



Liberating Herself Feminist Revisions of Beauty and the Beast

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Abstract. Fairy tales are very valuable texts, but the classic fairy tales are confined to the framework of the patriarchal system. With the rise of feminist thinking, many feminist scholars have reflected on and criticized fairy tales, some of them look at fairy tales from a feminist perspective, some of them try to uncover the hidden connotations of women in fairy tales, and some of them create new fairy tales belonging to women. This study examines three Re-Vision of the classic fairy tale Beauty and the Beast. The three new texts rewrite and adapt Beauty and the Beast in various aspects. This study identifies the commonalities among these three fairy tales through comparison and delves into the core of feminist fairy tales. This study finds that these three texts coincide to a certain extent with the trend of feminist wave. Through the analysis of these three texts, this study hopes to bring new values to feminist fairy tale studies.

Keywords: Beauty and the Beast · Ugly and the Beast · The Tiger's Bride · The Beast · feminist fairy tale

1 Introduction

Subsequent paragraphs, however, are indented. Fairy tales and folk tales have their unique meaning and value as texts that have been passed down to the present day. However, many fairy tales and folk tales have been created on the basis of patriarchy, and therefore, with the rise of feminist thinking, classic fairy tales have been challenged by feminism. Feminist writers and theorists have re-examined the connotations and meanings of classic fairy tales, reflecting and criticizing them from a feminist perspective.

In *The Second Sex*, feminist scholar Simone Beauvoir analyzes the myth under patriarchy as the process of being created, and the patriarchal myth places woman naturally and eternally in the role of the Other [1]. In addition to myth, Beauvoir also points out the passivity of women's roles in Grimm's fairy tales. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Guba, in *The madwoman in the attic: the woman writer and the nineteenth-century literary imagination*, analyze the portrayal of women in fairy tales and expose the patriarchal metaphors implicit in fairy tales [2]. Along with the rise of feminist theory, feminist writers began to retell and rewrite classic fairy tales in response. In "When We Wake Up Dead: Writing as Revision," Adrienne Rich offers a writing strategy called "Re-vision": not only studying and criticizing old texts, but also creating new ones [3]. "Re-vision", which

aims to subvert patriarchal discursive traditions, serves as an exploration and attempt to transform deeply rooted patriarchal cultures, and provides guidance for feminist writers in their creation of feminist fairy tales.

Feminist fairy tale narratives are an important part of feminist literary criticism. Many scholars have combed through feminist fairy tales. Wang Yue, in her article “An Overview of Western Feminist Fairy Tale Research and a Preliminary Exploration of Local Practice,” provides a systematic overview of the creation and research of Western feminist fairy tale retellings, and on this basis, explores the applicability of such thinking to Chinese texts [4]. In “From Radical Opposition to Rational Reflection: Gender Politics in American Feminist Fairytale Revisions,” Hui Chun-ping discusses the meaning and development trend of feminist fairy tale rewriting [5]. In “Feminist fairy-tale scholarship: A critical survey and bibliography” Donald Haase provides a detailed literature review and textual analysis of feminist fairy tales from the second wave of feminism in the 1970s [6]. In *Twice upon a time: Women writers and the history of the fairy tale*, Elizabeth Wanning Harries, the author spends a chapter in this book exploring the old bottle in a new wine, which means the Re-vision of the fairy tales [7]. Hixon, Martha Pittman, in her treatise *Awakening and Transformation*, provides a comparative study of Re-Visioning the Tales of “Sleeping Beauty”, “Snow White,” “The Frog Prince” and “Tam Lin” [8].

Unlike previous studies, this study looks at the same classic fairy tale and compares several feminist fairy tale texts based on the same classic fairy tale. This paper studies three feminist fairy tales with *Beauty and the Beast* as an older text, namely “Ugly and the Beast” from Barbara Walker’s *Feminist Fairy Tales*, “The Tiger’s Bride” from Angela Carter’s *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, and “The Beast” from Francesca Leah Block’s *The Rose and the Beast*. Through analyzing the characters, storyline, language and imagery in the feminist fairy tale, this paper will try to explore how the “new text” corrects and rewrites the “old text” to subvert the patriarchal discourse system. By comparing the similarities and differences among the three texts and exploring the internal connections among them, we also explore the development and changes of feminist fairy tales’ writing on gender politics.

