Fairytales as Psychological Tool in the Development of Children

Abstract

Once upon a time, magic slippers, glass coffins, witches who live in the woods, dwarfs, evil stepmothers and princesses are the gems of popular stories we've all grown up by hearing them up. This paper is helpful to know the effects of fairy tales as well as the importance and meaning of fairy tales on the physiological development of the child. Fairytales have an immense emotional importance for children of different ages. Fairytales helps, guide and assist children in coming to terms with realistic issues in everyday life.

Keywords: Oral Tradition, Fairytales, Child Development, Origin, Everyday Issues, Psychological Perspectives

Introduction

If we want our children to be intelligent, read them fairy tales. If we want them to be more intelligent, read them more fairy tales. The period of childhood is recognized the most fundamental period in one's life, and an adult's attitude is often resulted by childhood experiences. The notion of childhood is constantly changing with the changing of issues in society. Children are shaped by many factors like family, friends, and what they read.

Review of Literature

Johann Schiller insists, Deeper meaning exist in the fairy tales told to me in my childhood than in any truth that is taught in life.[qtd in indick,5] Fairy tales are distinctive as they bring collected moral and corrupt into a small story. The story openly lands to the plot leaving nothing to ponder. Fairy tales brings out and explore qualities a person should possess and their opposites. These tales commonly meant for young children but they are very helpful to all ages. Tolkein in his essay "On Fairy-Stories" comments that fairy stories allow the reader to look over his own world from the perception of a different world. It was in fairy stories that I first divined the potency of the words, and the wonder of things, such as stone, and wood, and iron, tree and grass, house and fire, bread and wine. He suggests that fairy stories provide moral or emotional consolation, through their happy endings, which he terms as Eucatastrophe.

Aim of the Study

For generations, Fairytales have been popular children's stories, but they are not just entertaining tales. This paperexposes the use of fairytales as an assistance in child development, fairytales as beneficial tools in moral and social development of child.

A young child mind contains a rapidly expanding collection of often ill-assorted and only partially integrated impressions: some correctly seen aspects of reality, but many more elements completely dominated by fantasy. Fantasy fills the huge gaps in a child's understanding which are due to the immaturity of his thinking and his lack of pertinent information. [Bettelheim, 61]

A child begins fantasizing with incorrectly or correctly observed part of reality, and this produces anxieties in him and he gets carried away by them. The child turns out to be so puzzled that his little mind is not able to sort out the complex conditions. The simple stories, **Fairytales** benefits the child to understand the reality in a much more organized manner.

Almost all the people can easily recall a favorite fairytale from their childhood.Fairytales areusually read to children as bedtime stories, and are one of the first stories theylearn to read on their own. Fairytales amuse the child with castles, magic, royalties and happily ever after. A child likes reading fairytales because they depict the belief that no matter how many setbacks and defeats he may meet, he will finally be able to overcome all

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these difficulties and lead a happy life. The key features in fairytales that inspires people to live an ideal life and a perfect world can be called the Utopian Drive. A utopia isidle community or society and imagined that possess highly desirable or nearly perfect socio-political-legal system.*Bloch* in his short essay *"The fairy tales moves on its own in time" (1930)* commented that-

> *The fairy tale narrates a wish-fulfillment which is not bound by its own time and the apparel of its contents…One can also find the demons of old times, who return in the present as economic ogres. The political strategy of the leading 200 families is fate. [Bloch,167]*

The desire for an ideal world or say utopian drive can never vanish and fairytales completes this need.

These stories with their magical world provide **Escapism**. Sometimes diving deep in a book, disturbing ourselves with a story or allowing our mind wander may be exactly what our brain needs. Escapism through fairytales benefits to avoid a boring or an unpleasant life. Fairytales helps a child to travel from the world of harsh realities into the world of excitement and imagination, thus fairytales are pure escapism. Fairytales punishes bad behavior and rewards good behavior. In literature when bad characters are punished and good characters are rewarded, by an ironic twist of fate then the literary view of Poetic Justice is met. Children often have a solid sense of poetic justice, wanting to see an evil stepmother punished. The poetic justice brings up about when the villain gets punished but in so many fairytales it is more about the success of the hero than about notifying the child against the bad behavior that leads to punishment. Psychological methods to fairytales often see the genre as offering lessons as how to live regardless of hardships one faces.Everyone knows some kind of childhood fairy tale. Fairytales promises the child that even critical impossible situations can be overcome, and inspires him that he too can make it.Usually, it is believed that these imaginative stories were written with children in mind, but in reality, they were not. Fairy tales have grown through history and are thought of as the first mass media. The origin of the fairytales is never known, the genre has a vast history that can be followed through time.

