’s altars are subversive in their very nature. She explains that early Christian women, who were proscribed from active participation in communal worship, were able to direct the course of their worship at their home altars. They were, according to Turner, drawn to the use of icons as they were able to petition a saint directly without the intervention of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. In the eighth century A.D., iconoclastic clergy, seeking to assert their authority, declared that

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² The custom of making home altars extends back as far as the Neolithic era (5000 – 6000 BCE) (1999:12). Turner (1999:12) cites locations such as Çatal Hüyük where domestic altars “formed the ideological core of early matrifocal (mother-centred) religions.” These religions were primarily concerned with “fertility, reproduction and regeneration”, or as Turner put it, “creatively” (Turner 1999:12).

³ I make this assertion, based on my observation of the multitude of photographic examples provided by Turner in *Beautiful necessity* (1999). A Specific page reference would encompass the entire book.
objects or images that had not been blessed by a suitable authority could not be considered holy (Turner 1999:17). In defiance of this decree, women sought to retain the right to venerate personal images. For example, Irene, regent to her deceased husband, Leo IV, re-established the practice of venerating icons after his death in 788 A.D. (Turner 1999:17). Furthermore, the practice of hybridising pagan and Christian religious traditions in personal devotions emerged in the middle ages as women sought refuge from patriarchally defined parameters (Turner 1999:19). Turner (1999:19) explains that Catholicism became intermingled with “marginalised . . . earth based religions” and indicates that these altars in question combined magic and nature (anathema to the church) with officially sanctioned “cultural and doctrinal” elements. In keeping with the subversive character ascribed to women’s altars, each of my altars is subversive.

3.2 Part one – Deconstruction cycle

3.2.1 Ironing board altars for Mary and Eve

This series of works comprises five wall-mounted, painted panels, and five accompanying altars (Figure 3.1). Each panel has been painted onto canvas stretched over table-top ironing boards. The ironing boards were chosen not only for their shape, which is evocative of the arched panels typically found in altarpieces, but also for their clear association with mundane domesticity. The images on panels one, three and five refer to the Mary stereotype, which I have indexed with the colour blue, while panels two and four are associated with Eve and the colour red. Three pairs of blue shoes are presented in their boxes on a found table below panels one, three and five respectively, while a pair of red shoes is placed beneath panels two and five. Each shoe box is covered with a Perspex lid, indexing the notion of display and referencing Snow White’s glass coffin, which I discussed in Chapter Two. Moreover, the Perspex cover separates each pair of shoes from the viewer in the same way that Snow White’s glass coffin provided a boundary between the abjection of her corpse and her viewer. The table belonged first to my grandmother and then my mother. It is now in my possession. I utilise this table to allude to the feminine practice of keeping domestic altars, often on a table in the home (Turner 1999:10). I place the ironing boards at the height of the high Catholic altar, a man’s altar. This configuration of women’s shoes placed beneath ironing boards, and bearing deconstructed images of stereotypes perpetuated by the patriarchal order, brings the unequal power dynamic into focus.

3.2.2 Mary (panels one, three and five)

Each Mary is painted within the borders of an image of a gutted fish. I have used the fish for several reasons, the first being that medieval images of Mary portray her at the centre of a mandorla (Figure 3.8) that calls to mind the ribbed interior of a gutted fish. Christians, especially in the early church, were
associated with the symbol of the fish, which was used as a secret code to indicate where, and with whom, they might secretly gather to worship (Biedermann 1989:131). The image of the fish is associated with the effort to avoid persecution and martyrdom prior to the Emperor Constantine’s declaration of Christianity as the official religion of Rome in A.D. 325 (De la Croix & Tansey 1970:234). Furthermore, one can infer that the fish symbol also refers to Christians in Mark 1:16-18 (NIV) (Thompson 1983:1021), which presents Jesus as instructing Simon and his brother Andrew to: “Come, follow me . . . and I will make you fishers of men.” Tertullian (Knight 2017:1) enlarges on the metaphor in his description of Christians as “we, little fishes” who follow the “example of our [ichthys]Jesus Christ”. I conceptualise the gutted fish and the red shoes, which I discuss later, as metonyms for Karen in The Red Shoes as well as for myself. Both Karen and I might be considered to have been gutted by the application of the Mathew 18 injunction to cut away various body parts to cut away sin.

The gutted fish also highlights the notion of the abject, and by placing the Virgin Mary inside the gutted fish, I precipitate a confrontation of the sacred and the profane. I use the gutted fish to denote the process by which women sacrifice their agency and identity on an altar dedicated to patriarchy. My choice to use the image of a fish, which has its interior exposed as an abject exterior, relates to my argument that the Mary stereotype is profoundly harmful, and that it literally turns the subject inside out. I argue that the act of turning the subject inside out facilitates the excision of anything that is associated with Eve and, therefore, deemed to be profane.

I have repeated the image of the gutted fish, and imposed the silhouette of the Virgin Mary statue (Figure 3.2) that occupied pride of place on my mother’s dressing table, in panels one, three and five of the cycle. The interior of each silhouette is, however, occupied, by an image fragment of a real woman, rather than by the traditional, idealised, and distant Mary. More specifically, I have inserted an image of my mother seated in my father’s car about to ‘go away’ on her honeymoon (Figures 3.3 and 3.5) into the Mary cut out in panel one (Figure 3.1, panel 1). My sister, seated on her motorbike holding her helmet, disrupts panel three (Figures 3.1 & 3.7) and finally, I have incorporated an image of myself into panel five (Figures 3.1, 3.4 & 3.6).

This particular arrangement of elements was derived from a series of collages that were made prior to the commencement of these paintings (Figures 3.3 and 3.4). The intention was to invoke direct contact between elements that might be read as either sacred or profane. I utilised the recognisable negative

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4 There are many references to fish throughout the gospels, for example, the story of the feeding of the five thousand, in which Jesus fed five thousand people with just five loaves of bread and two fish (Matt 14:13-21; Mark 6:31-44; Luke 9:12-17; John 6:1-14) (Thompson 1983: 1001, 1028, 1058, 1089-1090). This story is equated with the symbolism of the Catholic sacrament of communion.

