

GRISELDA'S SISTERS: WIFELY PATIENCE AND SISTERLY RIVALRY IN ENGLISH TALES AND BALLADS

The present study is aimed at two widespread themes in traditional English narratives: the twin sisters separated at birth who vie with each other for the same man, a tale which is best known in medieval literature as the *Lay Le Freine*, and that of the patient wife, well-known in English through Chaucer's *The Clerk's Tale*. Both stories seem to have common mythological roots, marked folktale features, and a long survival in popular ballads. After tracing a possible genealogy and analysing the variants so as to show how the two stories are related, we will account for the significance of their themes within English culture.

1. HAZEL TREE AND ASH TREE: A TALE OF ORIGINS

The oldest extant version of our stories in English is the *Lay Le Freine* copied in the Auchinleck MS (c. 1330), which is a translation of Marie de France's twelfth-century lay *Fresne*. Its Spanish editor Ana María Holzbacher (1993: 37) calls it an example of 'feminine docility' in love. Indeed, the heroine Fresne is always obedient to the man (Gurun) who takes her from the convent near which she had been abandoned as baby inside an ash tree ('fresne' in Marie's French), even when, after years of cohabitation, he decides to degrade her from lover to servant, in order to marry a rich lady called Le Codre (Marie's French for 'hazel tree'). In one of the passages missing in the English version,¹ Sir Gurun's feudatories compare the two ladies using the metaphor of trees:

¹ These passages are usually supplied by English editors in Henry W. Weber's translation of Old French in counterfeit Middle English. See Sands, ed. 1986: 244, lines 341-8.

Sire, funt il, ci pres de nus
Ad *un produme* per a vus;
Une fille ad, ki est sun heir:
Mut poëz tere od li aveir!
La Codre ad nun la damesele;
En cest païs nen ad si bele.
Pur le freisne que vus larrez
En eschange le codre avrez;
En *la codre ad noiz e deduiz,*
Li freisnes ne porte unke fruiz! (Holzvbacher, ed. 1993: 152, lines
331-40. My italics)

They oppose the two ladies by reminding their lord that, unlike ash trees, hazel trees are fruitful of nuts and delight ('la codre ad noiz e deduiz'), an allusion to the fact that La Codre has a wealthy father ('un produme'), whose heiress she is ('un fille ad, ki est sun heir'), and so Gurun will have many lands through her ('mut poëz tere od li aveir!'), whereas he had none of Fresne ('li freisnes ne porte unke fruiz!'), whose family and fortune are unknown. Fortunately La Codre turns out to be Fresne's twin sister, and, as Fresne is recognised by her rich family, the lord marries her.

The metaphor of trees must be central to the meaning of the lay *Fresne*. It was probably a very old motif by the time Marie translated (or so she claimed) her lays from the Breton language. In his imaginative search for the feminine sources of bardic poetry Robert Graves (1961: Chapter 15) refers to a conflict between the hazel as the Irish tree of eloquence and wisdom, and the ash tree of Woden, the Germanic god of wisdom. Thus the conflict between hazel and ash reproduces the clash between Celtic and Germanic cultures that took place in France as well as Britain. Both trees are Wednesday ('Woden's-day', a word suggesting the final victory of Germanic culture and its ash tree) in Graves' reconstructed tree-calendar. As for the reason why two trees should vie for wisdom, it may be sought in a more recent quest for the Great Goddess that Graves and many other poets recreated: Anne Baring and Jules Cashford (1991: 498) trace the problem back to the Biblical dissociation of the Tree of Knowledge from the Tree of Immortal Life by the father-god Yahweh. The dissociation and subsequent Fall from Eden is, in Baring and Cashford's view, a key stage in the setting up of a patriarchal imagery that weakened and distorted an original goddess myth, wherein there was only one tree with two

qualities, and therefore no conflict. Whether we agree entirely with such mythological explanations or not, the fact remains that the confrontation between women for marriage is, as we shall see, a recurrent theme in traditional narratives, and that it might have originated in a founding myth of patriarchy: the splitting of twin trees of the same root or family by a powerful lord, god, or husband, for whom the sister-trees spend all their feminine wisdom and energy.

