

Folk and Fairy Tales in Children's Literature as  
Illustrated by  
*Cinderella* and *Little Snow White*

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## Abstract

At a time when many of our children are over-scheduled and over-stressed , we must ask ourselves what roles literature can play in their lives ?

For many years , modern realistic fiction has been considered the most popular genre among young readers , perhaps because it was closer to the lives they know and , therefore , easier to read . such realistic fiction whether regional or historical provides opportunities for people to live vicariously in times and places they cannot experience any other way . Yet , sometimes many of the classic stories for children exist in the realm of fancy because of the timeless quality of such tales . Things that are most real in life can best be conveyed through fancy .

Those who care about children and their literature have an obligation to inform themselves of the best and the latest thinking about the constellation of topics that will enable them to bring the two together most successfully . Writers usually believe in the vision of peace we offer our children insisting that violence , a brutal expediency and war are inevitable to get maturity . Apparently , it seems that it is nice to talk to children , to sing to them and to write fancy books feeding their imagination with dreaming tales of their future lives . Children want to feel some good tales to enhance highest ideals and purest dreams , then we expect our children to outgrow what we have taught them .

Among the aims of the children's literature is to provide them with stories that empower them . A good story moves the reader inside another human being at a moment when that man is ready to make a choice . And in the moment of that choice , character and reader are empowered .

Accordingly , this research sheds light on the significance of folklore and fairy tales related to children's literature showing the extent that such genre arouses and effects upon children's sympathy in dealing with some well-known tales as Cinderella and Little Snow White .

The research is divided into three sections ; the first deals with the concept of Fairy Tales : Definition and Motif . The second section tackles Cinderella ; the tale of the rewarded Cinder-maid , while the third section is about the tale Little Snow White ; the tale of the true looking-glass .

## **Section One : The Concept of Fairy Tales : Definition and Motif**

The term " Fairy " goes back only to the middle ages in Europe , analogues to these beings in varying forms appear in both written and oral literature , from the Sanskrit gandharve to the nymphs of Greek mythology and Homer , the jinni of Arabic mythology and similar folk characters of other nations . The common modern depiction of fairies in children's stories represents a bowdlerization of what was once a serious and even sinister folkloric tradition . The fairies of the past were feared as dangerous and powerful beings who were sometimes friendly to humans but could also be cruel or mischievous .

Fairies are said to be of human size or smaller , down to a height of 3 inches or less (WWW.Merriam-Webster Online :Wish Faery) . Female fairies may tell fortunes , particularly prophesying at birth and foretelling deaths . They are dwelling on earth in close relation with humans . They appear as dwarf creatures typically having green clothes and colorful hair , living underground or in stone heaps , and characteristically exercising magical benevolent ends (Ibid) . They have no souls and at death simply perish . They often carry off children to fairyland .

Fairy stories are not in normal English usage stories about fairies or elves , but stories about creatures , that is Faerie , the realm or state in which fairies have their being (WWW.Hastings) .So , Fairy Tale is a story relating mysterious pranks and adventures of supernatural spirits who manifested themselves in the form of diminutive human beings . These spirits possessed certain qualities which are constantly drawn upon for tales of their adventures : supernatural wisdom and foresight , a mischievous temperament , the power to regulate the affairs of human beings for good or evil , the capacity to change themselves into any shape at any time (Holman , 180) .

Some other scholars like Stith Thompson , European folklorist , preferred the term "Marchen" , German translation of "tale" , rather than fairy tale for a Marchen is a tale of some length involving a succession of motifs or episodes , moving in an unreal world without definite locality or

characters . This term , according to Thompson , is distinguished by undefined time and place which nevertheless are closely related to the society from which the tale comes , flat characters that never developed even when given names as Cinderella . This name means nothing more than " girl of the cinder " , typically an implicit or explicit prohibition that affects the plot , and last transformation either physically e.g. the beast turns into a handsome prince , or a character transformation e.g. the ugly duckling turns out to have been a swan all along (WWW. Hastings) . Almost every nation has its own fairy literature , though the folklore element embodied in fairy tales prompts the growth of related tales among different nations .

