

The Influence of Female Images in *Grimm's Fairy Tales* on Children Against the Background of Patriarchal Society

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Abstract—*Grimm's Fairy Tales* is a collection of folk tales collected in the 19th century by the Grimm brothers in the German states of Hesse and Westphalia. It reflects the unique aesthetic features of western culture and the low status of women at the same time. The Grimm brothers serve as a sounding board for gender awareness, and the book is full of princesses and princes, beauty and intelligence, which are both publicized and approved by the society. *Grimm's Fairy Tales* creates the most ideal female image in a patriarchal society. For children, who are important readers of fairy tales, fairy tales play an irreplaceable role in education. In the context of patriarchal society, *Grimm's Fairy Tales* also affects children's psychology, self-cognition and values.

Keywords—fairy tales; Patriarchal society; gender difference; children education

I. INTRODUCTION

Grimm's Fairy Tales is the symbol of European folk tales and everyone's memories of childhood. Children in fairy tales can find similar to their own characters, so their emotions are placed in the fairy tale characters fate. Children in fairy tales are able to accept the various tempers and emotions of their favorite characters or animals. Grimm's fairy tales are permeated with the ideology of patriarchal culture to maintain the supremacy of men in society and family. The female characters created by male literary imagination and value orientation have developed into a set of "femininity" about ideal women: beauty, loyalty, docility, passivity and obedience. As long as female characters possess such qualities, they will be rewarded "prince" and "marriage". *Grimm's Fairy Tales* is characterized by imaginative and symbolic non-reality elements, legitimate themes for educating children, and hidden and omnipresent male hegemony. When the new bourgeoisie read little red riding hood in the family, it not only catered to their need to educate and keep children safe from danger, but also reinforced a kind of adult male hegemony, even though they may not know it. In order to make this purpose more covert and more acceptable, Green's *Little Red Riding Hood* even arranged a hunter — a grown man who saved little red riding hood from no hope of escape, and finally let the obedient little red riding hood avoid danger, thus perfectly justifying

himself. *Grimm's Fairy Tales* through the shaping of female characters such as *Little Red Riding Hood*, invisibly strengthens the ideology of reforming women in patriarchal society, so that they can grow up according to the female standards expected and stipulated by men. *Grimm's Fairy Tales* is a textbook advocating the aesthetics and values of patriarchal society.

II. THE BACKGROUND OF GRIMM'S FAIRY TALES

Grimm's Fairy Tales was written in the early 19th century. At this time, the German region under the rule of the Holy Roman Empire was loosely structured and lacked unity in both the state and the nation. In 1806, French Emperor Bonaparte Napoleon formed the confederation of the Rhine, abolished the Holy Roman Empire, aroused the awakening of German nationalism, and a large number of intellectuals joined the national liberation movement.^[1] However, the differences between dukedoms and free cities, including language and culture, become obstacles to the formation of a unified national spirit.

In order to remove this cultural obstacle, some intellectuals began to promote cultural nationalism. While adhering to the spirit of romantic culture, they also turned their eyes to the traditional field of folk culture. Against such a background, brothers Grimm began to research folk literature and folk songs, collected fairy tales and stories that were widely spread among German folk and contained German national characteristics. The Grimm brothers published the first edition of *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, also known as *Children and Family Fairy Tales*, in 1812.

The status of women in the 19th century was still low. Although women were given education by the French court in the early 17th century, they had no right to say anything about marriage, childbearing and other related matters. Middle-class women in 19th century Europe lived in a very narrow circle. As society does not expect women to go out to work, they can only stay at home to do housework and take care of children. Especially in the Victorian period, the femininity advocated by the British society affected the whole Europe, and Germany was no exception. Society advocates that women should be the angels of the family and

take the family as the center. Appreciate pale, supple, weak, passive dependence on women; the moral standard of a good woman is obedience and selflessness, selfless devotion to her family, and she must allow her husband to find refuge and comfort in their home when he returns. Men, on the other hand, were expected to be aggressive, adventurous, and protective of their homes, exercising strict control over their wives and children as the head of a family.[2]

Since ancient times, women have been fighting against men in order to get rid of their dependence and dependence. Especially after the vigorous development of feminist movement and the rise of feminist literary theory, the essence of classic texts as the representation of patriarchal ideology has been revealed and reinterpreted, and classic fairy tales have been favored by them. Through an oral tradition that takes place mainly among women, fairy tales show the possibility of openness because of the implicit femininity of such texts. Grimm's fairy tales, known to every household, is one of the most typical examples.