The tree metaphor of the lay *Fresne* was forgotten in the English tradition, as in the course of the fourteenth century French ceased to be a major literary medium in England,¹ and the word 'fresne' (or 'freine', as it was written in England) became meaningless. The variants of tale are often surprising and tend to distort it beyond recognition. For instance, the only Spanish version of *Fresne* is the 'Romance de Espinelo', in which the separated twins are brothers (not sisters) and the hero is named after the 'espino' ('thorn tree' instead of ash tree) where he was abandoned. The closest post-medieval English cognate of both the story and the name of 'Freine' is the ballad of 'Fair Annie' [Child 62D], dated as late as 1769.² In this ballad the old motif of the twins separated at birth by their mother to avoid shame has disappeared, though in some variants [Child 62F], perhaps to follow the fashion of many contemporary ballads, they add the explanation that the heroine had been abducted by a Scottish lord. But, as in the medieval lays, the conflict between the sisters for the man is solved when they recognise each other and the one just arrived renounces the lord and shares the family's ship-loads of gold with Fair Annie, so that he can find her acceptable as his bride.

In a more distant analogue of the story, 'The Twa Sisters' [Child 10], the sisters' rivalry goes to the extreme of murder. In some variants [Child 10A] the elder sister murders the younger as they see their father's ship come sail-

¹ The state of French in relation to English as a cultural vehicle is reflected in the Auchinleck MS, many of whose items, such as the *Lay Le Freine* are English poems translated from French, and one item (20. Xxvi. 'The Sayings of the Four Philosophers') in macaronic Anglo-Norman French. This suggests that the producers of the MS expected its readers to be vaguely familiar with French. See *The Auchinleck Manuscript*, ed. D. Pearsall and I.C. Cunningham (London: The Scholar Press / The National Library of Scotland, 1979).

² Our ballad references are all to *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 5 vols., ed. by F.J. Child (1882-1898; reprt. New York: Dover, 1965). Ballads are cited with their number of order and the letter of variant in Child's classification between square brackets: [].

ing in (perhaps the father was going to deprive the elder daughter of her rights of primogeniture because he liked the younger one better?). In others [Child 10B, C, D, etc.] the motive is explicit, for a suitor has given the elder a gold ring but the younger his true love: he would marry the heiress but love the fairer one. The questions of inheritance and dowry become dramatically decisive in the ultimate, violent, confrontation between sisters.

2. PATIENCE REWARDED: THE ORDER OF PATRIARCHY

The popular tale of Griselda seems to answer a question that *Fresne* left behind: what would happen if the other sister did not come and give the heroine the necessary dowry and portion of their father's land? What if the lord actually married the heroine despite her poverty? The answer is in patient suffering. As Peter Burke (1994: 164) sums it up, in traditional culture 'Most popular heroines were objects, admired not so much for what they did as for what they suffered.' In Patricia Shaw's memorable classification of the roles of women in medieval English literature (1989: 210), the first principal role of young women is 'that of the patient and longsuffering wife, the victim, frequently, of the machinations of an older man or woman.' When it is older women that victimise the heroine, they are Professor Shaw's 'lither ladies', 'the precursors, therefore, of the Snow White and Cindirella bogey-women familiar to us from childhood' (ibid). When they are men, they are often the heroine's own husband.

Medieval culture made an analogy between a wife's relation to her husband and (the soul of) man's relation to God, and the Christian model of patience with God is Job. In *The Canterbury Tales* Job is first cited ironically in the Wife of Bath's role-reversal, when she has got the upper hand of her husband Wilkyn: 'Syth ye so preche of Jobes patience. / Suffreth alwey, syn ye so wel kan preche' (III.436).¹ The biblical figure appears in another ironic context when the Fiend mentions him to the Summoner in the *Friar's Tale* (III.1491). But it is in the *Clerk's Tale* that Job's figure becomes central, since Grisilde's patience his associated with his, when the Clerk argues that women's humility and patience is always greater than men's (IV.932). The

¹ Line quotations of *The Canterbury Tales* refer to *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford: OUP, 1988).