In the beginning myths or oral stories, about humans and Gods were circulated. These myths tried to explain natural forces to reduce fears. The stories gave a feeling of belonging and the faith that miracles with some kind of magic are possible to create a better world.Oral stories arevery smooth, each Storyteller has the ability to change the content. There is a relationship between the listener and the teller,the storyteller understands the reactions of the audience and modify the contentto fit a particular group.*I.A. Richard's* Reader-response theory reveals the reader as an active agent who imparts "real existence" to the work and finishes its meaning through interpretation. Reader-response criticism debates that literature

should be viewed as a performing art in which each reader makes their own, possibly exclusive, text-related performance. In the same way these fairytales have transformed over the time in accordance to the need of reader or listener.

> *Fairy tales, are the result of a story being shaped and reshaped by being told millions of times, by different adults to all kinds of other adults and children. Each narrator, as he told the story, dropped and added story to make it more meaningful to himself and to the listener's, whom he knew well. When talking to a child, the adult responded to what he surmised from the child's reaction. Thus, the narrator let his unconsciousness understanding of what the story told be influenced by that of a child. Successive narrators adapted the story according to the questions the child asked the delight and fear he expressed openly or indicated by the way he struggled up against the adult. Slavishly sticking to the way, a fairy story is printed robs it of much of its value. The telling of the story to a child, to be effective, has to be an interpersonal event, shaped by those who participated in it. [Bettelheim,154]*

There is a sense of agelessness in fairytales. Oral traditions can be grouped into different types, like memorates,myths,legends,and folktales. A memorate is an explanation of a personal experience or encounter with the paranormal, such as a ghost story or other expression of the spirit to a human being. Legends are oral traditions related to specific places often involving culture ghosts' witches, heroes, or some other events related to that place. They can involve the recent or distant past,connecting people and the land. For example, the Legend of Sleepy Hollowis a version of events which happened in a particular place.

Myths depicts the initial possible time, including creation of stories. Myths account for the creations of the society and world, for example how women and men were evolved and how they are unique from one another. Myths have the supremacy to dictate how things should be, and helps in shaping, forming and carrying on traditions in a society.

In contrast to other types of oral traditions, fairytales are recognized as events which did not actually occurred but are useful for providing social or moral lessen for entertainment.

Meek in her book *"How Texts Teach What Readers Read"(1988)*expresses about the young readers:*They have innocent eyes, language in the making, fewer presuppositions about the predictable and less experience of established conventions of narrative. They can be counted on as allies by virtue of their curiosity and a huge desire to learn how the world works (Meek, 14).*Children should begiven the appropriate literature that would help them in their further development. And fairy tales entirely relates

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with a child's mental scope of knowledge and represents the real world to a child the way he understands. Fairy tales helps a young child make sense of what it is to be human and helps him understand the world around him. The fairytale genre opens doors for children to moral psychological and social development.

Stories are important in everyone's lives and most significant to the lives of children. Children gain a sense of who they are, through these stories. The story telling to themselves and others about what have happened to them, they form their personalities through fitting in their unique, personal family histories with the legends of the culture.

Bruno Bettelheim claims fairy tales of great worth, when it comes to the upbringing of children. In his book, *"The Uses of Enchantment"(1989)*, *Bettelheim* studies fairytale's worldwide significance in understanding child's development and states his thoughts on the way children work through the psychological problems of development:

> *In order to master the psychological problems of growing up –overcoming narcissistic disappointments, oedipal dilemmas, siblingrivalries; becoming able to relinquish childhood dependencies; gaininga feeling of selfhood and of self-worth, and a sense of moral obligation– a child needs to understand what is going on within his conscious selfso that he can also cope with that which goes on in his unconscious. Hecan achieve this understanding, and with it the ability to cope, notthrough rational comprehension of the nature and content of hisunconscious, but by becoming familiar with it through spinning outdaydreams – ruminating, rearranging, and fantasizing about suitablestory elements in response to unconscious pressures. By doing this, thechild fits unconscious content into conscious fantasies, which thenenable him to deal with that content. [Bettelheim, 6-7]*