2 Text Analysis

2.1 Rewriting of Character Images

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Guba in “The madwoman in the attic: the woman writer and the nineteenth-century literary imagination” mention the male writers’ imagination of female characters, and there are two types of female archetypes under male writers. Women are either “angels” or “monsters” in male writers [2]. In fairy tales, the heroine is usually the image of an “angel”. As angels, the heroines are beautiful, meek and kind, and are recognized by the patriarchal discourse as “beautiful” images. As “Snow White” in the Queen’s expectations of Snow White, she hopes her little daughter’s skin grows white and red, looks like the white snow and bright red blood, so beautiful, so proud and tender, hair grows like the window ebony black and bright.

The same is true of *Beauty and the Beast*, where the heroine is even directly referred to as “Beauty”. This demand for beauty in female characters caters to the external conditions of patriarchal discourse, where a woman must be an angelic figure. In “Ugly and the

Beast”, “beauty” is rewritten as “ugly”, “the youngest daughter” is rewritten as “the eldest daughter”, who was hunchbacked, bowlegged, pigeon-toed, overweight, coarse-skinned, and lank-haired, with small piglike eyes, a bulbous nose, crooked teeth, and a deformed jaw [9]. This is a rebellion against the male gaze, where women are no longer beautiful and even become ugly. But this rebellion is passive, and the author sets up an image of a woman whose objective conditions do not correspond to those of an “angel”. In “The Tiger’s Bride”, the “beauty” is finally licked away by the beast and turned into a tiger [10]. “Beauty loses the characteristics of a woman’s body and is transformed from a human being into a beast. Thus the possibility of her being “sexualized” disappears, and male power cannot judge her “good” or “bad” by her appearance, she is neither an angel nor a monster, but a beast, an inhuman species. This is an active rebellion against the male gaze, a woman who refuses to stare and chooses to liberate her own nature. In “The Beast”, “Beauty” is transformed during her stay in the forest with the beast: “Her hair was always tangled, she bathed less often, her body smelled of garden and forest, and she was almost always barefoot to the point of having calluses on the soles of her feet.” She turned away from human society and returned to nature, living like Tarzan of the Apes. Beauty changed from a “beautiful woman” to a “beastly man.” She became stronger, she could even run for hours on end, she slept better, ate more, and became healthier. Beauty’s appearance is no longer beautiful, her body is no longer soft. Beauty has chosen to become who she is now, to live this way, a choice of female autonomy, an active rejection and rebellion against the male gaze.

Not only is the image of Beauty rewritten, but the image of the Beast is also rewritten. In “Ugly and the Beast”, the “beast” is no longer a “cursed prince”, but a “real ugly wizard”. This setting makes men also encounter the gaze, they are no longer shiny and perfect existence, they also have the same trouble as the ugly. In “The Tiger’s Bride”, although the beast is disguised as a man, the beast is a beast from beginning to end. This setting actually removes the mask of the patriarchal “princely fantasy” and reveals the truth about the center of male power. In “The Beast”, beauty is freed from the constraints of society and returns to nature, becoming a “bestial” human being. The beast, however, gradually “humanizes” and becomes more social. The female characters are given the opportunity to liberate their nature, while the male characters return to the discipline of patriarchal society. This is a kind of mockery and rebellion against the patriarchy.

All three fairy tales show a rejection of the male gaze. The author not only rewrites the image of the female character, but also the image of the male character, and by rewriting the male character, the feminist fairy tale tears off the pretense of the male character as a gentleman and exposes the nature of patriarchy.