Though every nation has different tales , yet many of them exchange their tales till they have developed through repeated oral retellings . Each person who retells a tale makes his / her own contribution to the story , altering it in some way , and in the process of transmission the tale takes on the character and concerns of its particular community .

Considerably , specialists distinguish between two types of Marchen : Volksmarchen or the folk tale and Kunstmarchen or a literary fairy tale . The folk tale is the older form and it is oral and communal and it has developed through repeated oral retellings within a society or community (Ibid) . While the literary fairy tales , as opposed to folk tales , may include individualized characters with a more developed personality and more specified and detailed description of individuals and settings .

One may have a thought that the traditional association with the word "folk" may mean group of peasants and other poor , yet is also suspect since many of the best-known fairy tales drew from middle-class or aristocratic rather than from the peasantry .

The association of Fairy Tales with children became strong day after day , generation after generation as if there is an essential link between them . They became means to be told to one another for entertainment and instruction as well adapted to meet the needs of various situations . Their motives changed by time , by tellers , by the listeners and by the country in which they arose and the countries to which they were carried . Scholarly interest in fairy tales , however , arose precisely because of perceived ties between those stories and myth and legend . These tales began to be studied as descending from ancient sources , and therefore as providing information about the past of nations and people and as preserving remnants of cultural treasures otherwise lost or unrecorded .

Only around the beginning of the twentieth century did the study of

Fairy Tale as a literary genre begin in earnest . Jacob Grimm (1786-1859) were active and productive scholars who made many contributions to the study of German culture and its fairy tales (Ibid) . "Grimm's Law" is still a landmark in the explanation of how an Indo-European dialect developed into the Germanic group of language which naturally paved the way to study the nations folklore . Thus , as a consequence , the study of fairy tales in the Grimm's time and on to the end of the nineteenth century was almost wholly devoted either to attempts at determining the place and time of the genre's origin or at discovering in the tales much information about a nation habit or its practices . In fact , Grimm tried to make a collection of these tales depending in his sources mostly on members of the educated middle and upper classes , and most were woman . Two families in Kassel and another in Westphalia , who were close to the Grimms , provided much of the material (Ibid) .

Indeed , some details that appear to us romantic today may merely reflect the real social conditions where the tales were first formulated . For example in "Cinderella" , the prevalence of the stepmother did not come out of imaginative mind but as a realistic estate that the rest of family lives by the consequent shortness of the ex-marriage . Fairy tales are thus more realistic than they may appear at first sight . The magic in them almost heightens the realism and sets us wondering how we ourselves would react in similar circumstances . Among the merits of the tales , they encourage speculations and give a child license to wonder through going beyond possibility enlarging daily horizon .

Tales which are told by generation after generation almost deal with selected characters and incidents that would strikingly illustrate what heroes and heroines , witches , enchanters , giants and dwarfs , the haughty , the envious and the unfaithful were capable of . For example ; heroes and heroines move towards and gain an absolute worth in life ;later on they become wise kings and beloved queens and lived happily ever afterwards . Elders and youngsters had heard about magic , witchcraft and transformation . They had no doubt about the efficacy of spells , charms and many incidents that came from savage conceptions . Happiness in fairy tales is possible and compensation is due to those who have been wronged . Envy and unfaithfulness are condemned and punished . Wicked people keep on their course of badness but they are not bored . Decent people may be lonely but they are never despondent . After all , children's stories concern themselves not with just happiness and light but quite often with privation and suffering , cruelty and betrayal , murder and death .

If we tackle the term "Folklore" , at first glance , it indicates the

traditional arts , belief , traditional ways of work and leisure , adornment and celebrations . These activities are cultural ways in which a group maintains and passes on a shared way of life (WWW.New York Folklore Society) . Such traditional forms of knowledge are learned Informally within a one-to-one or small group exchanging , through performance , or by example . The members of these groups link the past and the present taking into consideration the originality of the folk art and the changes that are adapted to new circumstances which makes it never static . In all cases , folklore and folklife are learned and perpetuated within the context of the group for it means sharing experiences . Acting the public activities by groups symbolizes the identity of them and reactivates experiences from a common past . Alexander H. Krappe ,in The Science of Folk-lore(1930) affirms that folklore "limits itself to a study of the unrecorded traditions of the people as they appear in popular fiction , custom and belief , magic and ritual "(Holman ,188) . According to this definition , folklore is a means to reconstruct the spiritual history of the human race that can be transmitted by written records as well as by word of mouth . It includes myths , legends , stories , riddles , proverbs , nursery rhymes , charms , spells , omens ,and beliefs of all sorts as death or marriage .

