

An Introduction to Childhood Fairy Tales

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Abstract:

Fairy tales are not actually about fairies only, but they have fantasy stories, with fantasy creatures like elves, fairies, dwarfs, witches, beasts, etc. The fairy tales that we know today are Disney's adaptation and retelling of age-old stories. The parents shared these tales with their children in various cultures with variations throughout the world. When discussing the history of fairy tales, their origin goes back much further than the 17th century; many were created by women and retold throughout history. Authors like Charles Perrault, Hans Christian Andersen, and Grimm Brothers were the first ones who took the initiative to collect and retell tales from centuries ago. Moreover, in the collection process, they have preserved these tales from becoming extinct. This paper attempts to look into the history of Fairy tales, their elements, morality, and status in the present time.

Keywords: Charles Perrault, Disney, Fairy Tales, Grimm Brothers, Hans Christian Andersen

Fairy tales are adventurous short stories that have continued to enthrall children globally from one generation to another. Fairy tales from the beginning were not available in the written mode.

Long before they came in written form, fairy tales were propagated through oral tradition like folklore, which is why sometimes it is difficult to distinguish these two. However, fairy tales and folklore in terms of characters, plot, place, moral and religious nature are different from each other. The history of fairy tales is complicated to trace. Still, it is believed that fairy tales have existed for thousands of years, although not perhaps recognized as a genre. Many of today's popular fairy tales have evolved from centuries-old stories that have appeared, with variations, in multiple cultures worldwide.

"Most of the stories began and are still propagated through oral traditions, which are still very much alive in certain cultures. Especially in rural, poorer regions, the telling of tales – from village to village, or from elder to younger, preserves culture and custom while enabling the teller to vary, embellish or adapt the tale as they see fit". (2017)

As these tales were passed down from one generation to the next, they were often altered according to the storyteller. It is also known that these stories were altered by removing some parts which contained any dark and disturbing elements to make them fit for the young audience.

The term fairy tale could be defined as a short story that typically features fantasy creatures like dwarfs, goblins, fairies, elves, giants, mermaids, beasts, or witches; full of magic, evil, love, and morals. Many repeated fairy tales date today back to the 17th century and earlier. Most fairy tales have either French or German influence in them. However, collecting, editing, altering, and publishing these oral narratives was not an easy task. Fortunately, some people were interested in doing this massive task of gathering, editing, and publishing these tales.

"The genre was first marked out by writers of the Renaissance, such as Giovanni Francesco Straparola and Giambattista Basile, and stabilized through the works of later collectors such as Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm. However, the oral tradition of the fairy tale came long before the written page". (2017)

The 'fairy tale' as a genre became popular, and Perrault essentially laid the foundations for this new literary variety with some of his best works. Born on January 12, 1628, Charles Perrault has been considered the "father of fairy tales". "Charles Perrault is the author of some of the most beloved fairy tales. Perrault was an advisor in Louise XIV's court and had a passion for writing. When Perrault left the courtly work, he started collecting tales from peasants, villagers, and workers; and retold these tales for the upper class. Perrault began collecting and publishing traditional folktales designed for children,

including in the volume Tales and Stories of the Past with Morals. Perrault used to alter these stories by adding a bit of magic and fantasy to make them more appealing. After collecting the stories, Perrault published them in 1697 under the Tales of Mother Goose, containing eight fairy tales, including some of his best works like 'Puss in Boots,' 'Little Red Riding Hood' and 'Bluebeard'. This Perrault also fixed the forms of 'Sleeping Beauty' and 'Cinderella.'

Perrault was not the only author who tried to preserve fairy tales. Brothers Grimm were also among those who tried to preserve and retell German fairy tales. Known for popularising 'Hansel and Gretel,' 'Rapunzel,' 'Rumpelstiltskin,' and 'Snow White,' Jacob Ludwig Carl Grimm and Wilhelm Carl Grimm, better known as Brothers Grimm, remain some of the best-known storytellers of folk tales. During the 19th century, the duo was German academics, linguistics, researchers, and authors interested in collecting and publishing folklore. The brothers' fairy tales came from not only peasants but also aristocrats and other noble figures. Grimm Brothers collected and preserved the stories because they considered them essential parts of their heritage. Greatly inspired by Charles Perrault's works, Grimm Brothers rewrote several stories, adding new details and fitting them for children. Brothers Grimm's first volume of fairy tales was published in 1812 under the title "Kinder- und Hausmarchen," also known as "Children's and Household Tales" it featured eighty-six stories. The book gained immense popularity, and over the following

years, both brothers continued to feature more tales in the collection. Over time, the collection became known as "Grimm's Fairy Tales ."It was republished many times, eventually growing from the first collection of eight-six stories to the seventh edition of more than 200 stories.