wisdom of women about patience and its high cost is confirmed in *The Tale of Melibee* as his wife Prudence advises him not to wreak rash vengeance upon the men who have just beaten her up and wounded his daughters (VII.999). Finally, the *Parson's Tale* makes Job a more universal exemplum of penitence (X.176). In sum, Job may be the model of man's patience and humility towards god, but it is wives that best understand these virtues, despite Chaucer's remarks on the impossibility of finding real Griseldas any more (IV.1177-1188). Indeed, Professor Helen Cooper (1989: 191) has noted that Chaucer's Grisilde, in comparison with some analogues to the tale specifically designed as allegories to show God's treatment of the soul, 'makes the husband less an analogy for God than a contrast to him.' Furthermore, by heightening the pathos of her situation, the master poet encourages readings like that of E. T. Hansen (1992: 191), according to which Walter's own self-confident role as husband is severely disturbed:

Galled by the unbearable way in which this woman eludes his tyranny by refusing to resist and define it, he can only torture her again and again, seeking to determine her elusive identity as well as his own, to find the other Griselda, someone he can master in order to find himself.

Griselda's fortitude transcends the weakness and submission patriarchy expected of wives, therefore undermining the god-husband's identity. Her virtue (and Hansen reminds us of the connection of the word with Latin *vir*, 'man') makes her like patriarch Job, manly, strong.

A subversion of patriarchal roles continues in various degrees throughout the ballad versions of Griselda's story, and most explicitly in 'Child Waters' [Child 63] when the pregnant heroine Ellen dresses up as a page *boy* to face the tests her man will put her through.¹ Nevertheless, the suffering of such heroines perhaps leaves the symbolic order of patriarchy more insecure and laden with guilt, but formally intact. Tales and ballads of the Griselda type probably kept their illustrative effect as role models for

¹ The motif of cross-dressing is very common in ballads, and also in medieval hagiography. For men it had a mystical meaning, while for women it was more a practical device to overcome the limitations society imposed on them. See Caroline W. Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987: 291).

patient wives, along with their potential for deconstructing those models. Likewise, they might present exempla of what godly husbands should *not* be, or, for that matter, of what *God* should not be, by making too Satanic ‘the godlike, otherworldly character of Child Waters, without which his testing of fair Ellen would be intolerable’ (Fowler 1968: 181). Yet, whether he is a god or a demon, he stays in power.

Some ballads which bear certain similarities to ‘Child Waters’ might be regarded as re-writings of it from women’s point of view, since they all seem to belong to the period after minstrels and poets had been largely replaced by women in the oral transmission of ballads. The outstanding example is, of course, Mrs Brown of Falkland, whose repertory included also versions of ‘Fair Annie’ and ‘Child Waters’ (but these two can be traced, as we have seen, to earlier times), as well as a ballad like ‘Willie o Douglas Dale’ [Child 101A], which Fowler (1968: 302) considered in some respects ‘an anti-“Child Waters”’, because a noble lady elopes with a man of lower degree and he is the one to serve her in submission to all her whims. Others deal with lost patience and revenge. In ‘Lord Thomas and Fair Annet’ [Child 73] he hesitates wavers between the fortune of the nut-brown girl and the beauty of Fair Annet; finally, the jilted nut-brown girl stabs Fair Annet at the altar. Finally, in ‘Lord Thomas and Lady Margaret’ [Child 260], she poisons him. As in the case of the story of rival sisters, in the stories of patient brides there is a tragic extreme in which the tensions that patriarchy both generated and tried to contain, break out murderously.

3. FOLKTALE PATTERNS: KINDRED STORIES

For a comprehensive view of the narrative aspects of English tales of suffering wives in their medieval and post-medieval stages, it will be useful to compare the narrative form of *Lay le Freine* and ‘Fair Annie’ on the one hand, and *The Clerk’s Tale* and ‘Child Waters’ on the other. That the four stories are related is illustrated by Fowler (1968: 105 and 283) in his suggestion that ‘Fair Annie’ may be an epitomised version of ‘Patient Griselda’ (rather than of *Fresne*) sung by sixteenth and seventeenth-century minstrels. This relationship becomes most apparent when they are reduced to their bare narrative structure. Propp’s morphology (1968) has been applied to Child’s

collection of ballads (Beatie 1978; Buchan 1991), proving that they fit into common folktale patterns.¹ It will be noticed that the ballads, by focusing on the emotional core and on pure narrative action, tend to reduce the story to essentials by making most of the circumstances and motivations implicit, instead of explaining them. Some of these, particularly the dowry, are cultural motivations that the logic of Propp's morphology brings to the fore as latent or virtual functions of the narrative:

