

The grandmothers tale essay



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EXTENSION ENGLISH - The Grandmothers Tale Speech Fairy Tales are short stories that have been passed through cultures and generations, usually adapting to fit the social restrictions and morals of the time. The Grandmothers Tale, which most of us would recognize as Charles Perrault's adaptation, Little Red Riding Hood, has been passed through different cultures, countries and many variations of the text are prevalent in different societies around the world. The Grandmother's Tale tells of how a young girl, who is nameless, ventures through the woods to visit her sick grandmother.

On the way she meets a wolf, and because of her naivety, tells him where she is heading. The wolf beats her there, eats the grandmother and when the girl arrives, the wolf simulates the grandmother's voice in order to eat the girl too. The girl however escapes and the wolf ends up getting dropped in the river by laundresses and drowns. Because the hero of the story, the young girl is kept nameless throughout various variations of the text, she is then seen as a representative of all children who read the text, making her a role model for those children. By giving her an identity this would no longer apply, lessening the effect that fairy tales are designed to have on children.

The text has undergone a number of transformations, both simple and complex, thus leading to a variety of versions. By analyzing the text and applying reading practices, approaches and other methods of deconstruction, namely those of Joseph Campbell's hero's cycle and Vladimir Propp's deconstruction of folk tales, it is possible to create a complex transformation of the text. Vladimir Propp and Joseph Campbell both theorized the idea that in divulging into a fairytale text analytically, one can establish certain analyzable elements which are present in a majority of folk

tales in unvarying order. Propp studies fairytales by examining their most basic plot components. He devised a list of 31 generic functions, proposing that they covered all of the plot components from which fairy tales were constructed. Joseph Campbell however, discovered one standard plot that has been repeated throughout mythology and fairytale genre.

The invited reading of this text is not dissimilar to Bruno Betlelheim's theory that " Children know that there are monsters - they need to know that they can be defeated. " The young girl is able to subvert the power relationship between herself and the wolf by using her wits to outsmart him, becoming the heroine of the story and saving herself rather than being passive and becoming a victim. The ideal reading is to not challenge the status quo, thus agreeing with the ideologies presented in the text. By doing so, the reader would be then deemed by Eco to be what he theorized as the ' Model reader'. The Model reader responds, comprehends, embraces and respects dominant ideologies and discourses promoted in the text.

Though the model reader is not born with that socio-cultural understanding, it is imbedded into varying aspects of their culture, like fairy tales, thus molding them into the " Model reader". By using characters such as Ogres, witches and, in the case of the grandmother's tale, a wolf, to portray evil, children are able to easily distinguish between the good and bad. One reason for this is because of the depiction of such characters in folk tales. Usually the good characters are represented as being beautiful, gold hearted beings while the evil are ugly animalistic creatures that are rarely human.

The purpose of many fairy tales is to support the status quo. By repeating this practice fairy tales are able to convey the idea that society is portrayed how it should and that it should not be challenged or questioned. They are inherently conservative and portray the dominant ideologies of the time and the society of which they support. They are written by those in power in order to position us in favor of the already powerful. When analyzing *The Grandmother's Tale*, it is necessary to have considered the cultural understandings of the time period of which it was written and to understand the discourses which shape that particular society.

A discourse is not just a way of speaking or writing, but the whole 'mental set' and ideology which encloses the thinking of all members of a given society. That is why transformations of the text can occur. French Philosopher, Michel Foucault is post-modernist in his approach to defining power. He theorized that " Power works through language by presenting a certain type of knowledge as if it were reality or truth. The discourses of power which exist in society, are those promoted in fairytales.

These are people who are wealthy, mainly those born into wealth, and the biologically powerful, men. In *The Grandmother's Tale*, the power is, to my cultural understanding, decentralized, by subverting the power relationship to favor the young girl, though in the transformation, *Little Red Riding Hood*, the power is attributed to the patriarchal male. By referring to Joseph Campbell's Hero cycle and Vladimir Propp's analysis of folk tales, the characters can be categorized by the roles of which they play. The heroine of the story is the young girl; she would be labeled as the hero.

This operates under a socially acceptable discourse, that of femininity and youth. She is portrayed as genuinely light hearted, a discursive trait that is generally attributed to the hero of the tale. The wolf is the villain of the tale, portraying evil, dishonesty and a cunning manipulative personality. In Norse mythology, Fenrir is a wolf that is bound by the gods, though destined to grow and kill Odin, only to be slain by Odin's son .