5 Ichthys is the Greek term that refers to fish (Biedermann 1989:131)
cut out of Mary (Figures 3.2, 3.3 & 3.4), who is identified as sacred. I, subsequently, inserted images of women in my family into the Mary cut out so that the sacred is brought into direct contact with the purported profanity of real women. Furthermore, the images of each woman are deliberately too big to be contained by the Mary cut out. In this way, the Mary shaped ‘frame’ only allows a fragment of the original image of, for instance, my mother (Figures 3.3 and 3.5) to be visible. As a result, the image of my mother is fragmented or divided by the frame, in much the same way that the Mary stereotype imposes artificial divisions upon the female subject. The images beneath the frame are thus purposefully cut off to denote the artificial and often cruel imposition of the constructed frame. I chose to use the image of my mother in her going-away outfit because the image is emblematic of the fairy tale belief in ‘happily ever after’. Sadly, my mother’s experience belied that myth. Instead, my mother was trapped in a destructive marriage by the teaching of the Catholic Church. Her only recourse was to find comfort in the Virgin Mary, whose statue adorned her dressing table. I deliberately obscure my mother’s face to suggest that she loses her own identity under the aegis of the patriarchally sanctioned frame.

The second Mary cut out disrupts an image of my sister (panel 2 of Figure 3.1). Of the three women in my family, my sister is the most oppositional in her relationship to both stereotypes. As a child she actively rejected the princess, eschewing the convention that she should wear dresses. Instead, she dressed as a ‘tomboy’ and studied technical subjects at school. With her short hair and typical attire of jeans and a leather jacket she is still mistaken for a male. In a recent conversation she described herself as being most comfortable with the designation ‘other’, rather than the traditional male/female binary, a designation that places her well outside both stereotypes. An image of my sister as I know her, in her leather jacket, holding her helmet and within the Mary frame, provides a radical example of how the Mary stereotype does not accommodate people who live in a female body but identify outside patriarchally sanctioned norms. It is, therefore, not surprising that my sister was the first member of our family to actively rebel against the familial, religious ethos.

As previously stated in Chapter Two, I conclude that the parodic insertion of a real woman into the space traditionally held by a stereotype challenges the legitimacy of the stereotype. This finding contextualises a series of experimental collages made prior to my analyses of Rego and Victor’s works. I experimented by inserting images of myself into the Virgin Mary frame in Figure 3.4. I discovered that the use of these self-portraits, as opposed to images of other real women, generated an internal tension relating to the transgression of taboos. My first concern was that these works might be perceived to be blasphemous. Despite my own critical viewpoint, I have no intention of attacking

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6 Taken using my smartphone and a selfie stick
Christianity per se. The works in this series are an expression of my personal journey in which I attempt to disentangle myself from a limiting and damaging patriarchal belief system. My second area of concern related to a sense of (dis)ease when I placed images of myself under the Madonna frame, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. I understood that I had to find a way to challenge the hegemony of the Mary and Eve stereotypes, but I was unprepared for the sense of personal transgression that these images evoked in me.

The photographs that I have used are images that were taken as experiments with the selfie stick. I chose deliberately not to ‘dress up’ or to perform a role. Instead, I photographed myself in tracksuit pants and a sweatshirt; these are clothes that are comfortable and allow movement. The images reveal a typical overweight, middle-aged woman who resembles, in some cases, the Venus of Willendorf (Figures 3.4 and 3.6). The insertion of one of these photographs into the Madonna frame sets up a dialogue between the reality of my body and the idealised perfection of a stereotype that cannot accommodate a real woman’s body or experience. The woman I encounter is the very antithesis of the sacred stereotypes that promote childlike innocence and bodies along with passive submission and self-sacrifice. Despite the fact that these images feel regressive, they do begin to allude to the direction of the reconstructive journey that follows.

3.2.3 Bloodied Eves (panels two and four)
I have used two artworks as source material for my interpretation of Eve to engage with two issues that arose from my research on her. The first Eve is related to John Roddam Spencer Stanhope’s, Eve Tempted, (1877) (Figure 3.9), through her pose and her idealised body. This idealisation of Stanhope’s image confirmed my suspicion that, while Eve might be perceived to be profane, the way in which she was depicted had less to do with religious sentiment and more to do with the aestheticising male gaze. In contrast, the second Eve was derived from Melisa Cadel’s white earthenware sculpture entitled Rebirth again (2011) (Figure 3.10). Cadel’s sculpture evokes a sense of deep shame and confinement, which is achieved through her combination of white earthenware, wax and string binding as well as the almost foetal position of the body. When read against my research on Eve, Cadel’s work seemed to allude to a sense of marginalisation.

As my research in Chapter One reveals, the blame for the fall was heaped upon Eve and her daughters. I sought to highlight the double standard fostered by portrayals of Eve by men, such as Stanhope, by juxtaposing his Eve with an interpretation of Eve by a female artist. While Cadel’s work does not deal specifically with Eve, I would argue that her work conveys, for me, the lived reality of bearing the weight of shame. Cadel makes use of the same upside-down pose that I analyse in the
works of Rego and Victor in Chapter Two, a pose that proves useful when suggesting the need to review (or literally ‘overturn’) the manner in which women have been made into art and put on display for the male gaze.