Lay le Freine

Fair Annie

1. Initial situation (a). The envious wife of a knight accuses another lady of laying with two men because she bore twins.	[Preliminary functions, here presented in lower case letters, are not essential, so the ballad doesn't include any]
4. Violation (d). The knight rebukes his wife for speaking calumnies lest they should be cursed for this violation of good conduct.	
9. Preliminary misfortune (i). Her slander brings about the punishment of bearing twins herself.	
10. Villainy / Lack (A). The mother asks the midwife to get rid of one of the twins so as to avoid shame. [This abandonment will cause the heroine's lack of dowry and so her poor marriage prospects.]	[The reason for the heroine's separation from her rich family is not told in most ballads (and when it is, it seems to be a late addition, like her abduction by a Scottish lord in Child 62F), but her lack of dowry is essential to understand her plight.]
11. Mediation (B). The midwife intercedes to spare the baby's life.	

¹ For the aims of the present study we prefer this analysis according to themes and motifs to one based on structure and formula, such as David Buchan, *The Ballad and the Folk* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972) or Flemming G. Andersen, *Commonplace and Creativity: The Role of Formulaic Diction in Anglo-Scottish Traditional Balladry* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1985).

12. Contrary Action (C). The baby girl is abandoned inside an ash tree near a convent with her mother's cloak and ring.	
13. Departure (D). A knight falls in love with Freine and takes her to live with him 'as if she had been his wedded wife' (line 310).	The ballad begins by telling that Fair Annie has given her maidenhood and borne children to her lord,
14. Testing (D). The knight, following the advice of his counsellors, takes a rich wife, Le Codre. The ultimate ordeal is having to prepare everything for the wedding, even the bed.	Who has now decided to take a rich wife. She is suffering as she and her children watch the bride's ship. She has to lay the tables for the wedding banquet and even to make the bridal bed.
15. Reaction (E). She endures it all in silence and behaves as a perfect servant and hostess, and lays her own cloak on the bridal bed to make it look richer and worthy of her lord.	She endures her suffering alone, but she cannot help crying and taking her harp to sing her lament.
27. Recognition (Q). Freine's repentant mother sees the cloak and realises who she is	Her sister the bride recognises her, renounces to the marriage and gives her gold.
28. Exposure (Ex). The mother confesses.	
31. Wedding / Reward (W). The wedding is annulled so that the lord can marry Freine.	[Fair Annie now has a proper dowry]

In comparison with these straightforward narratives, Chaucer's tale of Griselda and its ballad counterpart are more elaborate, novelistic treatments of the same source of drama, namely, the inequality of man and woman in society, sex and marriage. The theme of the twin sisters separated at birth is replaced in Griselda's story by her separation from her own children, her daughter replacing Freine's sister as the lord's new bride. In 'Child Waters' the theme disappears altogether, and it is the lord's mother that recognises,

Griselda's sisters: wifely patience and sisterly rivalry

not her noble birth, but the fact that she is giving birth to the lord's first child, and that he is to marry her.

The Clerk's Tale

Child Waters (Percy folio MS)

1. Initial situation (a). Walter, marquis of Lombardy, is convinced by his councillors to take a wife so as to have a descendant.	
2. Reconnaissance (e). He sees beautiful Grisilde and will have no other, even though her father old Janicula is poor.	Fair Ellen tells Child Waters she is pregnant of him.
8. Complicity (h). She subjects herself to the morganatic wedding by pledging absolute obedience.	He offers her two counties for their son to inherit, but she'd rather have his love.
10. Villainy / Lack (A). Her promise (and her lack of marriage portion) leaves her at his mercy.	Her refusal of his offer leaves her at his whim, for he doesn't seem willing to marry.
13. Departure (̄). She leaves her father's home to marry Walter.	Walter makes a journey north allowing Ellen to follow him dressed up as his foot-page.
14. Testing (D). Some years later, longing to test her constancy, he removes from her their daughter, then their son, and later still he announces he will cast her off and take a wife of higher birth.	She runs barefoot after his horse, then he makes her swim across a deep, cold river, and then tells her that the fairest lady in the town they are reaching will be his paramour. Waters' sister pities the foot-page and asks her brother to let 'the boy' sleep with her, but he refuses Ellen all comfort and tells her to go to town and fetch him a prostitute.
15. Reaction (E). She endures all the ordeals with patience and without any complaint.	Ellen endures all the hardship despite her advanced pregnancy & sleeps meekly at the foot of Waters' bed.