2.2 Rewriting of Language and Imagery

In the story of “Beauty and the Beast”, “the rose” is a very important imagery. The beauty asks her father to bring her a rose, and the father picks the forbidden rose, in exchange, the beast asks the beauty to come to his castle. Just like Eve asking Adam to pick the forbidden fruit in the Bible, the “rose” becomes the original sin of the beauty. In “Ugly and the Beast”, the ugly does not ask her father for anything; it is the father who sees the rose in the castle and thinks it matches his daughter who takes the initiative to pick it [9]. In “The Beast”, Beauty knows that “her father wants her to say so” and

therefore makes the request of “wanting the rose” [11]. This shows that the “original sin” is actually brought on by the father, but is passed on to Beauty, suggesting the oppression of women by the patriarchy. In “The Tiger’s Bride”, the rose is given to Beauty by the Beast, who gets the rose, and the father loses Beauty to the Beast, who asks Beauty to give him a rose to show her forgiveness [10]. This reversal of father-daughter position also shows that Beauty is not at fault. In “The Beast”, it is directly stated that the “rose” is necessary for the meeting between Beauty and the Beast. The encounter between the beauty and the beast is not an active process between them, but rather a passive encounter through an exchange between the father and the beast, or even a transaction, where the necessity “rose” is essentially the currency used in the transaction between the beast and the father. The exchange between the “rose” and the “beauty” is a material exchange between male power, in which the beauty is essentially a materialized commodity.

In addition to the rewriting of the important imagery of the “rose”, women become the center of the narrative. In “Ugly and the Beast” and “The Beast”, the psychological activities of the beauty are depicted at great length. The Tiger’s Bride, on the other hand, is a first-person narrative from the perspective of a beautiful woman, highlighting the subjectivity of the female character. The first-person narrative perspective and the description of the psychological activities allow the reader to go deeper into the inner world of the beauty and understand her feelings. This also makes it more likely that readers will take on the role of “beauty” and let feminist thoughts and consciousness enter the readers’ subconscious world.

2.3 Resistance to Patriarchy

Beauty and the Beast is a story of sacrifice and devotion. The choice of beauty is a sacrifice, and the spirit of making sacrifices for the family is the moral requirement of patriarchy for women. In “Ugly and the Beast”, the ugly woman is different from the traditional story of the beauty. The ugly woman is no longer a soft and passive figure, she is brave, active, and chooses to take responsibility for her family on her own. In “The Tiger’s Bride” Beauty does not actively give herself, she is lost to the Beast by her father, and it can be said that she is sold as a commodity. This is a revelation of the truth about patriarchy. The “sacrifice” of Beauty in “The Beast” is passive, and the price paid by her father for breaking his promise makes Beauty choose to sacrifice herself. Unlike traditional stories, this sacrifice results in the beauty escaping from the confines of her family and gaining freedom and liberation in nature.

In “Ugly and the Beast”, although the heroine has a sense of independent choice, she is still bound by the family responsibilities under the patriarchal system, and family and marriage are the final destination of the ugly woman. Compared with “Ugly and the Beast”, the heroine in “The Tiger’s Bride” is more radical. She not only reveals the violence and ugliness of her father, but also takes a defiant attitude in the face of the “beast”. The heroine uses her body as a bargaining chip and a weapon to play with the two centers of male power, her father and the Beast, and she does so in a playful and playful manner with patriarchal discourse. The heroine of *The Beast* is more gentle. Originally living in a safe and comfortable environment, she is later liberated by her nature in nature away from her family. When she returns from nature to her family to be

examined for patriarchal criticism, she develops a true awakening of consciousness and makes her own choices.

The ideological core of these three fairy tales echoes the development of feminist thought. With the rise of feminism and the feminist movement, women went from being confined to having more autonomy in their choices. Women gradually moved from the home to society. From the initial demand for equal political and economic rights to the fight for the rights of all aspects of society. In modern times, women “naturally” have certain equal rights, and under the discipline of patriarchal discourse, it is easy for women to forget the struggles of their predecessors and settle for the status quo until a certain opportunity arises for her to become self-aware. The way these three fairy tales resist patriarchal power is precisely in line with the development of the times. Although the times are changing and the writing of gender politics in feminist fairy tales is also changing, the spiritual core of their resistance to patriarchy remains the same in the first place.

3 Conclusion

The three feminist fairy tales based on Beauty and the Beast all take “beauty” as the center of their writing, and the role of women changes from the unchanging “other” to a variety of subjects, from passive to active, from submissive to a sense of autonomy. Classical fairy tales reinforce patriarchal norms of power and discipline and indoctrinate people. Feminist fairy tales are different in that resistance to patriarchal power becomes the central theme, and this resistance is developmental and closely related to the development and changes of feminist thinking. This also provided inspiration for future generations to write new fairy tales.

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