My Eves are presented as paintings on panels two and four. Stanhope’s Eve appears in panel two, but instead of rendering the surfaces with mimetic precision, I have disrupted the idealised surface with blood flowers (discussed below). The same blood flowers disrupt the surface of Cadel’s figure in panel four. In both instances, the burnt red felt, wax, paint and liquin\(^7\) flowers provide cover by disrupting the trajectory of the male gaze. The burnt flowers are made using red felt cut into silhouette shapes that were developed from the original floral covering of the ironing boards. These shapes are composited together with leftover scraps of felt and other detritus that emanates from the process of making the red shoes that form part of this installation. They are finally dipped into molten wax, and once the wax has hardened, they are covered in a mixture of red oil paint and liquin, made to resemble menstrual blood, and set alight. Menstrual blood is understood to transgress the boundaries of the body, which defines it as abject waste, whereas the act of burning each flower alludes to the management of that waste through incineration\(^8\). The flowers, thus, in their very make-up might be classed as waste or abject.

I also relate the burnt flowers to Andersen’s fairy tale, The Red Shoes, in which the first pair of red shoes owned by the protagonist Karen were discarded and burnt as instructed by Karen’s guardian. The burnt shoes, therefore, become a signifier for all that is viewed as profane by Karen’s guardian. As mentioned above, the burnt blood flowers are derived from the original fabric covering of the ironing boards, the floral design remained faintly visible through the canvas I stretched over them. After priming, and once the Eves had been drawn onto the boards, I re-imposed the original floral silhouettes to disrupt the idealised female form and break the outlines of the body. As the images developed through succeeding layers of glazed underpainting, the flowers began to suggest blood stains seeping beyond the boundaries of the body. Each wax flower also deliberately disrupts the borders of the painting, by extending beyond the border of the panel and by interrupting the smooth canvas surface of the painting.

\(^7\) Liquin is a resin-based painting medium that reduces the drying time of oil paint. In this instance, I mixed red oil paint with a mixture of liquin, turps and linseed oil (all painting media) as an equivalent of blood. The blood mixture was used to cover the original flowers and subsequently set alight to allude to the original red shoes that were burnt by Karen’s guardian.

\(^8\) I refer back to primary school memories of incinerators installed in cloakrooms. Ironically, girls who had their periods were too embarrassed to use these devices. As a result, used pads were left on the floor or flushed down the toilet. Needless to say, this system did not take the real shame of very young girls into account.
3.2.4 Shoes

In *The Red Shoes* Andersen creates an opportunity for Karen to choose ‘sacred’ black church shoes, rather than the ‘profane’ red shoes that she covets, when she accompanies her guardian to purchase new shoes. In keeping with Andersen’s binary, and to express the binary conundrum facing women, I present the series of red and blue shoes described at the beginning of this section. The red shoes are related to the gutted fish that is discussed on pages 56 and 57. This relationship is evident in the first experimental pair of shoes (Figure 3.11), which shows the direct correlation between the shoes and the fish. As the shoes evolved through the experimental phases, the conceptual framework broadened. For instance, the overlap between the blood flowers and the red shoes, both utilising red felt and wax, supports the notion that red shoes reference menstruation.

Hilary Davidson (2006:273) states that the “red shoe” combines “a highly charged colour and a form that is also not entirely innocent”. She (2006:273) explains that the colour red is ambiguous in its associations. That is, depending on the context of its use, it might be negatively or positively perceived. For example, in Europe and Asia red is associated with the notions of fertility and life. At the same time, however, red is also related to death. As a result red “assumes a unique ambivalence, as it can be regarded as either positive or negative” (Davidson 2006:273). Or, to put it another way, red can be linked to the concepts of both the sacred and the profane. For instance, red denotes the upper orders of the Catholic Church in which Cardinals wear vestments of red, and the pope wears red shoes; and yet red is also associated with adultery and prostitution through terms such as scarlet woman and red-light districts. Red is also a colour traditionally linked to the devil. Andersen, in *The Red Shoes*, has clearly associated red shoes with notions of rebellion and sin. This is evident in my discussion about the illustrations of Karen who has lost control of her body, and is dancing to her death on account of the control exerted by the devilish red shoes (Figures 2.1 and 2.3).

In contrast, the light blue shoes allude to the light blue mantle worn by the statue of the Virgin Mary owned by my mother (Figure 3.2). Furthermore, I relate this colour to patriarchal mechanisms of controlling women, and my lived experience of growing up in the shadow of Mary. The Marian construct required that I, and others like me, abject ourselves through the sacrifice of our identity, agency, mind and body. The blue shoes index the limited options for Catholic women of my mother’s generation if they wished to remain respectable to marriage or the convent. My generation was grudgingly granted the option of *celibate* spinsterhood. The blue shoes relate to the Mary stereotype and the constrictions of the feminine ideal. The pink interiors of the blue shoes refer directly to the pink flesh of the abject pig/girl in the narrative series of paintings, which I discuss in the next section. These pink interiors suggest the impossibility of denying the flesh. No matter how much the Christian virgin rejects the flesh
it always returns because as Douglas (2002:202) declares, “life is in the body”. In contrast, the red shoes index the profane aspects of womanhood that I link to the Eve stereotype. I employ these divergent sets of shoes to refer to my lived experience as well as that of my mother and sister.

Based on the preceding argument, I view each set of shoes, the red (Figure 3.13) and the blue (Figure 3.14) as unwearable metonyms, not only for Karen and myself but also for my mother and sister. I draw on Julia Pine’s (in Hilary Davidson 2006:273) description of shoes as a “substitute self” to support my argument. Pine argues that the very “form of shoes presents associations around the body, identity and sexuality” as they mould themselves to the foot of the individual wearing them. The resulting hollow impression that the shoe retains when the shoe is removed becomes, for Pine, a “vessel for identity” or a “substitute self.” Each pair of shoes is made to fit a mould of my feet. However, after submerging or ‘baptising’ them in a bath of hot wax, they become distorted in much the same way that the patriarchal Mary and Eve stereotypes twist and distort the subject’s relationship with her body, her sexuality and her very identity.

