



**Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
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Children's Literature: A Study of Implied Morals and Ethics in Selected Animated Tales

A Thesis

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Chapter One

Introduction and Background of the Study

1.1 Introduction

Children's literature includes all written and published books for children who are not interested in adult literature or those who do not have reading skills, comprehensive understanding, or knowledge. Kimberley Reynolds points out that children's literature began orally based on fables, fairytales, and folktales in its origin as well as its books which were read by both children and adults and were written to a different audience (2). Reynolds explains the meaning of children's literature as referring to materials written to be read by both children and young people (1). Peter Hunt confirms that children's literature developed very slowly in earlier times. Since it was orally passed down from generation to generation, children's literature came to existence later than general literature (4).

As an independent genre, children's literature was separated from adults' literature in print books or booklets which were confined only to children in the second half of the eighteenth century (McCulloch 29). The early children's tales and stories were didactic, moral, and instructional rather than artistic. Such tales were intended to construct spiritually healthy children. By the emergence of the fairytales of the Grimms, Perrault, and Anderson, the focus is placed on the stunning transformation from the early purpose of didactic literature into ingrain moral and ethical values by providing children, through rather than religion, with entertainment and

education (Fox11). The moral theory of the fairytales is skillfully exploited by Disney's Company to convey the moral and ethical values to children through entertainment.

Thus, the twentieth century has dramatically witnessed so many tremendous transformations in the field of Children's Literature. These changes are represented in abandoning traditional text tales and classic bedtime stories in favor of adopting the process of animation. Jessica Tiffin in Haase's book *Folk Tales and Fairy Tales* (2015), points out that animating the most famous and popular folktales in the world has become the most universally dominant media among all children. As a moral educator, Walt Disney's Company has been world widely considered the favored pioneer one among other rival companies. By selecting popular fairytales from different worldwide oral literature, modifying them into new versions to meet children's wishes through its well influential multimedia, Disney's Company acquires a good reputation among children all over the world. The dominance of Disney is caused by the close correlation between animation and fairy tales:

The relationship between animation and fairytale is also interesting in that animation shadows the fairy tale's problematic association with children. The generally childlike concerns of many animated works, together with the influence of Disney's clean-cut family values, echo the Victorian tendency to relegate folkloric, magical narratives to the nursery. (Tiffin, qtd. in Hasse et al 43)

Steven Watts argues that the main impulses for Disney's releasing first animated movies were to virtually create a higher artistic realism, to construct pedagogical background, and commercially get great profits (36).

It was done by employing traditional methods such as classical ways of Cel animation (the art of creating two-dimensional animation by hand on sheets of transparent plastic). Consequently, for the sake of hyper-reality, Walt Disney continued developing technical means which finally culminated through the application of three-dimensional digital technologies (Tiffin 45). For example, in the animal tales such as *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) or *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), the transformations of animal into a human can not be fully portrayed nor explicitly understood by children through using only fairytale texts, but by anthropomorphizing the characters via animation. Furthermore, creating characterization as an artistic process in showing principal characters and the way they act certainly serves the intended virtual reality through animation. It is obvious that screen literacy enriches children with a vast imagination and a variety of ideas to understand the world around them.

Moreover, Evely emphasizes a distinct feature of Disney's animated tales in creating fully developed characters "from concept drawings to final design" (13). As a result, the twenty-first century has witnessed an amazing artistic integration in the field of children's literature by using the technology of animation in filmic fairytales for better virtual reality.

The current study falls into five chapters. Chapter one includes an introduction to the thesis and its background. Chapter two is subdivided into three sections. The first section, *Children's Literature: A Survey* presents a definition of children's literature, historical background of its origin, and development during salient eras until it becomes an independent genre. The second section is also subdivided into two subsections. The first one, which is entitled *Folklore, Folktales, and Fairytales*, examines folklore and its

sub-branches such as folktales and fairytales in terms of definitions, origins, functions, purpose, and development. The second subsection entitled Children's Authorship tackles the vital role of children's authorship in the foundation of children's literature. The third section tackles with Cartoon Animation, its definition animation, purpose, development, and function.

Chapter three explores underlying morality through the theme of passivity in three animated selected fairy tales: *Snow White* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959). Chapter four examines underlying morality beyond the theme of transformation, its definition, and employment in literature. Transformation is used to address the issue of morality in three selected animated tales: *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Little Red Riding Hood* (2000), and *Princess and the Frog* (2009). Finally, chapter five is the conclusion in which the researcher sums up the main points resulted from the study and his recommendations for further studies.