“The results were threefold: the collection enjoyed wide distribution in Germany and eventually in all parts of the globe; it became and remained a model for the collecting of folktales everywhere; and the Grimms' notes to the tales, along with other investigations, formed the basis for the science of the folk narrative and even of folklore .”(Denecke, 2020)

Several Walt Disney movies, including 'Cinderella' and 'Sleeping Beauty' are adaptations of the Grimm Brothers' fairy tale works. Simultaneously, the tradition of developing fairy tales continued with other authors like Peter Christen Asbjørnsen, Joseph Jacob, Hans Christian Andersen, and George MacDonald. Danish author Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875) is recognized worldwide for his fairy tales. Born to poor parents, Andersen endured many hardships, but he was able to transform his pain into art. Some of his tales are considered by scholar's autobiographies. For instance, "The Ugly Duckling" reflects Andersen's feeling of alienation. While some tales exhibit an optimistic tone, having happy endings, others are deeply pessimistic.

"Indeed, one reason for Andersen's great appeal to both children and adults is that he

was not afraid of introducing feelings and ideas beyond a child's immediate comprehension, yet he remained in touch with the child's perspective. He combined his natural storytelling abilities and great imaginative power with universal elements of folk legend to produce a body of fairy tales that relate to many cultures". (Hans Christian Andersen)

Andersen's works have been translated into more than 100 languages making him the eighth most-translated (acc. to UNESCO) writer. Some of his notable works include "The Ugly Duckling," "The Little Mermaid," "The Snow Queen," "The Princess and the Frog," and "The Little Match Girl."

Removal of dark elements and addition of morals

The credit for altering and retelling the classic tales with much less dark, disturbing, and graphic elements should be given to the authors mentioned above. Most of these fairy tales contain many insolent and explicit elements, which were not fit for young readers. It is because fairy tales initially were not meant for children, but they started as tawdry folklores that adults told for entertainment after kids went to bed. Even the Grimm brothers' first edition of "Nursery and Household Tales" was meant for adults. Only after its poor sales do they decide to republish it for kids. In the original story of "Cinderella" ("Aschenputtel"), there was no fairy godmother. Cinderella received the dress and shoes for the ball under a tree by her mother's grave. Also, to fit the shoe, one

stepsister cut off her heel and the other her toes.

Similarly, in "The Little Mermaid" story, Ariel does not get her prince charming. The prince marries another girl, and Ariel is turned into sea foam. Giambattista Basile's 'Sleeping Beauty' is called "Sun, Moon, and Talia" (1634); the comatose princess was repeatedly raped by the king who visited her. Then she gave birth to his children, all in an unconscious state. In "Little Red Riding Hood," the little girl was eaten by the wolf as a comeuppance for her naivety. Rapunzel becomes pregnant by the prince before they are married in the real version. The evil mother realizes that Rapunzel is expecting, cuts off her hair, and throws her into the castle. The evil mother dangles Rapunzel's hair out the window when the prince returns to see her lure him into the tower. She tells him he will never see her again, and in despair, he throws himself out the window and lands in a patch of thorns, which causes him to go blind.

It was the effort of authors like the Grimm brothers and Disney that they replaced the horrified, gruesome, and dark details; and made a much cleaner version with a happy ending. However, they tried their best to retain the essential folklore character in these tales in this process.