What we concern here is the Folktale which is a sort narrative handed down through oral tradition , with various tellers and groups modifying and adding to it . The content of folktales ranges from myth through legends , fables , tall tales , ghost stories and humorous anecdotes to fairy tales (Ibid ,189) .

Though Folktales are dealt with to be experienced , enjoyed , appreciated , loved , yet they have hidden meaning to bring to and to take from . Each tale has variant versions according to the community that adapted to which bears another interpretation than the origin . For example , in the next two sections the researcher deals with two fairytales that each one of them had variant versions written by different languages yet share a common motif .

## **Section Two : Cinderella ; the Tale of the Rewarded Cinder- maid .**

We are all have heard the story of "Cinderella" , the cinder-maid , the beautiful child cast out to slave among the ashes .

Cinderella is arguably best-known fairy tale in world . It appeared in different versions and titles yet the same content as : The Cinder Maid , The Little Glass Slipper , "Fair , Brown and Trembling", The Wicked Stepmother , and The Wonderful Birch . All versions of the story share the idea of a reduction in social status , usually associated with mistreatment / servitude in one's own home (WWW. Hastings: Cinderella) .

The recognition of the heroine is important for that Cinderella be recognized in her degraded state . She was ill-treated by her father's second wife , the proudest and most haughty woman that was ever seen , and by the stepsisters of her stepmother's former husband , who were indeed , exactly like their mother in all things .

The tale in fact depicts different themes to present Cinderella as a study in contrast ; love and hatred , beauty and ugliness , cruelty and charity. Each of these themes is intended to be understood by children and adults as well for they represent psychological studies and plain explanations of what it is to be human .

As a fairy tale , it contains some supernatural events besides the realistic human feelings . These illogical elements have their roles to serve the tale significance and to help in framing the happy end . For example , Cinderella went to her mother's grave and planted the branch on it , and wept so much that the tears fell down on it and watered it , and it grew and became a handsome tree . The other is the turning of six mice and rats into horses :

Godmother then went to look into her  
Mouse-trap, where she found six mice,  
all alive...She gave each mouse a little  
tap with her wand , the mouse that  
moment turned into a fine horse,which  
altogether made a very fine set of sex

horses of a beautiful mouse-colored  
dapple-gray...There were three huge  
rats. The fairy made choice of one of  
the three to be a fat, jolly coachman,  
who had the smartest whiskers eyes  
ever behold .

(Cinderella , quoted in The  
Annotated Cinderella )

Cinderella presents some motifs as recognition of the tale . Folklorists have traced the motifs to the ancient tradition of races . For example , the motif of the ball traces to the ancient tradition of the "Bride-show" in which potential brides were shown off to prince . All invited persons have to dress very richly clothes . They are mightily delighted at this invitation and wonderfully busy in choosing out such gowns , petticoats , and head-clothes as might become them . This was in fact a trouble to Cinderella for it was she who ironed her stepsisters' linen and plaited the ruffles . She was likewise called up to them to be consulted in all these matters for she had excellent notions and advised them always for the best and offered her services to dress them :

Anyone but Cinderella would have dressed  
their heads awry , but she was very good ,  
and dressed them perfectly well . The sister  
were almost two days without eating , so  
much were they transported with joy . The  
broke above a dozen laces in trying to be  
laced up close , that they might have a fine  
slender shape , and they were continually at  
their looking-glass .