Anthropomorphism is the attribution of uniquely human characteristics to nonhuman beings, inanimate objects, or natural or supernatural phenomena. This is something that is repeated in many fairy tales, though in most cases the object or animal is portrayed as something positive. Examples such as the little bird or the bull, existing in transformation of the Cinderella text are seen as the agents of transformation, helping the unrecognized hero, as labeled by Joseph Campbell, to break free of the restraints which hold the hero back from transformation. Readers readily embrace the negative connotations attributed with wolves, not just because of representations in Norse mythology and other tales, legends and stories, but also because of the biological factors. The wolf is an ice age survivor, stalking its prey in packs.

They hunt in packs and for many years have deprived farmers of their livestock, leading to starvation. By attributing human traits to the wolf, a creature that is feared in societies around the world and often portrayed as evil, the children reading, or listening to the text are subconsciously connecting those fearful manipulative traits seen in humans, with evil. This particular representation has supported society's constraints and still exists and operates in societies of today. Though the wolf is portrayed negatively, it

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can still be seen as the agent of transformation. In the tale, the girl is naive and disorientated to start with, though with the second encounter of the wolf the girl realizes that he is negative, taking it upon her self to flee. The wolf or villain is then killed, leaving the reader with a sense of satisfaction, knowing that the good character of the story prevailed.

The wolf is not human so the power discourse is shifted then by that fact and the fact that he is evil, putting the young girl in power, making it socially acceptable for the wolf to be slain. In some variations of the text the wolf is slain in a gruesome manner yet is still seen as acceptable. By introducing the Woodcutter into an adaptation of the text, Little Red Riding Hood, the power discourse is then, in my opinion, centralized, due to the society of which I live in. In the text, the dominant discourses operating are that of gender.

A middle aged working man is now seen to be the hero of the story, subverting the power relationship away from the young girl. He rescues the two women from the wolf, portraying the women as passive and dependant. Both of these ideals are crucial in understanding both texts and without them the text would convey little meaning. This naturalizes the dominant discourses operating in the society of when the text was written. Post-Structuralism suggests that the reader will attribute their own attitudes, values and beliefs to a text whilst reading it.

They make links based on the social context of which they exist and operate and expect or predict certain outcomes and events, such as good prevailing over evil, thus leading to a “ happy ending” (do finger quote marks!!!!). A happy ending is normally constituted by the dominant discourse that

represents the good, generally the heroes, prevailing, while the negativity of the story or the villain is conquered. In literary theory structuralism is a reading approach that observes narrative material, semiotic codes being just one aspect. Structuralism emerged fully in the 1950's and 1960's though it can be traced back to the works of Ferdinand de Saussure; a Swiss Linguist who was one of the key figures in the development of modern approaches to the study of language between 1857 and 1913.

By analyzing The Grandmother's Tale using the semiotic code, there are underlying actions, discourses and ideologies prevalent in the text, as well as symbolic meanings which lead the reader to gain inter-textual references and recognize the text as a variation of a text that they have read. Examples of this are such things as the introduction of the colour red that is used in Little Red Riding Hood, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's version Little Red Cap, an Austrian version called Little Red Hat and it is also seen in other variations of the story. Alfred DuPont Chandler, Jr. was a professor of business history at Harvard Business School, who wrote extensively about the scale and the management structures of modern corporations.

He states " A sign is a meaningful unit which is interpreted as standing for something other than itself". The tale and its variations follow the same basic structure and the discourses under which the characters operate tend to be similar in each of the texts. By analyzing the text and subverting discourses and changing actions and traits of the characters, a complex transformation of the text can be produced. This text is generally unrecognizable and readers are unable to connect it to the original text until methods of deconstruction are applied. An example of this is the movie <https://assignbuster.com/the-grandmothers-tale-essay/>

Pretty Woman, a complex transformation of the Cinderella fairy tale. The discourses under which the characters operate have been subverted; therefore the viewer doesn't recognize the text though they anticipate the actions and behavior of the characters as well as the ending because they are subconsciously making links to Cinderella and similar fairy tales without realization of this.

To create a complex transformation of The Grandmother's Tale, one must subvert ideologies and discourses so that they can be questioned and must stray from the archetypal characters. When deconstructing the transformed version of The Grandmother's Tale it is obvious that the same basic line of events and structure is still used. It is the discursive shifts and altered semiotics that make the text unrecognizable. The ideal young girl of the story is that of a kind hearted innocent being. By representing her as a young prostitute who has little respect for men, she is no longer the epitome of all that is good and pure, formulating many negative ideologies so that the reader then has to question the text. This then allows a transformation of which challenges cultural expectations and social understandings and assumptions that are crucial to the base text.

The inversion of the "wolf" is another aspect of the transformed text that makes it harder to link it to the original base text. Zoopomorphisation, opposed to anthropomorphism, is giving the human character animal features. I have then subverted those characteristics so that the character is completely different from what the reader expects. The wolf character in The Grandmother's Tale represents evil, so it would be natural to have the human character whose physical attributes are wolf like to also be evil. There

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are examples of this in many fictional stories and movies with the use of the “ werewolf” character. However, in the transformed version of The Grandmother’s Tale, Fenrir the male client of the subverted ideal girl who is a prostitute is inverted behaviorally by loving and trying to protect the prostitute.