The Problem of the study

The current study tackles the issue of morality as it is manifested through the themes of passivity and transformation in the selected animated folk and fairy tales. Concerning passivity, the study sheds a light on the state of submission, which the female protagonists obviously display in three selected animated fairy tales, especially those that were produced by Walt Disney's Incorporation. Although Disney was thought to be as a worldwide moral educator, due to selecting celebrated fairy tales to animate, he received much critique by many scholars and critics when he released the films *Snow White* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) because all the three princesses in these films were passive. Thus, this study

deals with the problem of passivity and its negative effects on kids in the previously selected animated fairy tales. Through thematic and psychological analyses of the passive roles the main characters in these tales play, the researcher traces passivity and tries to adapt it into a constructive instrument to enhance good morals and avoid bad behaviors for children. When evil stepmother, envious queen, and wicked witch, though they possess power and authority, fail to continue enslaving good female protagonists. Thus, goodness always wins over evil. Then, the pedagogical theory of the folk and fairy tales is realized. This theory hypothesizes that fairy tales are full of moral lessons that indirectly teach children much about societal activities, class, emotions, values, and vices as well as the struggle between good and evil.

Similarly, the present study deals with morality through the theme of transformation by selecting three world widely known animated fairy tales: *The Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Little Red Riding Hood* (2000), and *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), which were released by Disney's Incorporation in different times. The researcher traces morality beyond transformation in these three selected animated fairy tales, to demonstrate that the process of transforming the princes in *The Beauty and the Beast* and *The Princess and the Frog* into repulsive animals, is based on the psychoanalytic theory of Freud. According to Freud's theory, the mind is responsible for conscious and unconscious transformational behaviors and notions. Thus, the transformation is not physically real, but it is appealing to the fantasy of a child due to moral sake.

The hypothesis of the Study

Animated fairy tales contain diverse themes that foster children's good morals through enjoyment. The themes of passivity and transformation help to manifest underlying moral lessons to instruct children to behave positively.

Thesis Statement

Animated fairy tales, as they convey morality to children, can positively affect children's personalities. Animated fairy tales foster children good morals, maintain these morals, and support children emotionally and mentally.

Methodology

The researcher's selection for the three animated fairy tales of Disney *Snow White* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), is not random but rather depends on the fact that these selected works represent a coherent and continuous thematic unity. The theme of passivity combines the first three works and accordingly, the theme of passivity is used to manifest obedience and maintain good values in the first three selected works. Likewise, the selection of *The Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Little Red Riding Hood* (2000), and *The Princess and the Frog* (2009) depends on the theme of transformation which combines these selected works coherently. Thus, the current study relies mainly on the thematic approach. Through the analytical explanations, characterization, highlighting symbolic elements of the six selected works and reviewing the concept of

morality and other associated terms like values and ethics, the study strives to demonstrate that the animated folk and fairy tales implant good morals in children.

As a style of writing, the researcher depends on the MLA style in formatting this thesis.

1.2 Literature Review

Children's literature is defined as the body of written books, booklets, picture books, and any accompanying illustrations produced to entertain and instruct children through entertainment. This type of literature started with the folklore world. As a result, to study children's literature both readers and investigators should take folklore and its main branches such as folktales and fairytales into account, arguing when and how children's literature started and the way it became an independent genre. The current study then analyzes implied morals and ethics in selected animated fairy tales that are based on fairytales, and further shows the modifications Disney's Company makes on these tales so as to suit the social changes and modernity.

Many writers, critics, and investigators then are attracted by an extraordinary massive wave of fairytale movies since the twentieth century up to now. Therefore, many researchers are interested in the reasons why and how these animated fairytales spread and become a cultural phenomenon world widely. As life in the twenty-first Century becomes a more sophisticated and a large proportion of people turn into perverts, the majority of people search for refuge and meaning in fairytales and other

relevance of human imagination and religion. However, unlike religious beliefs, fairytales have a fascinating secular appeal that aims to help people arrange their lives and uphold hope for a harmonious peaceful society and stability. When the whole world becomes exposed to stormy social and political conflicts, people restore to more fairy-tale films, and through fantasies of these films, those who are wrongly done find relief and psychotherapies as fairytales address and diagnose the perplexing dilemmas of the current era. Though fairy tales are secular, they seriously feed humanity with spiritual morals due to the utopian purpose they implant in human seeds and buds represented by children.