18. Task (M). Before being expelled, Grisilde must prepare the household for Walter's new wedding and even give her opinion about his new bride.	In the morning, he orders Ellen to go down to the stable and see to his horses. There her childbirth starts and she must suffer it alone.
19. Solution (I). As Grisilde says she has never seen a lovelier bride and humbly begs him not to put his new wife to trials as he did to herself, he is at last moved to pity.	Waters' mother hears Ellen's moans, calls him and, as he sees the woman's suffering, endurance and love, he is moved to pity her.
27. Recognition (Q). Walter tells Grisilde that his new bride was actually their daughter whom he said he had killed, and the page she brought their son.	(Waters and his mother recognise Ellen as the his own child's rightful mother)
31. Wedding / Reward (W). Grisilde's rags are now definitely replaced by rich robes, and her father and children are restored to their rights.	Waters tells Ellen he will marry her at once.

Thus reduced to their episodic structure, the four tales appear to be related and make up a type of their own. Among the widespread story types that Stith Thompson (1977: 117-8) classified, it is 'The substituted bride' that most closely resembles 'Fair Annie', but not 'Child Waters', which has very few analogues outside Britain (see Child, vol.II: 84), except in other versions of the very popular tale of Griselda. The type called 'The Black and White Bride' (type 403 in Aarne & Thompson 1981: 132-4) has a limited resemblance to our ballads, but it involves magic, a wicked stepmother, and more importantly, a fierce competition between two brides. Virtually the same applies to type 510, 'Cinderella and Cap o' Rushes' (ibid: 175). Only the Griselda story itself (type 887, ibid: 302) really bears a close correspondence with all four of the studied versions, its hallmarks being the godlike man who puts his woman to terrible tests, its realism (no magic is involved), and the fact that women's co-operation prevails over their rivalry.

4. RECURRENT THEMES AND THEIR CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The extremes of 'Fidelity and Innocence' (the epigraph under which Arne and Thompson classify the Griselda type of tale) and the heroine's rebellion in later ballads such as 'Lord Thomas and Lady Margaret' [Child 260] is finely balanced by the women's positive action in 'Child Waters' and 'Fair Annie.' In the oldest versions of the Griselda story, including Petrarch's, Chaucer's and the broadsides in Pepy's collection, it is Griselda's patience alone that wins the day. In 'Fair Annie', however, her life is saved by a kind midwife, her rights as wife are saved by her sister's recognition (and in the lay by her mother's confession). In 'Child Waters' the lord's sister first intercedes for her in vain,¹ and it is eventually his mother that, by urging him to go down to the stable and find Ellen in labour, practically makes Waters take responsibility for Ellen and their new-born infant:

And that beheard his mother deere,
Shee heard her there monand.
She sayd, 'Rise up, thou Childe Waters,
I think thee a cursed man.

For in thy stable is a ghost,
That grievouslye doth grone:
Or else some woman laboures of Childe,
She is soe woe-begone.' [Child 63A, stanzas 37-38]

With these words Waters' mother seems to suggest that either he accepts the existence of the pregnant woman, or the curse of guilt will torment him like a ghost. Far from being a wicked would-be mother-in-law, his mother is the one who brings to an end the heroine's ordeals. Undoubtedly the intervention of women like Mrs Brown of Falkland in the transmission of the story also put an end to its heroine's loneliness against her man.

By Chaucer's time Griselda's patience was regarded as dead and buried in with her in Italy. Yet society changed only to confirm the inequality of men and women in marriage, patriarchy being reinforced by the culture of Protestantism in Britain. The existence of at least two different seventeenth-

¹ Not in all versions. In Mrs Brown of Falkland's version [Child 63B] it is Waters' mother than suspects the foot-page's fat belly.

century printings of the Griselda story in broadside form, previous to the first version of 'Child Waters', confirms the continual popularity of the theme. The end of these broadsides completely overlooks Chaucer's envoy, making Grissel's husband the Marquis celebrate her as a role model:

The Chronicles of lasting fame,
Shall evermore extol the fame,
Of patient Grissel
My most constant wife.¹