III. THE WRONG LABEL OF STEPMOTHER AFFECTS THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN

In reality, the role of "mother" is extremely important in everyone's life. When the role of "mother" is missing, children will turn to people with maternal characteristics, such as grandmother, aunt, sister, etc., or look for people who can shoulder the responsibility of mother, such as father, relatives, neighbors, teachers, etc. Therefore, in children's literature, the image of the mother or similar role of the mother has a very important impact on children's world view. In *Grimm's fairy tales*, the stepmother is shown in the following characters: pure stepmother, the mother of the husband, and the mother of the adoptive family. Stepmother image is fully displayed in the following works: "Little Brother and Little Sister", "Cinderella", "Juniper Tree", "Snow White" and so on. In these works, the characters who are abused by the stepmother are often the "great good man" images that the author wants to create, and they are all oppressed by the stepmother without exception.^[3]

However, in *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, all stepmother images are labeled as evil, which makes children rebel against stepmother or women who play the role of stepmother from an early age, and even have a preconceived idea: all stepmother are bad, and have a deep hatred with stepchildren. Such an image and meaning has become the greatest misfortune of childhood, but in fact, the stepmother is not as evil as the fairy tale depicts. One of the misfortunes of childhood is often associated with the loss of one parent or the love of one. Of course, it would not be the greatest calamity if the deformity of losing one party remained in the unhappy family, for, after all, there was still the possibility of kinship among the members of the family, in which the nature and form of love could not undergo such an unpredictable change of direction. For many, the greatest disaster for minors, often due to the reorganization of the family structure, with the appearance of the "stepmother", people's eyes began to become heavy and uneasy. As far as the family is concerned, the stepmother, once married back by her father, has the undisputed right to manage the family.

Since the formation of their identity does not need their children to identify it in an emotional way, this kind of "appointment" rather than "elected" background, almost from the very beginning, put "stepmother" and children in the relationship structure between ruling and being ruled. Thus, it is necessary to not give "stepmother" such a heavy prejudice.

IV. THE INFLUENCE OF "PRINCESS" IMAGE ON CHILDREN'S VALUES

Grimm in character portrayal of the male character brave, reason is intelligent, good personality, women tend to give kind, tender, diligence and lazy character, the prince to rescue the princess in the fairy tale story, the prince or hero can with his brave and rational character he rescued princess. The differences in character characteristics in these fairy tales are one of the reasons for the gender differences in children's character development.

There is a saying in Europe: a beauty's dowry is in her own face. Thus, it can be seen that beauty plays an important role in female social gender characteristics. Throughout *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, the princesses all have a common appearance. They all have the same innate beauty that makes the opposite sex fall in love at first sight. They are made from the same mold, and their appearance represents the destination of their life from the moment they are born, and are evaluated by fairy tale language as the most beautiful women. Among the 54 stories with princess characters, 35 described the princess with such adjectives as "beautiful", "extraordinary appearance", "exceptionally beautiful" and "unmatched beauty", and many of them described the princess's beauty in a delicate and subtle way. Perhaps it was the blood dripping on the snow that did the work. Snow White did have white skin, red lips and hair like ebony, so she was called "Snow White" and even became the most beautiful woman in the world at the age of 7. Because of beauty, she attracted stepmother (queen) jealous and crazy pursuit. Before her, the crown of the most beautiful woman had been worn by her stepmother. But it was by virtue of her beauty that she escaped death again and again: because of her beauty, the hunters who pursued her at the queen's command let her escape; Because of her beauty, the seven dwarfs took her in. Under the protection of the dwarfs, Snow White can at least live a comfortable life. But in her quest for "more beauty," she was repeatedly deceived by the queen, and several times she came close to death. Why did the beautiful Snow White open the door again and again and again with delight, in the face of the queen's monotonous deceptions and the dwarfs' harsher words? As mentioned in the previous article, it was her desire to be "more beautiful". Comb and belt are added feminine charm accessories, and apple is a symbol of young beautiful face. It can also be seen as a symbol of women's attraction to men. Snow White has realized that her beauty is what the society pursues. Although her beauty brings her death, it shows that her beauty is what the princes and nobles really look for, and her beauty is doomed not to be buried forever. All she had to do was dress up and wait for a prince to find her, choose her, redeem her, and usher her back into the rich world. [4] Even in the war

between women, men still dominate. When the war ended, it was still men who rewarded and punished the winners and losers. As the winner, Snow White was rescued from the people by the prince, returned to the palace, become a person below ten thousand people above the queen; While the underdog stepmother after being stripped out of the palace, and forced to wear red-hot iron shoes and dance to death, and thus can think down, Snow White, perhaps is now before the queen, Snow White is likely to become now may be the subsequent fate of the queen, it is a vicious cycle of guided by men, jump out of the patriarchal consciousness now is the only thing that can break the cycle. [5] Throughout Grimm's fairy tales, princesses must be beautiful, because in the fairy tales under the patriarchy, the concept of princess is almost equal to the scope covered by the word beauty, which is also the most important value for men to women.