3.3 Part two – The reconstruction cycle

3.3.1 Narrative series: Prologue

This piece (Figure 3.15) prefaces the reconstructed narrative by presenting the binary nature of fairy tales. I present two characters that embody the sacred/profane binary: a dissolving/emerging princess on the left, and the pig/girl on the right. The princess occupies the entire left register of the painting, as well as the left hand side of the road that runs through the painting. Emerging from the right hand margin of the painting, the pig/girl inhabits the opposing side of the road to the princess. The road is covered by red flower silhouettes derived from the blood flowers of the deconstruction cycle. The road is bounded on either side by high walls confining the sacred and the profane. The sphere of the sacred is identifiable in the top left and central registers through the use of shapes that evoke the idea of a church. The road acts as the buffer, preventing dangerous contact between the antagonistic categories, and might be defined as a liminal space. The blood flowers become the visual marker of the liminal space in this painting and the eight that follow. The flowers retain their reference to menstruation and the profane. As such, they cannot be contained within the traditional concept of the sacred. As my research revealed in Chapter One, the fertile and menstruating female body is defined as profane. I have, however, moved the flowers into the liminal space so that I might suggest that these categories need to be challenged.

In this panel, as in the paintings that follow, each character has been separated from the “world of their birth” and removed from their polarised sacred or profane categories. Instead, they inhabit the liminal
space, the space in-between the defining walls of each category. By placing these characters in this intermediate space, I allude to the three-part structure of fairy tales that I reviewed in the introduction to this chapter. The liminal space within this painting becomes the stage upon which the drama of integration will unfold. As each category cannot tolerate contact with the other, and I need to integrate elements that purportedly belong to each, this third space seems to be fit for my purpose.

3.3.2 Protagonist, antagonist, composite

I experiment with the traditional binary fairy tale roles of the protagonist and antagonist in this panel, while I actively repurpose these roles in the form of a composite character in the main narrative. At the time of their creation, my research in Chapter One had shown how the Virgin Mary construct was predicated on patriarchal beliefs such as Tertullian’s that women were “the devil’s gateway” (Tertullian cited by Warner 1976:93). I draw on that inherent patriarchal distrust of women in my presentation of a protagonist, who displays elements of the fairy tale heroine. I have, however, subverted the trope of the fairy tale princess by presenting her as only a fragment of a gown from which a single mannequin’s arm emerges. In short, the traditional fairy tale heroine cannot exist in lived experience; she is a construct. It is for this reason that I discard this character in the rest of the narrative. In contrast to the traditional antagonist’s role, which is usually conferred upon the older, aggressive female, my antagonist emerges from an area of underpainting as a pig with a girl’s shadow. She is visible on the right hand side of the canvas. The fact that she has emerged from the leavings of prior layers seems to reinforce the notion that she is indeed a marginal character. This pig/girl also encapsulates, for me, the central paradox of the Mary and Eve stereotypes in that the attempt to live inside these stereotypes can only leave one with a profound sense of filth and shame. I view the pig as an expression of doctrinally induced shame. That the pig is uppermost suggests the primacy of her purported profanity. The shadow girl forms the other half of the binary.

The pig is treated as an anomalous creature in Leviticus, in the same way that women are (Leviticus 11:7; Leviticus 12) (Thompson 1983:109, 111). In Chapter One, I describe how instructions for the management of the fertile female body are inserted between chapters on dietary taboos relating to profane animals and the sick body. The pig embodies, for me, the presumption of profanity that underpins the eventual construction of the Marian ideal and, ultimately, fairy tale stereotypes that seek to control the female body. Catholic patriarchs designate this same body as profane. This symbol also expresses the shame of growing up in a profoundly religious home in which the body was perceived as so shameful that it was utterly denied. She is me.

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9 In Leviticus 11:7 (NIV) (Thompson 1983:109) the Israelites are exhorted not to eat the meat of pigs as they are unclean.
The pig/girl also draws on the artistic tradition of alluding to animals to create metaphorical concepts about the human condition. Pointon (1996:115), for example, describes this phenomenon in her analysis of Rego’s fallen Snow White by juxtaposing Francisco Goya’s *Plucked Turkey* (1812) (Figure 3.16) with Rego’s *Snow White swallows the poisoned apple* (1995) in Spellbound (1996). In so doing, Pointon alludes to a relationship between these works. It is a relationship that she does not explore specifically, but she does mention the work in general terms when she refers to similarities that exist between human and animal bodies in “all the great narratives of creation” (Pointon 1996:110). Pointon explains that the purpose of such allusions is often didactic, and refers to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in which humans are transformed into animals as a punishment. While in Aesop’s tales, animals participate in stories in which victory is won by the innocent.

### 3.3.3 The reconstructed narrative

The characters that emerge in this narrative (Figures 3.18 to 3.25) are to be read as aspects of the same identity. To this end, I re-introduce the pig/girl, identified by her girl shaped shadow and her human feet. In the course of her journey, she encounters and integrates with an older woman and a guardian, both of whom emerged from my earlier therapeutic journey. As they are older, they have the required strength and insight to retrieve the pig/girl from the margins. Detritus scraped from my palette has been stuck to and incorporated into the painted surface of the pig/girl and the guardian characters to convey the abject nature of each character. This excess matter disrupts not only the boundaries of these characters but also the picture plane that acts as a boundary between the picture and the real world. The second goal of this strategy is that both figures transgress the border between my internal, imagined journey and the world of my daily, lived existence. This disruption denotes the integration of an internal transformation, effected through the process of painting, into an external, composite lived experience.