Without diving deep into the tale, the child automatically determines the hidden meanings of the fairy tales on his own. In a magical way, fairy tales recognize the maturational processes in the development of child and provide a productive ground that helps a child to connect with the society. Fairy tales deal with emotional childhood experiences and key issues, they play an importantrole in the construction of the child's psycho-emotional experience. *The fairy stories expressed through language by symbolic representations, facilitate the development of symbolic thought, the representative abilities and the mental processing of life events at afantasy-level [Kourkoutas],*which form the basis for the development of imaginative thought and emotional intelligence. Fairytales adds up highly to the development of children's creative imagination, which is important for their psycho-emotional health. These

stories are like dreams that we all have together. If children want to know their dreams, they can look at these stories and study them. If they want to know the stories better, they can study their dreams. There is a great inter-relationship between these two forms of imagination.

> *Having imagination means enjoying inner wealth, a relentless and spontaneous flow of images and viewing the world in its entirety [Elliade,1961].* In the dreamy world of the fairy tale, where everything unfolds in an intermediate space between reality and fantasy, the child's magic thought finds an appropriate way out

> *The structure of fairy tales allows children to move into a dreamy world without restrictions and cancellations. At the same time, through themechanisms of identification and projection, the child has the ability to identify, express his/her negative feelings, to give importance to personal traumatic experiences and, ultimately, to lookfor and find a meaning in his/her life.*
> *[http://www.ijlll.org/vol2/98-L009.pdf]*

In awell-defined manner, the fairy tales provides responses for the deep-seated questions of children and keep their character, as these stories transfer important information and knowledge about life to the child. Children's knowledge of the world is so limited that they cannot judge between the strange, fantastic, the nonsensical, without help. They do not understand the world of grownups because they are less educated and less experienced.The stories of fairy tales increase children's faith in their ability to build their own unique personalities.

> *The enchantment of fairy tales lies in this very potential. Among the multiple functions they perform, fairy tales offer an effective way for children to express and illustrate their existential-developmental anxieties, the inner and external conflicts and their doubts [Franz, 27].*

Fairy tales give meaning to the external and inner conflicts which children go through in a complex, hardship-filled and incomprehensible world.

> *With the positive outcome of these stories, fairy tales help in pacifying the fears experienced at various developmental stages, in reassuring that the unknown can become known and contribute to the establishment of a wider, positive perspective about life, while answering a child's deep need for justice.*
> *[http://www.ijlll.org/vol2/98-L009.pdf]*

With all the positive effects of the tales at times people concerns about the death or violence that eventually comes to the character who pursues mean deeds. For instance, the death of the wolf in **"*The Three Little Pigs*"** – a beloved tale for younger children. The wolf comes down to the chimney, where the pig catches the wolf in a pot of boiling water,

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slams the lid on, then cooks and eats him. This fairy tale is not meant to call up a need for violence, but rather the desire to do away with 'sin' in the common sense. Here children sense that the wolf intents on hurting the pigs and therefore his involvement in evil should be ended and justice served. In many fairy tales, an evil character makes numerous decisions that finally end up him to death, but here again, the goal is not to see the evil one come to death, but to allow a storyline to educate our children make connections in seeing how the character did not follow goodness and truth and suffers in the end.

The difficulty of human nature, in which both evil and good coexist, is well defined in fairy tales. The characters in fairy tales are bad and good at the same time, as is in reality, but since polarity dominates the child's mind, it also governs fairytales. A person is either bad or good, never anything in between. For example, one sister is hard-working and moral, the others are lazy and dreadful, one parent is evil, the other good. The contrast of conflicting characters helps the child to easily get the difference between the two, which he could not do if these figures were closer to real life. Besides, a child's choices are based, not on wrong versus right, but mainly which person they dislike and which they like.It is easier for a child to classify with a simpler and more sincere character and to reject the bad character.

