

Fairytales may convey a hidden message

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As innocent as they seem, from the cute fairytales of Cinderella and her submissive character to the passionate story of Beauty and the Beast, a maiden who falls in love with a beast, the true meaning that lies beneath the pretty shell delivers a different message to children. The idea of the “traditional” role of women is constantly portrayed in many fairytales. Fairytales, although fantasy-like, still resemble aspects of the world and throughout history, women were considered inferior to men. ...it is a fair assumption that in a world dominated by men, the fairy tale reflects the world as defined and organized by men...” (Oliver 86). Stories such as The Little Mermaid by Hans Christian Anderson, Cinderella and Snow White by the Grimm’s Brothers, and Beauty and the Beast (La Belle et la Bete) by Madame Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbet de Villeneuve, emphasize the different inequalities between men and women. “ Girls in Fairyland do not triumph over males; they obey. ” (Oliver 86).

An envious step-mother, a mistreated heroine, and a granted wish to go to the ball may not be the only meanings presented in the fairytale of Cinderella. A dangerous message sent to children, especially for young girls, is to be passive till a rescuer (in this case, Cinderella’s mother) to arrive and grant their wishes. Although obedience is a valuable lesson to be learned, Cinderella continues to be submissive to the extent which she is relentlessly abused by her step- mother. Yet, eventually, her passive role is rewarded and as a result, she lives happily ever after with her noble prince. ...toying with the Cinderella motif, Gardner explodes the notion that every woman is simply waiting for a prince to come along and save her. ” (Zipes A32).

However, this message taught can be subconsciously embedded into

children's minds and during the periods of maturation, children will have the thought that suffering quietly will ultimately be rewarded. " While it may be true that fairytales offer metaphors for the unconscious (an argument as difficult to prove as to disprove) it is clear that they can affect cognition and belief.

As the child absorbs environmental data, learns language, and develops cognition, she begins to say something to herself and about the world and her place in it. " (Oliver 86). Cinderella not only presents the idea of passiveness and femininity, but a message that step - mothers are evil. Throughout many fairytales, step - mothers, old, wise women are wicked and are meant to be overthrown or be rid of. "" Cinderella" is the supreme statement of the devastating nature of a parent's [mother's] unresolved and destructively acted out oedipal jealousy of a child. (Bettelheim 307). The oedipal mother acts out to destroy the daughter, but later, the daughter is rescued by a man from the evil. Everywhere in " Fairyland", the domineering mother is set out to demolish the offspring. Eventually, the step-mother loses her power when trying to intimidate and becomes " silly". (Bettelheim 307). Although many fairytales, including Cinderella, portray the mother in charge as tyrannical, it's also common to see children having good relationships with their fathers as in Beauty and the Beast.

Belle, the main character, has a close bond with her father unlike Cinderella, who poses as a threat to her step-mother. Not only does Belle share a good relationship with her father, but there is no mother figure in the fairytale. (Bettelheim 307). "...the girl's oedipal father is the gentle, protective, loving

man who hands her over to an acceptable suitor at the appropriate time. ” (Oliver 87). Many fairytales other than Beauty and the Beast show the father as a caring man, while, on the other hand, mothers tend to have jealous, destructive feelings towards their children. Oliver 87). With the “ loving father” and the “ envious mother”, the message sent to children can be misleading and one-sided. Another example of the “ wicked step-mother” is illustrated in Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. The innocent beauty, Snow White, and her feminine charms are similar to the common house wife by doing chores around the house while maintaining a certain image of perfection and beauty. Her step-mother is in “ competition” with Snow White; activeness and power versus submissiveness and obedience. The competition between Snow white and the queen turns into a struggle for survival between two halves of a singlepersonality: passivity and tractability as opposed to inventive and subversive activism. ” (Barzilai 520). Once again, another fairytale shows the rivalry which the mother figure is set to destroy the daughter. The over-assertive woman (in this case, the queen) is represented as an envious monster. “ The queen is characterized throughout in unremittingly negative terms: she is most often deemed “ wicked”, but she is also proud, overbearing, and envious. (Barzilai 520). There are many examples in “ Fairyland” which give a bad reputation towards the step-mother or the mother figure. Beauty and the Beast is a popular fairytale about a girl who falls in love with a beast and in return the beast becomes her prince. Luckily, for Belle, the beast’s true nature was a compassionate, kind- hearted man. However, it may not be the situation in the average lives of women who are constantly abused by their spouses. Young girls receive

from this romantic love story that love will eventually change their partners. (Mangan 10). Beauty and the Beast, for example, is said to foster the notion that love can alter the nature of a man and make early absorbers of the information more inclined to stay with a violent partner in the hope that she can change his behaviour. " (Mangan 10). Fairytale deliver unrealistic ideas to young children, which send false hopes that can be hazardous. Little Mermaid, a young mermaid who risks all for her prince but suffers tragically in the end, conveys a message to young girls that in order to gain the love of a prince, one must sacrifice all and expect love in return. Still, any cursory sweep through childhood stories will reveal further examples of submissive women who were implicitly or explicitly offered up as role models during our formative years...The little mermaid who sacrifices her home, family and fishy tail for a crack at the oxygen-breathing prince. " (Mangan 10). In the fairytale, the young mermaid's tail was traded for a pair of legs, but whenever she would walk, it struck her pain. She suffers throughout the story whenever she was asked to dance for the prince.

Although the prince did not love her in return, the little mermaid continued to love him and was granted a soul. However, consequently, she became one with the sea or sea foam as punishment for not wedding the prince on time. Another example of inequality between the genders, why must the heroine suffer for the one she loves. There are many examples in " Fairyland" that convey the inequalities between genders. The step - mothers and the old witches are viewed as evil, overly- jealous women seeking destruction while the fathers and wise men are caring and compassionate.

Cinderella, Snow White and Beauty and the Beast illustrate the different relationships between the heroine and her parents. Not only were women “evil” but the good ones were meant to be submissive and obedient. Cinderella’s passive example is later on rewarded which can deliver a misleading message to young girls. The Little Mermaid clearly points that she had to sacrifice all for her love. Beauty and the Beast is very dangerous for young girls that love will change their spouses. The innocent story which children for ages grew up to may not be innocent after all. Works Cited Barzilai, Shuli. Reading “ Snow White”: The Mother’s Story. ” Signs 15. 3 (1977): 274-300. Bettelheim, Bruno. The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales. New York: Random House, Inc. 1976. Mangan, Lucy. “ G2: Women: Happily never after: Comatose princesses, submissive floor-scrubbers and evil stepmothers may not be the best of role models. ” The Guardian 2 May 2005: 10. Oliver, Rose. “ Whatever Became of Goldilocks? ” Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies 2. 3 (1977): 85-93. Zipes, Jack. “ Children’s Books; Kissing Off Snow White. ” The New York Times 22 Mar. 1987: A32. ----- 1 2