

Feminism and Fairy Tales

Outline

- Introduction to Feminism
- Feminist Readings
 - Marcia Lieberman
 - Ruth Bottigheimer

Feminine and Masculine

<u>Feminine</u>	<u>Masculine</u>
Passive	Active
Submissive	Dominant
Sweet	Courageous
Emotional	Rational
Intuitive	Logical
Damsel in Distress	Knight in Shining Armor

Feminism: Terminology

- Sex vs gender
- Female (vs male)
- Feminine (vs masculine)
- Patriarchy
- Essentialism
- Sexism
- Feminism
- (See definitions on course web site)

Feminism: Definition

- Political stance
- Challenge the essentialist equation of female with feminine and the social consequences of that equation
- Uncover and debunk patriarchal prejudices and social imbalances
- Expose the ways in which males appropriate high-status roles for themselves
- Reveal the bias in supposedly neutral or objective observations

Readings

- Marcia K. Lieberman. "Some Day My Prince Will Come': Female Acculturation through the Fairy Tale." (1972)
- Ruth B. Bottigheimer. "Silenced Women in the Grimms' Tales: The 'Fit' Between Fairy Tales and Society in Their Historical Context." (1986)

Lieberman (General)

- “Some Day My Prince Will Come”
- Historical/cultural approach
- Children read stories because they are interesting
- Children learn to predict outcomes and consequences of specific acts (interest in endings)

Lieberman Outline

- Life as a Beauty Contest
- The Glamour of Suffering
- Powerful Women (Good and Bad)
- Marriage in Fairy Tales

Life as a Beauty Contest

- Beautiful = meek, good-tempered
- Ugly = ill-tempered, ambitious, conniving
- There are no plain but good-tempered girls
- Being beautiful = Being chosen = Getting rich
- Beauty is rewarded, at least eventually, without having to do anything
 - Beautiful girls are never ignored
- There can be only one winner because there is only one prize
- What’s the effect on beautiful girls? On plain girls?

The Glamour of Suffering

- Heroines are not merely passive; they are also victims and martyrs
- Martyrdom and suffering are glamorous
- “Women in distress are interesting”
- “... the thrill of persecution, bordering at once on self-pity and self-righteousness”
- Passivity leads to being saved and, ultimately, chosen
- What lesson do girls learn from such examples?

Powerful Good Women

- Not human
- Remote
- Brief appearance
- Fate is irrelevant
- Old
- Asexual
- What sort of role model is the fairy godmother for a girl?

Powerful Evil Women

- Ugly (wicked witch) or jealous (wicked stepmother)
- Moral value of activity is sex-linked
 - Witches and villainesses are bad and active
 - Heroines are good and passive
 - Fairy godmothers are good, but not human, remote, and reactive
 - Heroes are good and active
- “The counterpart of the energetic, aspiring boy is the scheming, ambitious woman.”
- “Being powerful is associated with being unwomanly.”

Marriage

- Marriage = wealth and social status
- Tales are preoccupied with marriage, but rarely portray it
- Desire for eternal courtship, since marriage is the end of the story

Bottigheimer Outline

- Philological approach
- Social context
- Types of silence in fairy tales
- Verbs of speaking
- Germany, 1770–1830

Philology

- The study of languages and literatures
- The study of written and oral texts and the nontextual features needed to understand them
- The study of a culture or civilization through its written and oral texts

Social Context

- German society of the Grimms' time expected "silent women"
 - Evidence outside fairy tales
- "Men could be silent, but women were silenced."
- Women's speech is chattering or nagging
- Women's silence is feminine
- Men's silence is well-earned repose

Types of Silence in Fairy Tales

- Muteness (as a curse or punishment)
- Distribution of speaking parts in the narrative
 - First- and third-person representations of speech
 - Quiet vs talkative characters
- Verbs of speaking
 - Speak (sprechen)
 - Say (sagen)
 - Ask (fragen)
 - Answer (antworten)
 - Cry out (rufen)

Verbs of Speaking

- Choice of verb that introduces direct speech
- Choice of verb indicates authority
- "Speaking" in seven Grimm tales
 - Mother (3)
 - Girl (7)
 - Witch (19)
 - Father/King (11)
 - Boy/Prince (16)

So What?

- Is the distribution of verbs of speaking significant?
- Can it provide credible insights into the society of the time?
- Why does Bottigheimer emphasize that her research applies only to the Grimm corpus?

Common problem

- Why do you not want to write on your exam essay “Bottigheimer says that women are silenced in fairy tales and we see an example of this in ...”?
 - Bottigheimer says some specific about this subject with respect to the German tales in the Grimm collection. What does she say about other fairy-tale traditions?
 - If Bottigheimer’s comments are about German tales from a particular period, how should we go about applying them to Russian tales?

Feminism and Male Characters

- How about male characters and boys?
- Are women complicit in perpetuating patriarchal models?