The architectural space in each panel actively supports the ongoing narrative. For example, in panel one (Figure 3.18), I present the margins as an abandoned, enclosing, Colosseum-like space that is, nevertheless, open to the elements. The Colosseum alludes to the physical martyrdom of Christians that occurred prior to 313 A.D. As indicated in Chapter One, Constantine signed the edict of toleration that ended the era of persecution in 313 A.D. The lone occupant of this space is the pig/girl enmeshed in a fouled cloth. She embodies the actual outcome of the ‘sacred’ struggle for female purity. I stated in Chapter One that the cult of the virgin emerged after 313 A.D. once the threat of physical martyrdom had abated. Women, as the purported “gateway to hell” (Tertullian in Warner 1976:93) remain fixed in a state of shame to expiate the sins of Eve through the martyrdom of their flesh, and the abjection of self.
Images of water and stairs leading downwards are images that re-occur in my dreams at times of great change and emotional upheaval. The prospect of actively engaging deeply entrenched taboos at the beginning of this project elicited several dreams of water and stairs. I, therefore, employ images of water and stairs and a boat to articulate differing states of change and agency. For example, in panel one, the boat placed at the centre of the arena implies movement and thereby agency, both of which are moot as the boat lacks oars and is landlocked. Water, which facilitates movement and, therefore, agency, only appears in panel eight.

In panel two (Figure 3.19), the viewer encounters an interior space beneath a staircase, suggesting the transitional nature of this space which is dominated on the right by a red tree indexing Eve and the profane. A doorway opens into a dark foreboding space to the left, while a second opening lacks a staircase. Instead, the drop to the next level is sudden. The height might be read as the shallow end of a pool which without water becomes difficult if not impossible to navigate. The lack of stairs and water in this panel indicates that at this early stage of the journey, my engagement is intellectual. I am both drawn to and repelled at the prospect of challenging the taboos protecting the Mary and Eve stereotypes, hence the inviting and foreboding nature of this panel, and the series.

A fragmented image of Bernini’s *Ecstasy of Saint Theresa*, 1647–52 (Figure 3.17) spans the top left corner of panel one and the top right corner of panel two. This placement across the boundaries of each panel is deliberate, as Bernini portrays Saint Theresa on the border “between the sacred and the erotic, body and soul, but also inside and outside” (my emphasis) (Turvey Sauron 2007:189). Bernini’s depiction of her ecstasy as an erotic, bodily experience is at odds with the Church’s firm rejection of the corporeal aspects of their virginal saints. While Saint Theresa is completely covered by her robes, her robe seems to display the “fantasised body, the dark crevices of marble suggesting the intimate surfaces of the female body,” (Turvey Sauron 2007:189). Victoria Turvey Sauron argues that Theresa’s robe indexes not just the hidden skin but also the internal experience of religious ecstasy that vacillates between the sacred and the erotic (profane). The words of Saint Theresa (in Victoria Turvey Sauron 2007:261) seem to evoke the bodily experience:

> Beside me, on the left hand, appeared an angel in bodily form . . . In his hands I saw a great golden spear, and at the iron tip there appeared to be a point of fire. This he plunged into my heart several times so that it penetrated into my entrails. When he pulled it out, I felt that he took them with it, and left me utterly consumed by the great love of God. The pain was so severe that it made me utter several moans.

This account of the saint’s sacred experience might also be perceived to recount an erotic bodily experience thus placing Theresa, herself, on the margins. One might also argue that her recorded, lived
experience is broader than what the narrow confines of patriarchal church dogma would allow. I argue that Saint Theresa embodies a composite of what is perceived to be sacred or profane, and that the use of this image might encapsulate the human conundrum that Mary Douglas (2002:199-200) expresses as the quest for purity.

An older woman carrying the pig/girl occupies the bottom left register of panel three (Figure 3.20). She is an older aspect of the pig/girl that reintegrates by entering the liminal space. I employ the agency and will of the older woman in fairy tales to reclaim the pig/girl who is shamed into passive stasis in panel one. In so doing, I debunk the trope of the wickedly aggressive witch. The seated, hovering figure in red in the top left register acts as companion and guardian. She is seated on a fragment of one of the burnt blood flowers, a formerly jettisoned object reclaimed. Through the reference to menstruation associated with the burnt flower, she replaces and subverts Andersen's sacred angel in The Red Shoes while performing the function of guardian holding a self-defined boundary that creates space in which integration can occur. This character is conceptualised as part of the developing composite identity, derived from my prior process of reintegration, in which I visualised guardians holding boundaries, while I integrated the child within. Those guardians are part of my composite identity. The architectural space of panel three supports the notion of an exodus from the authoritarian, patriarchal order by referencing exterior images of the Colosseum. The heavy angled walls evoke a claustrophobic sense of oppression and dis-ease that is reminiscent of Expressionist spatial arrangements in films such as The Cabinet of Dr Caligari (Weine 1920).

The draped cloth re-occurs in panel four (Figure 3.21) designating, on a compositional level, a threshold. The cloth bisects the pig/girl's body in the bottom left register and stretches into the distance. The red (profane) wall on the left and the blue (sacred) walls on the right define the categories that the pig/girl is on the verge of re-evaluating. The cloth, once gathered and embraced, becomes a self-defined boundary in panels five and six (Figures 2.22 and 3.23). Furthermore, the cloth alludes to the draped ambivalence of Saint Theresa. This space accommodates not only the composite anomaly that is Saint Theresa but also my composite identity. This composite character is presented in panel six as a single unit that nevertheless retains the distinct nature of each character.

In panel five, the built environment is crumbling, as is the patriarchal order. I have inverted the colour index by 'washing' the pointed arches with red paint, alluding to my integration of the purportedly profane aspects of the feminine. While the red arches dominate the sky in the top left register, the guardian appears to be more clearly defined. Her bare feet in this panel and in panel four recognise the role shoes play as instruments for the socialisation of Karen in The Red Shoes. I have chosen to
consciously employ the naked foot as a metaphor for the shedding of socialised norms exemplified by the Mary and the Eve stereotypes. The prominence of feet in this narrative thwarts the removal of feet and agency in Andersen's fairy tale. Fairy tale convention is undermined further through the introduction of upside-down shadow trees in panel six. These shadows allude to fairy tale forests that become the school-room in which the fairy tale protagonists are socialised. In both *The Red Shoes* and *Snow White*, Karen and Snow White were apprised of their passive domestic role reserved for them within the patriarchal framework. These upside down shadows highlight the need to subvert the traditional fairy tale forest and perhaps appeal to something older, something more natural and possibly matriarchal, which at this point remains undefined and ephemeral.