No less remarkable is the parallel existence of broadside ballads such as 'A warning for all desperate Women. By the example of Alice Daus who for killing of her husband was burned in Smithfield ...' or 'The vnnatural Wife: Or, The lamentable Murther of one goodman Daus, Lockesmith ...', or 'Anne Wallens Lamentation, For the Murthering of her husband John Wallen...'.² Meanwhile Puritan treatises such as William Gouge's *Of Domesticall Duties* (1622) hammered on the idea that 'The wife's first duty was obedience, an obedience based not merely on logical acceptance, but on her deep belief in the naturalness of her subordination to her husband' (Sharpe 1997: 67). Likewise Cleaver's extremely popular marriage treatise explained that the wife must obey, for 'if she be no subject to her husband, to let him rule all household, especially outward affaires: if she will make head against him, and seeke to haue her owne waies, there will be doing and vndoing. Things will goe backwarde, the house will come to ruine'.³ Shrewish wives and scolds who did not suffer in silence like Griselda were privately disciplined by their husbands, or publicly derided in cucking and charivari.

Such ideas and the stories they inspired rest upon certain marriage rites and customs. As early as the twelfth century the Anglo-Norman ceremony of marriage included the confirmation of the bride's dowry, her father's handing her over to the bridegroom, and the groom's imposition of his ring on her

¹ Final lines of both 'A most excellent and vertuous Ballad of the patient Grissell' and 'An Excellent New Ballad of Patient Grissel', in *The Pepys Ballads: Facsimile Volume I*, ed. W.G. Day (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1987), pp. 34-35 and 520-521.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 120-127.

³ Robert Cleaver, *A Godly Forme of Household Government for Ordering of Priuate Families, According to the Directions of Gods Word* (London: Printed by Thomas Creede for Thomas Man, 1603), p. 88.

(Brooke 1989: 248-9), similar to the lord's gift to his vassal in the feudal ceremony of homage. In the same context the principle of primogeniture was established, under which both the elder and the younger children suffered, according to Lawrence Stone (1979: 71): 'The latter normally inherited neither title nor estate ... and they were therefore inevitably downwardly mobile ... As for the elder sons, their entrepreneurial drive was sapped by the certainty of the inheritance to come.' There are echoes of the resulting tensions between younger and elder sisters sublimated in the generous renunciation of one for the other in 'Fair Annie' and, in the opposite extreme, in the fratricide of 'The Twa Sisters.' In addition, it followed from the dowry system, 'which governed the structure of the English family at all levels of the propertied classes from the sixteenth century on through the nineteenth century', that the head of the family, normally the father, had 'great power in controlling the marriages of his children, since he alone could provide the necessary portions for his daughters' (Stone: 72). So far as social history can be learned from the rich hoard of Scottish songs, Mary Hamilton (1995: 105) tells us that 'there were many more songs of tenderness in marriage than of strife.' The business side of marriage, however, the bargaining and scheming with daughters' *tochers* (dowries), is also widely demonstrated by the words of several songs, and so are the hardships of the tocherless girl (Hamilton: 86 and 88-90). As the modern dichotomy between money and interest did not exist (Stone: 70), a bride without dowry was rather worthless for a man of property. Hence the cruelty of husbands to their wives in *Griselda* stories: first attracted to them by the girl's beauty, that is, by lust, they subsequently made her compensate with human worth for what she had not been able to provide materially as a bride. As a result, the humble feminine creature has to prove morally, even physically in her sheer endurance, superior to the god.

To sum up, *Griselda* type stories in their various aspects not only dramatise the culture of wifely obedience and sisterly rivalry, but also imagine some solutions and alternatives within their patriarchal order. The continuity of their themes from the Middle Ages to the Modern period suggests that the Renaissance did not involve a very substantial change in popular mentalities. The themes reveal key facets of traditional women's culture across a long time span: their attitudes to the sort of marriage to which they were confined, the drama of winning a husband either through submissiveness or fierce

competition, of resisting the ordeals of sexual inequality, sometimes thanks to the co-operation among women, other times through the heroine's endurance. In the last analysis, the stories throw into disarray patriarchal notions of 'the weak sex', showing that this tag actually referred to the disadvantageous social condition involved by the dowry system.

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