(Ibid)

The second motif is the motif of the shoe as a token of recognition which associates the Egyptian story of "Rhodopis" , told about 2000 years ago , with the Cinderella tradition (WWW. Hastings : Cinderella)  
.A glass slipper allows one to see that foot fits and is an unyielding material better suited to a severe test than fur , which could be stretched to fit a variety of feet . Cinderella's foot is smaller and daintier than anyone else , in addition this shoe was set particularly for Cinderella by her godmother :

As Cinderella moved , the firelight shone  
upon her dainty shoes . "They are of dia-  
monds " , she said . "No" , answered her  
godmother , smiling ; "they are better than  
that-they are of glass , made by the fairies

(Cinderella, quoted in  
Antelope Ebooks)

Vividly , the tale of Cinderella bears lessons beneath the entertaining  
atmosphere that man is rewarded for his kindness and forgivable spirit .  
Cinderella at the end after the fitness of her slipper and the frank recognition  
of being the un-known princess in the ball , and after being the closable  
prince's wife , shows much kindness when she forgave her wicked  
stepmother and arrogant stepsisters as they threw themselves at Cinderella's  
feet to beg pardon for all the ill-treatment they had made her undergo :

The sister hung their heads with sorrow  
And vexation ; but kind little Cinderella  
Put her arms around their necks , kissed  
them , and forgave them for all their un-  
kindness , so that they could not help but

love her .

(Ibid)

### **Section Three : Little Snow White ; the Tale of the True Looking-glass .**

Snow White is a scholarly resource for all those interested in folk and fairy tales and , more specifically , in the tale Snow White .

Again , there were complaints about the figure of the guilty stepmother . Some people thought this presentation of the stepmother in the folk is unjust to the many good stepmothers who , in fact , existed . Yet , the two tales of our research have real displaying of the jealous stepmother and hateful late husband's daughters .

The figure of the stepmother of Little Snow White wasn't evil , she was simply a complex personality whose only power was her beauty . She didn't think about the girl as a person . She hated only what Snow White symbolized , which was youth and the power and beauty of this youth . To take these points into consideration , the tellers of these tales tried to warn readers from some characters' vices as pride in Cinderella and envy in Little Snow White and at the same time they enhance some good values and virtues as charity , forgiveness and love . This theme is found clearly in the content of Little Snow White when Snow White grew up and became more and more beautiful than the queen herself who is Snow White's stepmother .

As a proud queen , she couldn't bear to have anyone else more beautiful . Her envy prevented her to love Snow White for the latter exceeded the queen in beauty . Both the pride and envy pushed the angry queen to ask her wonderful Looking-glass when she stood in front of it looking at herself in it and said :

Looking-glass ,Looking-glass , on the wall.

Who in this land is the fairest of all ?

The Looking-glass answered :

Thou , O Queen , are the fairest of all !

(Little SnowWhite ,  
quoted in Ongoing Tales)

Actually , the vice "envy" that the tellers concentrated on in their tales

was a means to attack vices in general and a lesson that such a vice might destroy or kill . In fact , we all have envy but when we functionalize it with anger , it may be turned to a destructive tool that spoils life :

And envy grew higher and higher in  
her heart like a weed , so that she had  
no peace day or night . She called a  
hunter , and said : " Take the child  
away into the wood ; I will no longer  
have her in my sight . Kill her , and  
bring me back her heart as a token " .

(Ibid)

Within Little Snow White , there is another motif which is related to the mirror , mirror on the wall . It shows at every point that this is a story about the desire to be the fairest of them all (WWW. Vandergrift : Snow White) . The queen's desire to be the fairest is not shown for sexual attractiveness or sexual feeling . What is focussed is the anger and fear of the queen's realization that as she gets older she will lose such fairness . The queen's desire to eat Snow White's lungs and liver , a desire which represents a primitive cannibalistic expression of envy , implies only her desire to include Snow White's beauty , power and youth within herself , and whatever sexual feeling is involved in that is included in the original passion to be fairest :

I'm glad that i don't have to kill her.  
Just then a young boar came running  
by . He killed it , cut out its lungs and  
liver , and took them back to the  
queen as proof of Snow White's death.  
She cooked them with salt and ate them.

(Snow-White , quoted in  
Ashliman's Folktexts)

Moreover , the dialectic of narcissism between the queen and the magic mirror is the dominant motif of the action . The wicked stepmother assaults her own soul , demanding reassurance of her desirability . The mirror so like herself , so like a daughter answers truthfully . Evidently , the mirror is much more true than the candle-light or the moon-light . It provides and tells truths that its frankness brings no rest to the queen :

O Queen , thou art fairest of all I see,  
but over the hills , where the seven  
dwarfs dwell , Snow-White is still  
alive and well and no one else is so  
fair as she .