In panel seven (Figure 2.24), a dressing table is situated in a forest clearing that is bounded on the left by a built portico with stairs leading down into an open central space. The appearance of the stairs will allow the protagonist to confront the mirror. The image of a mirror appears in both *The Red Shoes* and *Snow White*. In *The Red Shoes*, the mirror is associated with Karen who is associated with vanity as a precursor to her fall into rebellion; while the mirror in *Snow White* is linked to the murderous jealousy and vanity of the evil queen. Gubar and Gilbert (1987:299), however, argue that the mirror in *Snow White* signifies the internalised, patriarchal voice of the king. I would argue that the voice of the patriarchy is also embedded in Andersen's use of the mirror in *The Red Shoes*. By repatriating the mirror from the castle in *Snow White* and Karen's bedroom to my imagined forest I present my composite protagonist with the opportunity to re-view her reconstituted self. As I indicated earlier, water eventually appears in panel eight (Figure 2.25) once the voice of the patriarchy has been confronted.

### 3.4 Part three – Incorporation Cycle

As with the altars and related altarpieces of the deconstruction cycle, the Incorporation Cycle altarpiece (Figures 3.26, 2.27 & 3.28) subverts traditional expectations of an altarpiece. Through the shape of its panels, I infer a connection to works such as Giotto's *Polyptych of Bologna* (ca. 1332-34) (Figure 3.29). This shape is comparable to that of an ironing board with its triangular apex. I employ the ironing board shape in the central panel of this altarpiece, as I do with the Mary and Eve altars, as a reference to the elevated patriarchal tradition of altarpieces, while also alluding to the lesser domestic role afforded to women. Similarly, this shape references the Gothic framework of Victor's subversive *Eight Marys* (2004) (Figures 2.15 and 2.16). The two side panels of my altarpiece are derived from a single, vertically bisected, panel. Their placement on either side of the central panel is reminiscent of Bernardo Daddi's *The Virgin Mary with Saints Thomas Aquinas and Paul* (ca. 1330) (Figure 2.31). However, my altarpiece is displayed as three separate pieces and does not close. This piece is specifically installed
on the wall opposite the deconstructed shoe altars to set up an oppositional dialogue between it and the Mary and Eve stereotypes.

### 3.4.1 Central panel

In Giotto’s, *Polyptych of Bologna* (1332-34) (Figure 3.29), as well as Bernado Daddi’s, *Madonna enthroned* (1334) (Figure 3.30), the central placement of the Virgin Mary demonstrates her importance, while her blue and gold robes, and the Christ child on her lap, attest to her divinity and status as the queen of heaven and mother of God. Her formal placement on the throne underscores this point. In contrast to the rigid formalism of these traditional altarpieces, I present an image of myself, informally seated, clad in the traditional red and blue of the Madonna. The pointed prow of the boat in which I am seated acts as a flattened echo of the Madonna’s pointed throne, or a mandorla that is formed when two circles intersect. According to J.E. Cirlot (2002:326), the mandorla signifies the intersection of “heaven and earth”, as each circle represents heaven and earth respectively. I posit that as the curved sides of the boat suggest an intersection of sacred and the profane, it provides a suitable “womb” or “cradle” for the developing composite self (Cirlot 2002:92; Walker 2013:134). The boat extends onto the left hand panel which actively challenges the contained segments of traditional altarpieces and, I argue, the strict containment of the Mary stereotype. Thus, the movement implied by the breaching of these borders stands in direct contrast to the stasis of the Madonna and fairy tale heroines, such as Andersen’s Karen, sans her feet, and the Grimm’s Snow White entombed in her glass coffin.

The Christ child on the Virgin’s lap is replaced in my painting by the pig that is no longer dependent or passive but exploring. She is separate but contained within the boat, indicating that she is part of a composite whole. By placing her in the prow of the boat, I suggest that she has the agency to step beyond the picture plane into ‘real’ lived space. The red of my clothing, which functions as a boundary, alludes to the presence of the guardians who regulate my self-defined order. Additionally, I have incorporated fragments of the guardians at the apex of this panel, as well as in the side panels. In this way I suggest that the external world provides context for this reconstructed, composite identity.

Borders are further challenged by the large draped cloth panel that spills beyond the margins of the boat, and beyond the borders of the central and right hand panels. The presence of the cloth alludes to the ambivalence exemplified by Bernini’s, *Saint Theresa* (1647-52). Moreover, the fact that I am actively sewing emblematic representations of the body onto the cloth suggests that I am consciously reclaiming my body, and creatively reconfiguring its symbolic signification. The fact that I portray the act of sewing rather than the completed task demonstrates that the task is ongoing. This cloth references
not only the substrate upon which I re-construct profane womanhood but also the actual canvas
stretched across this panel.

The same cloth is employed as a photographic reference for the self-defined boundaries and threshold
depicted in the reconstructed narrative series.

