

Fairy Tales Manipulate Women

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Fairy tales affect the way our society in general thinks about girls and their role in society. They also affect the way girls feel and interact with each other. As Marcia Lieberman says in her article, "[...] an analysis of those fairy tales that children actually read indicates that they serve to acculturate women to traditional social roles" (185). Because fairy tales are read to children in their impressionable years, they imbed thought into the child that affect the way they think about women and "normal" social roles. Fairy tales can have many harmful effects on the way women act and are perceived. They help to destroy girls' self-esteem and spur jealousy among the female population.

In fairy tales, the heroine is always considered a beautiful person. This is no different from the tale *Prince Danila Govorila*. The story starts off by describing a princess having two children. A son and daughter "both well built, both handsome" (Afanas'ev 351). The focus will be only on the daughter for this paper. In most other tales the girl is the one who is described as being beautiful this one just adds the brother. The fact that the girl is described as beautiful is important because girls identify with the main character and who wants to read about and identify with an ugly girl? People like to identify with someone beautiful and gorgeous rather than an unattractive person. This is one

reason why fairy tales are based on the attractive physical appearances. Lieberman states in her article, "[...] the beautiful single daughter is nearly always noted for her docility, gentleness and good temper" (188). This also sends the message to girls that being beautiful also means having a good personality or attitude. This may make young girls think that they can act however they want if they are pretty simply for the fact of their beauty. This is not something that is true at all. Some of the most beautiful girls are also the most conceited and self-centered.

Fairy tales just like *Prince Danila Govorila* only show us the more beautiful women as being the desirable characters. This is just like the media of today where all one sees is gorgeous supermodels. These women are accepted based solely on their looks and appearances. Young girls nowadays will see these women on magazine covers, television and movies and think that they must achieve specific looks to fit in. Fairy tales are just the primitive form of media peer pressure. I do not think the girls of previous times felt any differently than the girls of modern time. Girls reading fairy tales hundreds of years ago felt the same need to fit in by being beautiful because of the image fairy tales gives successful desirable women. If a girl grows up with the thoughts that she must be beautiful she will most

likely suffer from low self-esteem from constantly trying to become someone that she is not. This is one of the most predominant negative effects of fairy tales and is so imbedded in our society that it will not easily be changed at all. Girls will always feel as if they need to be beautiful to fit in or be chosen.

In fairy tales the beautiful girl is automatically the chosen one only because of her beauty. Leiberman states that, "The immediate and predictable result of being beautiful is being chosen" (188). This sends the message that to be chosen all one has to do is be blessed with beauty. Leiberman says that "the beautiful girl does not have to do anything to merit being chosen; she does not have to show pluck, resourcefulness, or wit; she is chosen because she is beautiful" (188). This is a very demoralizing statement toward women because it basically says that women do not need to possess any type of knowledge or skill. This sends the message that girls do not have to try to educate themselves or learn any skills (other than household ones of course) to get by in life. This is a negative way of thinking about women. It sends the message that women are not intelligent or talented enough to be considered more than just a pretty face. It implies that women must be dependant on men to be accepted and possible raise their

social status. Some women today still try to get through life simply by having a pretty face and are completely fine with that. This is not a good way of thinking to derive from fairy tales.

According to fairy tales, including *Prince Danila Govorila*, being beautiful qualifies you for getting a husband, being prosperous and in turn leading a happy life. In this story the brother is supposed to find a wife who can fit a ring. This essentially means he must find a physically appropriate or beautiful wife. The need to find an the right attractive wife is so important in this story that even incest is overlooked. The brother finds out the ring fits his sister. He says, "Ah my sister, you have been chosen for me by my fate, you shall be my wife" (Afanas'ev 352). The girl's brother does not care that he will have to marry his own sister rather than someone else, just the fact that she is beautiful and the chosen one by fate matters. This is taking beauty to an extreme. Marrying another person only taking into consideration their appearance is wrong enough but making that person a member of your family is horrendous. This sends the message to young children that finding a beautiful and "chosen" wife is more important than having morality. This is not something you would want your children taking away from a story. What kind of impression

is this incest marriage making on the younger children reading it? Conveying that being beautiful is more important than morality. It is giving children the idea that doing what is right is insignificant to outer beauty and appearances.

Fairy tales may be the initial catalyst in spurring jealousy and competition between girls. Leiberman states that "The beauty contest is a constant and primary device in many of the stories" (187). A perfect example of this is shown in *Prince Danila Govorila*. "He traveled and traveled through the villages and cities, tried the ring on all the lovely maidens, but could not find one whom he could take as his betrothed" (Afanas'ev 352). It did not matter whom the brother thought he loved, the only thing that counted for anything was whose finger fit into the ring. This being the case, it sparked a competition between the women who wanted to marry this man. In the end, the prettier of the women would be chosen as his bride. This probably caused much jealousy and resentment between the one who was chosen and that of who was not. Leiberman also feels that "Beautiful girls are never ignored; they may be oppressed at first by wicked figures, as the jealous Queen persecutes Snow White, but ultimately they are chosen for reward" (187-188). This means that the most beautiful girl will always win the

beauty contest.