His intentions are pure and selfless, unlike those of the wolf in the base texts. Another discursive shift present in the transformed text is that of the grandmother figure from the base text. The Grandmother’s Tale and Little Red Riding Hood both consist of a sick grandmother, who is needy of basic necessities like milk and bread. The young girl in both of those tales then takes those necessities to the ill grandmother.

By inverting the grandmothers gender and altering the age and discourse under which the character operates, an unrecognizable character is formed. When deconstructed, the pimp in the transformed text is actually the subverted grandmother from the base text. He too is ill, though in the text it states what illness he has, putting him in a position where he is relying on his prostitute to bring him money to live on. His behavior however is not kind, but manipulative and selfish, shifting away from the discursive traits of the original character. The pimp is represented as being physically attractive opposed to being physically animalistic and ugly, a trait which generally applies to the villains of the text.

Take for example the step mother or step sisters in Cinderella. Those three characters are all represented as being selfish and ugly and are seen to be the villains. The prostitute respects him, something that a lot of us would

find hard to comprehend due to the society of which we operate and the ideologies which enclose our thinking. In the original text, the hero's helpers are the laundresses. By inverting their gender and altering the motive behind killing the wolf character, they are no longer perceived as the hero's helpers. Though this shift has occurred, the same line of events and the same outcomes are achieved.

The reason for these discursive shifts is to subvert the dominant patterns seen in *The Grandmother's Tale* and its variations, thus positioning the reader to question ideologies and discourses used in the transformed text. The semiotics in the transformed text are those seen in the original text, though slightly altered. The colour red that has been introduced to variations of *The Grandmother's Tale* is used throughout the transformed version, though in different ways conveying different ideologies and meanings. The tattoo on the young prostitute's leg is an important symbol, attributing several different meanings to the text.

There is extensive symbolism endorsed with the colour red, some positive and some negative. Red is evidently the first colour perceived by man, and a common belief is that the colour red held protective powers against evil influence. Some negative connotations of the colour can be dated back to Israelites in biblical times who painted their doorframes in red blood to scare demons. In ancient Egypt red was the colour of the desert and that of the destructive god Seth.

Red is the most vivid symbol in the text, though it was not originally used in *The Grandmother's Tale* and was thought to be introduced by Perrault.

Psychoanalytic critics have divulged into analyzing the meaning of the colour as it traditionally symbolizes things that would not normally be attributed with a small child. Sin and blood to passion and sexuality, there are many sexual undertones attributed with the colour red. Though the colour is suggestive of sexual connotations, it was most likely introduced by Perrault to try and provoke the idea of caution, another meaning often associated with the colour red. It is obvious that the semiotics present in a text will change over time due to extensive perceptions of signs and symbols that are attributed with certain cultural beliefs.

The reason I chose to use a Chinese dragon as the symbol of her tattoo is because of the dominant religions prevalent in my cultural context. By using a red dragon, I am able to subvert the Judeo Christian ideologies and discourses surrounding innocence and the belief in one god. The dominant meaning derived from the tattoo and its colour is that it is very provocative and sexually suggestive, emphasized a lot by the fact that it is on her upper thigh. When analyzed and applied to Chinese mythology, it suggests a lot of other connotations, differing greatly to the negative connotations assumed surrounding Judeo Christian ideologies. The Chinese dragon is one of the most important mythical creatures in Chinese mythology. The Chinese dragon is considered to be the most powerful and divine creature and is believed to be the controller of all waters.

The dragon symbolised great power and was very supportive of heroes and gods. This subverts religious beliefs present in the text as there has been extensive interaction between chinese mythology and religion. The chinese dragon is also ultimately symbolic of good fortune. This transformation

oversteps boundaries layed down by society, and does not make sense within the traditional fairy tale genre. I have chosen to subvert various discourses in order to display this, though I kept the same basic structure throughout the whole text.

The original consists of a young girl getting followed by a wolf, who is going to get taken away from her grandmother, though because of this the wolf gets killed. The transformed text is ultimately the same, though due to the amount of discursive shifts this is unrecognizable at first. Through reproductions of the text, the most common dominant discourses present are that of gender, clearly reflecting the way society has been and still is being constructed to accept the patriarchal hierarchy of male dominance. It is evident that fairy tales have underlying intentions of societal constraint and socially acceptable conformity, thus the repetitive productions of fairy tales seem to have the same underlying message, of which is society is portrayed how it should and that it should not be challenged or questioned. Thank-you