3.4.2 Side panels

Each side panel is divided into sections. The top portion of each is dedicated to images embroidered in
red and blue thread and framed by embroidery hoops. These colours refer back to the colour index that
I established in the deconstruction cycle, in which blue refers to the sacred and red to the profane. By
integrating both colours in the same image, I articulate the integration of the sacred and the profane in
the composite identity that emerged in the narrative series. For instance, the blue, embroidered,
diagrammatic image of a brain imposed onto a red, linear, representation of Stanhope’s Eve re-
integrates body and mind. It challenges the Apostle Paul’s\textsuperscript{10} implication that women lack the capacity
for reason as they are easily deceived (in Warner 1994: 52). On the right, I impose a red diagram of a
heart over a blue linear fragment of Victor’s \textit{Eight Marys}, panel seven. In this way, I concur with Victor’s
subversion of the idealised sacrifice of self that is encoded in traditional representations of Mary’s
suffering heart.\textsuperscript{11}

Nine square, collaged fragments of female bodies, arranged in rows of three, occupy the mid-section of
each panel. These disembodied fragments allude to the piecemeal, symbolic cutting away of parts of
my body to avoid stumbling into sin that I refer to in Chapter One (Mathew 8:18). This reference is
underscored by the placement of a knife beneath each block of images. Each image has been cropped
from works that I have engaged with while working on this project and then positioned to generate
tension and dialogue, through which I refute the profane symbolism ascribed to the female body.

I have extracted images of feet and hands from Stanhope’s \textit{Eve Tempted} (Figure 3.9), Victor’s \textit{Eight
Marys}, panel one and two, (Figure 2.15), Rego’s \textit{Snow White swallows the apple} (Figure 2.12) and
\textit{Snow White and her step-mother} (Figure 2.13). Each image is arranged around the central image of the
head of a gutted fish, referencing my \textit{Deconstruction Cycle} (Figure 3.1) and indexing my visual critique
of the patriarchal argument for the profanity of women. The specific selection of feet and hands relates
to Andersen’s \textit{The Red Shoes} and the need to reclaim his protagonist Karen’s agency.

\textsuperscript{10} I refer to Paul’s argument in my introduction.
\textsuperscript{11} My discussion of this panel is outlined in Chapter Two.
Each selected fragment becomes an index for the artist’s original image. For instance, the feet of Victor’s second Mary stand self-consciously in a pool of abject fluid and refer to Victor’s substitution of the lived experience of a young woman for the sanitised mythology of the Virgin Mary. Similarly, the hands of Rego’s wicked step-mother, awkwardly inspecting Snow White’s underwear, reference a young girl’s coming of age with the appearance of her first menstrual cycle. I argue that each fragment on its own conveys the real dilemmas that a young woman faces. Additionally, the larger images point to each female artist’s capacity to express an impassioned visual argument that utilises legitimate emotion and has its origins in reasoned argument. All of this is at odds with Stanhope’s portrayal of a vacuous and passive Eve (shown in the first block, of the first row) at the mercy of the superior argument of the devil.

While hands and feet re-occur on the right hand panel, I broaden my focus to include other body parts. I utilise fragments of Bernini’s Ecstasy of Saint Theresa (Figure 3.17 and 3.28) including an eye with the capacity to see, her mouth, that enables her to speak, as well as her foot and her hand. The selection of Bernini’s Saint Theresa (Figure 3.17) is predicated upon my discussion of the marginal status of the sculpture earlier in this chapter. The middle row of this grouping focuses on the hearts of Mary and Saint Theresa. The first image, to the left of the sacred heart of Mary, is taken from what was believed to be a holy relic, the actual heart of Saint Theresa that was pierced by the angel’s arrow (Warner 1976:326-327). In contrast, Victor’s drawn image of the pegged chest of her middle-aged Mary parodies the self-annihilating, and unrealistic sacrifice required by the previous two images on the far right (Figures 2.16 and 3.28). This sets up a dialogue between the real suffering hearts of women tied to domestic drudgery and the perceived reality of the relic. The inclusion of further selections from panel seven of Victor’s Eight Marys, such as the hand holding an iron, supports the theme of domestic drudgery.

In contrast to the two-dimensional images on each panel, the lower register of both panels is dedicated to real objects. A real hammer, screwdriver and paintbrush have been attached to the left hand panel, objects whose use would traditionally consign a woman to the margins. However, as the daughter of a divorced woman, I learned to make use of each one. These same implements have been employed in this project. They speak to my reclaimed agency and stand in direct contrast with the dishcloth occupying the lower register of the right hand panel. This dishcloth refers to the customary domestic role of women while its companion, is a fragment of the cloth that I refer to in my discussion of the central panel of this altarpiece. At the same time, It is a real fragment of the cloth upon which I embroidered the images in the top register of these side panels.
3.5 Conclusion

As I stated in the introduction to this chapter, the overarching consideration in the production of each artwork is to investigate the possibility of reconstructing the patriarchal designation that womanhood is essentially profane. This is achieved through the application of critical discourse concerning the sacred and the profane as it pertains to the feminine. However, to fully engage with my research question, I am required to bring my lived experience, as a woman wrestling with taboos that circumscribe her relationship with her body and her mind. Consequently, my subjective and complex relationship with the Mary and Eve stereotypes gives rise to the altars and altarpieces of the Deconstruction Cycle. My need to liberate and embrace the ostensibly profane body from patriarchal misinformation motivated the Reconstruction cycle. Finally, my desire to undo centuries of patriarchal conditioning by incorporating mind and body and integrating the sacred and profane led to the Incorporation Cycle through which I am able to recognise in myself a functional synthesis, operating within the context of my lived experience. It is this final stage that permits me to reconstruct the heart of Mary and the mind of Eve in the side panels of my altarpiece and thereby embrace the possibility of wholeness for the first time in my life.
3.6 Illustrations

Figure 3.1
Hilary Keegan, Deconstruction Cycle: Ironing board series, panels 1-5, 2018, oil on canvas with burnt felt and wax decals (collection of artist)

Figure 3.2
Catalogue photograph of Mary hands out: statue of Our Lady of Grace from the online catalogue Catholic statues of Jesus, Mary, saints, angels, pedestals indoor or outdoor.[Sa]. Fiberglass resin and paint (Catholic statues Sa:2)

Figure 3.3
Hilary Keegan, Not so happily ever after, Digital photo-collage, 2016 (collection of artist)

Figure 3.4
Hilary Keegan, Middle-aged Venus, Digital photo-collage, 2016 (collection of artist)
Figure 3.5
Photographer unknown, *Photograph of artist's mother preparing to leave for her honeymoon*, 1963 (collection of artist)