This idea of having to be prettier than everyone else has a huge influence on girls today. There is so much jealousy between girls one can hardly believe it sometimes. It is even evident in young girls in elementary school. Girls are ruthless these days and it seems to be getting worse. I know this because my sister is in junior high school and everyday she comes home and tells me about how all of the other girls hate her. My sister is a pretty girl that attracts attention from many boys. This is very threatening to the other girls and they take it out on my sister. They even go as far as to call her vulgar names and start rumors about her. I believe this can be attributed to the reading of fairy tales as young children. As I have already mentioned fairy tales teach girls that the only way to get by in life is to be beautiful. The girls that are not extremely attractive feel threatened and attempt to hurt the pretty girls to make themselves feel better. Fairy tales have had a huge impact on the attitudes of girls which is quite evident.

Another common aspect of fairy tales is that the heroine is usually suffering in some way. In the tale *Prince Danila Govorila* the girl is suffering because her brother was trying to marry her. She runs away and is helped out by

a witch's daughter. The heroine is always helped out in some way. This sends the message to girls that they do not have to solve their own problems because someone will always help them out if they are in trouble. In this story the witch helps the girl out. Lieberman says, "The underlying associational pattern of these stories links the figures of the victimized girl and the interesting girl; it is always the interesting girl, the special girl, who is in trouble" (193). Lieberman also states, "What these stories convey is that women in distress are interesting." She is basically saying that girls do not need to be independent or know how to take care of themselves because someone will always be there to help them. In most cases it is the man who saves the poor, suffering girl. This has helped convey the message that girls will get attention by being in trouble and has led to the idea that being a "damsel in distress" is a desirable quality. This is not a good lesson for young girls to learn. Everyone should believe that they can be self-sufficient and take care of themselves.

Rarely do you read a fairy tale and not have the women laboring in some way or another. In *Prince Danila Govorila*, the women of the story are almost constantly at work. Most of the time, the work is for the men. At other times, the work was just done for the sake of something to

do. An example from the story is the line that says, "Inside sat a lovely maiden embroidering a towel with silver and gold. She sat with her hostess at the embroidery frame; they embroidered the towel and talked together" (Afanas'ev 353). The women were expected to keep busy, doing things such as cooking and cleaning but most importantly having children and or watching the ones they already had. This was perhaps the biggest role a woman had. They were also expected to obey the men and keep quiet. Bottigheimer says that "[...] one must conclude that fairy tales offered an apparently innocent and peculiarity suitable medium for both transmitting and enforcing the norm of the silent woman" (130). These ideas of women doing housework all the time has probably helped to keep traditional family patriarchy alive today. Fairy tales teach young girls that they should grow up to become good housewives. These thoughts may inadvertently be placed in the minds of girls today. They could feel that their only purpose is to have children and keep house while their husbands go out and live the more active life. Meaning, they provide for the family by working and expect their wives to take care of the rest. This is a very wrong approach as to what the roles of men and women actually are.

As with all fairy tales, the ending result is normally

marriage. However, to get to that point a woman must be chosen. In *Prince Danila Govorila* the brother can choose between two women, one being his sister, although he does not know which that is. In order for him to "determine their fate" so to speak, he has his servant fill a sheep's bladder with blood. He then puts this under his arm and the servant stabs it, causing blood to spill out everywhere. His true sister rushes to him, thinking that he is hurt, therefore determining whom he should marry. This is an example of how girls must wait to be chosen.

By reading fairy tales like these, girls today think that the man should be the one to initiate the relationship and be responsible for making the first move. The thoughts are planted in their heads to allow the men to control every aspect of the relationship. The girl does not know how to accomplish anything on her own except that she must be chosen by the man first. This type of thinking comes from the way fairy tales are written and perceived. Thus offering morally wrong views and opinions on how one should live. The ending to fairy tales is always the same. The man chooses his wife, they get married and "live happily forever after" (Afanas'ev 356). The pivotal point in the woman's life is when she is chosen by a man to be wed. As Lieberman says, "They wait, are chosen, and are rewarded" (189). She also

says that "Marriage is the fulcrum and major event of nearly every fairy tale; it is the reward for girls" (189). The women spend their entire lives waiting for the time when they get married. After that takes place, they spend the rest of their life heeding to their husbands every word. They are expected to produce children, care for them, cook, clean, and any other thing that must be done.

What about careers and jobs for the women? What if they wanted to be the one to make the living while the husband stays at home and does the housework? These thoughts are pushed aside due to the point fairy tales make. Girls are told that their main objective is marriage. As Lieberman says, "The system of rewards in fairy tales, then equals these three factors: being resourceful, being chosen and getting rich" (190). That is not saying very much about the female population. Women can do just as much as men can. I feel these fairy tales are putting false thoughts into the minds of the girls out there today.

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