In addition to the beauty, the princess's personality is more important, in the statistics of 54 story, the princess personality generally described using "gentle, kind, and humble" words, such as the princess are gentle, sacrifice spirit, listened to his father, they can marry to the frog, marry the man a bust a hedgehog, marry the man free country danger, marry first to beggars, marry the man not afraid, marry a threat to the throne and wealth of people, no matter how reluctant heart, she would choose to obey, this also is a kind of patriarchal yield. The ideal woman promoted by the patriarchal culture has always been regarded as submissive, submissive and the most sacrificial. Under male scrutiny, princesses shine from the inside out with a charm that pleases the beholder: the physical satisfaction of a man's physical appearance, and the spiritual desire to reinforce his dominance with the virtue of strict womanhood. As a woman should have norms and behavior, princess is also indispensable, even more strict.

According to statistics, in Grimm's fairy tales, there are 21 princesses waiting for salvation. Their beauty is envied, they are framed, they are locked in a tower or palace, and they are held by dragons, they are sleeping, they are very sick, they are waiting. However, young men in order to pursue women and run away from home, willing to risk killing the dragon, fighting with the giant, at the cost of life. The princesses themselves are physically, psychologically and politically disadvantaged. They have no power over others, no strength to protect themselves, and often find themselves in danger and unable to move. Being sacrificed, taken away and redeemed is almost the most basic experience of the princess in the folk tales. The female characters presented in such female stories are in a passive and weak posture and incompetent disadvantage in the relationship between the sexes, which is also the requirement and expectation of the patriarchal mechanism on women, as well as the heroic and capable behavior of men through saving the princess, which is worthy of being rewarded.[6]

In the characterization of *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, male characters are brave, smart and kind, while female characters tend to be kind, weak, hardworking and lazy. In the fairy tale prince rescue princess story is common, prince or hero can rely on their own courage, reason and other characteristics of the princess rescued. The differences in character

characteristics in these fairy tales are one of the reasons for the gender differences in children's character development. Specifically, the little boy hopes that he can become a prince or hero, can rescue the princess, and finally can live happily with the princess, if can inherit the throne (property) is the best. The little girl hopes that she can grow into a princess, a prince or a hero will come to rescue her when she encounters difficulties, and finally live a happy life together. Imperceptibly, the child's thought has appeared the localization, the man is brave, has the ability, can rescue others, but the woman is weak, the passive, waits to be rescued; Princess must be beautiful and fragile, will have incomparable luck, what kind of difficulties will be rescued, will have a happy ending. The patriarchal consciousness in *Grimm's Fairy Tales* exerts a subtle influence on children and their self-identity and values

V. CONCLUSION

American psychologist Bertelheim clearly pointed out that nothing can make adults as satisfied and fruitful as children as folk tales. A good story, he says, acknowledges the difficulties children face in their development and guides them through them, reconciling their worries with their aspirations. Folk tales are the most effective form of concise and direct statement of the psychological dilemma faced by children. Complex plots can mess things up, and overly personal characters can make it harder for children to relate to themselves. More importantly, the unreality of fairy tales makes them separated from the external world and forms an image metaphor, so that they can have a direct dialogue with children's unconsciousness in an implied way, help children find and sort out their inner tendency and predicament, and develop and perfect their personality. [7]

Grimm's Fairy Tales is undoubtedly a profound stroke in the history of literature. People still talk about its legendary. Even *Grimm's Fairy Tales* is the symbol of European folk tales. It is shining everywhere to advocate diligence and courage, and advocate loyalty and kindness to overcome the vicious ferocity. Good beauty to overcome ugly, lash satire lazy, greed, jealousy of the thought of brilliance, intended to pass on moral norms and the norms of life to children. However, *Grimm's Fairy Tales* is completely based on the preference of men, forcing the ideal female image in the hearts of men into the minds of little girls, and subtly affecting their growth since childhood in the seemingly beautiful fairy tale world, supporting a paradise out of balance.

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