(Little Snow White,  
quoted in Ongoing Tales)

The Looking-glass or the mirror illustrates the reality that no one ignores . It does not reflect the outer appearance of human being yet sometimes it shows the inner feelings and countenances of man . This mirror has the ability to reflect the narcissism of the queen . This insecure narcissistic personality of the queen was threatened by Snow-White's positive and life-asserting qualities as : "Snow White shall die , even if it costs me my own life"(Ibid) . On the other hand , the dwarfs appear as the rescuers or helpers who seem to come into our lives magically , just as the moment we need them . In the real world , these helpers may be therapists , friends , relatives , mates , or just strangers on the way . In the tale , the dwarfs are humble , nonthreatening , empathic , understanding , nurturing men with qualities that present a true contrast to those of the wicked queen (WWW. Vandergrift : Snow White) .The dwarfs are miners . They dig deep into the earth , seeking precious gems and metals . They help Snow White mine for what is precious in herself . They bring Snow White down to earth watching and guarding her from her envious mother . They do great role when they warn , support and give Snow White a purpose in life . They teach her how to have a good relationship with them and how to be careful for the stepmother's wickedness : Your mother does not love you , care about your needs , or put your interest first . She is out to get you . Be careful !( Little Snow White ,quoted in Ongoing Tales) .

Actually , Snow White and the dwarfs mother each other . Snow White may have an absent father , but she has seven father figures embodied in the seven dwarfs . She is learn much about the world by them , and they are essential in enabling Snow White to become an adult woman . They give her an opportunity to act as a lovable girl to be loved and rescued by dashing young prince . Moreover , work for the dwarfs is the essence of their lives ; they know nothing of leisure or recreation . Although they are immediately impressed by Snow White's beauty and moved by her tale of misfortune , they make it clear right away that the prince of living with them is engaging

in conscientious work :

...They were seven dwarfs who dug in  
the hills for gold . They lit their seven  
candles , and as it was now light within  
the cottage they could see that someone  
had been there , for everything was not  
in the same order in which they had left

it .

(Ibid)

In fact , the seven dwarfs are suggested to be the seven days of the week filled with work . It is this working world Snow White has to make her own if she is to grow up well .

Both , Snow White and the dwarfs have the religious and historical indications (WWW. Vandergrift :Snow White) . Snow White's perfect beauty seems distinctly derived from the sun ; her name suggests the whiteness and purity of strong light which indicates the beauty of being innocent . According to the ancient , seven plants circle the sun , hence the seven dwarfs . Another biblical indication which is not too dissimilar from the story of Adam and Eve's Apple when Snow White has to fall asleep after she bites the apple :

The queen made a poisoned apple. From  
the outside it was red and beautiful and  
anyone who saw it would want it...Snow  
White bit into it , but she barely had the  
Bite in her mouth when she fell to the  
Ground dead .

(Snow White , quoted in  
Ashliman's Folktexts )

Paradoxically , the poisoned killing apple was followed by a lively blessing kiss which afterwards Snow White given from the prince who holds her in his arms and leads her off on a white horse to his golden castle on a hill . His golden castle , every woman's dream , supersedes the dark , sinister castle of the queen . Snow White gets her reward besides the power and wealth that are glorified in the end .

## Conclusions

There are obviously mixed messages in two tales of stepmother ; Cinderella and Little Snow White " to have no real mother ". Childhood seems to generate two significant and related themes ; first , the child grows up without ever learning that gives him / her a chance to interact with other people to be cast off from the family compassion , and as a consequence of this , is doomed to solitude , loneliness and a lack of human companionship . Second , is the reward of the good and the punishment of the bad that the tale is concentrated on . On the other hand , these fairy tales are presented and framed by the influential role of the fairies who are helpers and rescuers the heroines from evil . The existence of these allegorical creatures is not only for entertainment and joys but also to present morality in fairy tales .

The penetration of wickedness , evil and injustice beside the forgiveness , charity , beauty and love are important in the history of cultures that the noble ideas of the great spirits should avoid and gain . Thus , Cinderella and Little Snow White are only tools that teach us what we have to be and what we have to not .

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