Elements of fairy tales

Character: Most fairy tales feature at least a hero, a helper, and a villain. A hero is often described as a good, brave, kind person without any magical power and is responsible for rescuing someone in danger

or trouble. There is always a helper in the fairy tale; it could be a "humans, animals, or magic beings who assist the hero or main character of the story. This might involve keeping the hero safe from harm, giving advice, or providing a means of rescue. The helpers are often unnamed or anonymous and provide help for no reward. The helper is important to the success of the quest or hero's journey". (Source 4)

Some of the helpers in fairy tales include The ducks in 'Hansel and Gretel,' the dwarfs in 'Snow White,' the fairy godmother in 'Sleeping Beauty and 'Cinderella,' and the elves in 'Elves and The Shoemaker.' Fairy tales are incomplete without villains. These characters have the intention to harm others. Because of their evil intentions, they face bad consequences in the end. The struggle between the hero and the villain — good and evil — is often at the center of the fairy tale and drives the action in the story. The evil stepmother in 'Cinderella,' the queen in 'Snow White,' Ursula in 'The Little Mermaid,' and Mother Gothel from Rapunzel are some most famous villains.

Magic: One of the essential elements of any fairy tale is magic. This is the element that makes a fairy tale more interesting. With the creativity of authors, magic in fairy tales has appeared in various forms. Magic is mainly interpreted in transformation. For instance, with the help of magic, a mermaid's tail can be transformed into human legs, a pumpkin can be turned into a horse carriage, old clothes and shoes can be transformed into

royal clothes fit for a ball, a person can communicate with animals, or it can keep one stay young forever. However, in fairy tales, magic can be evil; through evil magic, a person can be transformed into a beast or frog (or vice versa) or made to sleep for a hundred years. The characters who possess magic powers can use them for good or evil or grant a wish. Fairy tales often feature mythical or magical characters, such as witches, elves, and fairies.

Unknown Place: In many fairy tales, the forest is one of the frequently used settings where some critical action takes place. "It represents the unknown where anything can happen. It is outside of normal experience and is both a magical realm and a place of danger. It is a place of freedom and wildness, where normal rules no longer apply". (Source 5) The idea of a deep, dark, dangerous forest is rooted in German culture. "The forest is a symbol of the natural world, in contrast to the world of humans. It represents something more primitive and untamed". (Source 5) Away from town or village characters experiences something unexpected here. Another commonly used setting in fairy tales is a 'Castel'. The fairy tale castle is the center of the kingdom and often the home of the king and queen. It is associated with wealth, royalty, power, and luxury. It is a defensive structure, so it also represents safety and strength. The castle can also be a place of secrets. It has many rooms where people and objects can be hidden, lost, or locked away. 'Bluebeard,' 'Rapunzel,' Beauty and the Beast, Sleeping Beauty all feature a castle.

Good Vs. Evil: Fairy tales are recited to children for entertainment and a moral purpose. These tales "capture the meaning of morality through vivid depictions of the struggle between good and evil, where characters must make difficult choices between right and wrong ." (2020). Authors of great fairy tales and fantasy stories have incorporated some crucial life lessons in their plots. For instance, 'Little Red Riding Hood' was originally moralized as a warning for pretty young girls not to listen to strangers.

Similarly, "Beauty and the Beast" teaches the simple but important lesson that appearances can be deceptive, that what is seen is not always what it appears to be. 'Hansel and Gretel' teaches us we should not trust strangers, even if they are lovely. It also teaches us to take care of our near and dear ones.

Due to their longevity and various adaptations, fairy tales are criticized for being cliché. However, they are still written in the present day to their enormous popularity. Modern fairy tale authors Naomi Novik, Emily Carroll, Angela Carter, and Neil Gaiman are introducing new tales with new twists and themes. Looking at the present scenario, there are tales with strong female characters. Also, now villains are as crucial as any other characters. For instance, 'Maleficent' portrays the story from the perspective of the eponymous antagonist, depicting her conflicted relationship with the king and princess of a corrupt kingdom. Although

fairy tales are still being written today, that does not mean that people have replaced the old with new ones. The same age-old stories of Perrault and Brothers Grimm are frequently used today. Fairy tales are now propagated through two mediums: picture books and cinema, where the latter is more popular than the previous one. Fairy tales have been a part of our childhood, and they will always be significant to all of us; however cliché it may sound to some people, fairy tales cannot become insignificant or outdated.

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