Fairy tales thus help to cope with life, not by belittling childish difficulties, but by *giving full credence to the seriousness of the child's predicaments and relating to all aspects of his personality [Bettelheim, 5].*

The stories begin at the child's current stage of development, and show him the way:

Just like the black-and white characterization of the fairytales, so too is the child's view of the world marked by polarization.Fairy tales demonstrate that an inner development has to take place, by offering solutions which the child can understand, because they correspondto childish, animistic thinking, and express, on a symbolic/visual level,the things that motivate the child. [Hoeppel,208]

Some of the children's fundamental feelings, needs, desires and impulses which are often not communicated and are suppressed into the world of everyday life are favorite topics of fairy tale stories. In this safe world of imagination, children get in touch with the wide range of dark emotions-reactions and negative expressions of life, of their self and of others, without suffering the painful phases of everyday life.

Fairy tales are very superiorto contemporary children's literature because of their key features of cruelty and danger, since they produce neither aggression nor fear,but help children to survive with these feelings.Fairytales can also help children to learn about the reality principle versus the pleasure principle. For instance, in the same above-mentioned story *"The Three Little Pigs"* out of the three two of the pigs quickly build shabby houses in order to have more time to play. The third pig spends a great deal of time and thought building a good strong house, and misses out on a great deal of fun. A wolf comes along and easily destroys the first two houses, demolishing their inhabitants. When he gets to the third house, he is unable to demolish it, ends up falling down the chimney into a cooking pot, and is eaten by the third pig. This teaches the child that intelligence and hard work lead to a truly happy life. In other words, reality wins out over pleasure. In addition to this lesson, the child relates negative aspects of himself to the wolf and learns that these characteristics can be overcome by working hard and using intelligence. Hard work is not the only thing that pays off in fairytales. Fairy tales present some exclusive learning opportunities (moral or life lessons) for children. For example, in the story *"Little Red Riding Hood",* a young girl sees danger on her way through the woods to visit her grandmother. As readers, childrencan almost predict Red Riding Hood's fate when she first meets the wolf in the woods, even though the wolf was on his best conduct. The wolf's gentle appearance teaches the child a lesson in itself: be careful who you trust, especially people who appear to be very kind at first.

"The Princess and the Pea" is one more story with a moral lesson, it's a story about a queen who's on the quest for a princess to marry her son when she falls across a rather un-princess-like maiden with messy clothes and hair. To judge her, the maiden is invited to spend the night in the castle, where the queen hides a pea under her mattress. Only a princess would be able to feel such a small level of discomfort. The next morning, the maiden tells about her poor night of sleep, and the queen has found her son's wife. This story tells one of the oldest lessons of all time: don't judge a book by its cover (or a person by their initial appearance). People are more than their clothing and hairstyle.

Many times, it is the small achievements in these stories that are greatly recognized, such as the simpleton sonbringing home the handpicked rug in *"The Three Feathers"*. Children learn that even small accomplishments are to be celebrated, and are a step toward freedom.

Gaining independence is another problem of childhood spoken in fairytales. A large number of fairytales begin with the parents abandoning their children, dying or sending their children out into the world alone. These stories address children's concern about being on their own away from their parents. The tales walk through adventures which in the end helps the child to be confident that they can make it on their own.For example, such psychology is portrayedin the story of *"Hansel and Gretel"*, in which the two children Hansel and Gretel are abandoned in the woods but they manage to overcome a witch to return home safely.

Conclusion

Concluding up, one can say that the fairy tale is the method by which the child learns to read his mind with images-symbols language which isthe only language that permits the understanding before mental maturity is attained.Fairy tales offer knowledge of life from the inside the stories infolktales are *life*

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divined from theinside [Bettelheim, 24] because they give expression to inner processes and make these comprehensible. children understand that these stories signify the essential developmental steps towards independent existence.From Bettelheim's psycho analytical perspective,many fairytales deal – in a manner that is *unreal, but not untrue(ibid., 73)* – with violent and phallic fantasies, with oral and oedipal conflicts, with fear of sexuality or castration, self-destruction, with humiliation and separation anxiety. These stories help children to survive with life, as they thermalize the difficulties of becoming adults, and emphasize the hope of a happy outcome and a better future.

> *It seems there is a psychological need for something that only the fairy tale can give us, for all its apparent naivety, certain facets of our imagination are left unsatisfied by other forms of literature.[Davidson, Chaudri, 12]*

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