Figure 3.6
Hilary Keegan, *Selfie* Photograph of the artist, 2016 (photograph by author)

Figure 3.7
Hilary Keegan, *Photograph of the artist's sister*, 2018 (photograph by author)
Figure 3.8

Orcagna, *Dormition and Assumption of the Virgin*, 1359, Marble, lapis lazuli, gold and glass inlay, Church of Orsanmichele, Florence (Kren 1996c [sp])
Figure 3.9

John Roddam Spencer Stanhope, *Eve Tempted*, 1877, tempera on panel, 161.2 x 75.5 cm, Manchester Art Gallery (Eve Tempted:1)

Figure 3.10

Melisa Cadel, *Rebirth again*, 2011, White Earthenware, String, Pencil, and Encaustic (Cadel [Sa] 8)
Figure 3.11
Hilary Keegan, First shoe experiment, 2016, found shoes, paint and nails (collection of artist)

Figure 3.12
Hilary Keegan, Second shoe experiment, 2016, gauze bandages, fabric offcuts, embroidery thread and wax (collection of artist)

Figure 3.13

Figure 3.14
Hilary Keegan, Blue Shoes I, II and III, 2018, felt, Melton fabric, wax and oil paint (collection of artist)
Figure 3.15
Hilary Keegan, *Narrative series: Prologue*, 2017-18, oil on canvas with cotton stitching (collection of artist)

Figure 3.16

Figure 3.17
Figure 3.18
Hilary Keegan, *Reconstructed Narrative*, panel 1, 2018, oil on canvas (collection of artist)

Figure 3.19
Hilary Keegan, *Reconstructed Narrative*, panel 2, 2018, oil on canvas (collection of artist)

Figure 3.20
Hilary Keegan, *Reconstructed Narrative*, panel 3, 2018, oil on canvas (collection of artist)
Figure 3.21
Hilary Keegan, *Reconstructed Narrative*, panel 4, 2018, oil on canvas (collection of artist)

Figure 3.22
Hilary Keegan, *Reconstructed Narrative*, panel 5, 2018, oil on canvas (collection of artist)

Figure 3.23
Hilary Keegan, *Reconstructed Narrative*, panel 6, 2018, oil on canvas (collection of artist)
Figure 3.24
Hilary Keegan, *Reconstructed Narrative*, panel 7, 2018, oil on canvas
(collection of artist)

Figure 3.25
Hilary Keegan, *Reconstructed Narrative*, panel 8, 2018, oil on canvas
(collection of artist)
Figure 3.26

Hilary Keegan, *Reconstructed Altarpiece*, 2018, mixed media on three panels (collection of artist)
Figure 3.27
Hilary Keegan, *Reconstructed Altarpiece*, detail of left panel 2018, mixed media on panels (collection of artist)

Figure 3.28
Hilary Keegan, *Reconstructed Altarpiece*, detail of left panel 2018, mixed media on panels (collection of artist)
Figure 3.29

Giotto, ca. 1332-34, Polyptych of Bologna, Tempera and gold on wood, from the Rocca di Galliera, National Picture Gallery, Bologna (Giotto: the great pictorial art begins with the master 2016:1)
**Figure 3.30**

Bernardo Daddi, *Madonna Enthroned with angels and saints*, 1334,
Tempera on wood, 56 x 26 cm,
Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence
(Kren 1996a:Daddi)

**Figure 3.31**

Bernardo Daddi, ca. 1330, *The Virgin Mary with Saints Thomas Aquinas and Paul*. Tempera and gold leaf on panel, 121.6 x 113 cm, The J. Paul Getty Museum
(Giotto & Pacino 2012:1)
Conclusion

The initial phase of this research project was particularly challenging as it pertains directly to my own lived experience. It was only after I had established the framework of theory in Chapter One that I was able to appreciate that my discomfort emanated from my own deeply held notions of the sacred and the profane. I became aware that my while my stance of the impact of religion on my own life, on my family, and on countless women in South Africa was critical, the taboos that lead to the construction of the Mary and Eve stereotypes are still deeply embedded in my psyche. My dis-ease is unsurprising, as my research question challenges notions of the sacred and the profane that have been entrenched for centuries, particularly within the patriarchal order of the Catholic Church, which was entrusted with my formative religious education. I began to comprehend how deeply the Mary and Eve stereotypes have circumscribed and controlled my identity. My experience in therapy, of integrating ‘lost’ aspects of myself, prompted me to ask if it was possible to integrate purportedly sacred and profane aspects of myself. My research revealed that the sacred and the profane, as they are defined within the realm of patriarchal religions, and Catholicism in particular, could never come into contact. They could therefore never integrate. A different formulation was required, which meant that the Mary and Eve stereotypes were indeed untenable.

My analyses of illustrations intended for consumption by the young female readers of The Red Shoes and Snow White supported this conclusion. My analyses revealed that the Mary and Eve stereotypes are employed in these images to activate biblical allusions to stories such as the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. I determined that the Mary and Eve stereotypes, and the fairy tale tropes that masked them, were constructed to persuade young girls and women that it is better to be the young, submissive and silent virgin than the older, aggressive and vocal older woman. Unfortunately, no woman can live up to the fairy tale ideal, let alone the Marian ideal, unless as Kristeva (1985: 149) remarks, one is a nun or a saint.

The final component of my research, my artworks, speak to the necessity of a self-created space, within which I have been able to integrate complex and nuanced aspects of the feminine that would otherwise be reviled and ejected as profane. Occupation of this space allows me to explore previously vilified aspects of my feminine identity in a manner that negates the destructiveness of constantly reducing myself to propitiate the patriarchal ideal of the feminine. Instead, my artworks explicate a process of re-integration that might be viewed as therapeutic and, therefore, of value not only to myself, but also to other women.
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