Accordingly, fairytales and animated fairy tales have been the focus of researchers in different aspects of life. Since fairytales are rich with numerous themes with direct effects on the daily lives of people, many researchers have tackled various topics in different fields and environments such as academic studies. With regard to the available sources, it should be noted that the researcher could not find book sources or academic studies related to the topic of this thesis inside the country and could get access to book sources and studies only via the internet and by traveling abroad to check available sources in nearby countries. Nonetheless, the current study finds the following dissertations useful to support its main discussion and enrich its topic:

In a dissertation entitled, *The Use of Grimm's Fairy Tales to Understand the Moral Content in Fairy Tales* (2001), Kerstin Brand from Concordia University explores the child's understanding of the moral content in some classic fairytales of the Brothers Grimm only through experimental study which was conducted on a group of sixteen students from grades one

to three. He based his program on taking a fairytale story for an hour after school which was weekly presented for nine weeks. Brand made each participant take part in retelling each fairytale to examine after that the value effect these tales had on the lives of the participants. Brand's study consisted of four components: the practice of retelling the fairytale by the participants, the activity of dramatization these retold tales, the interviewing activity as well as the artistic activity. Then, through these activities, Brand found out that children have the ability to recognize vices and virtues in each tale. The researcher used theories based on Gilligan's (1988) research and Eisenberg's theory of prosocial behavior (1992) to calculate the effects of fairytales on the participated children.

Unlike the above dissertation, the current study discusses the implied morals and ethics in selected animated films released by Disney Company using a different method and a separate framework which depends on thematic analyses of each film, comparative method between the original fairytale and the animated film, psychotherapy analysis, critical analysis, and discussing life lessons in each film in terms of morality. In addition, the present study traces the origins of these animated movies, and how they are based on folktales and fairytales which are adapted to appropriate each era on one hand and appeal to children's mentality on the other hand.

In his dissertation entitled *Gender, Class, and Ethnicity in the Disney Princesses Series* (2009), Kirsten Malfroid from the University of Gent, focused on the main female protagonists only in terms of character analysis. He only discussed the human characters without taking into account the animal ones. He did not include film scenes in his analysis nor even film conclusion or discussion, did not examine morality behind any movie he

studied, paid no attention to the life lessons each movie conveyed. Instead, he chose to focus on psychological analysis of the so-called Disney Princesses due to their popularity among children. He performed a qualitative analysis based on a psychological approach in analyzing the principal female protagonists.

The current study considerably differs from Malfroid's dissertation because it does not examine gender, class, and ethnicity in terms of psychological analysis as Malfroid did, but according to underlying morals and life lessons as mentioned previously. Even the way of critique and psychological analyses are different that they are employed to serve social recovery and ethical mend.

The current study is also different from Elizabeth Walker Howson's dissertation *A Content Analysis On the Meaning of Disenchantment In Fairy Tales* (2007), from the University of North Carolina, which mainly focused on the analysis of disenchantment in fairy tales and the tools which are used to realize such kinds of magic. Howson examined fifteen fairy tales to identify that disenchantment which comes through various methods such as love, violence, courage, or expulsion of the alien. She depended on content analysis to convey the importance of disenchantment and the purpose of it in every tale, whereas the current study dismisses enchantment and warns children not to come near or trust in magicians because evil is represented by such voodooos.

Dianne Graf's dissertation *Reading Female Bodies In Little Snow-White: Independence and Autonomy Versus Subjugation and Invisibility*, (2008), from The University of Wisconsin, investigated the reasons and the

state of affairs that make the Queen plan to murder Snow-White by shedding light on the ways the Queen followed to fight for her physical throne. Unlike Graf's dissertation in which he referred to the patriarchal society represented by the wicked powerful Queen in conspiring to murder Snow-White, the current study focuses on the educational aspects parents should update their kids with as well as instruct children to be obedient in order to be safe. The patriarchal system is not the main topic in the present thesis. In her dissertation, Graf stressed more on the political and patriarchal issues than on morality.

Hatice Aydeniz's dissertation *Re-Imaging the World: Retelling Fairy Tales In Moving Image* (2011), explored the adaptations of fairytales and how these intertextual texts changed through retelling in the postmodern world. The researcher examined the process of these adaptations in two fairytales only *Snow White* and *Little Red Riding Hood* in both literature and film. Aydeniz analyzed the structural, narrative, and feminist critiques in terms of the effects of postmodernism these tales have on society, but the current study totally differs from Aydeniz's in many aspects such as the principal themes and the selected animated fairytales in terms of number and thematic discussions.

The present thesis notably differs from Rachael Michelle Johnson's dissertation *The Evolution of Disney Princesses and their Effect on Body Image, Gender Roles, and the Portrayals of Love* (2015), from James Madison University, in which Johnson investigated the effects of body image, gender roles, and the portrayal of love that fairytales have. He explored the effects of gender roles through bodily analyses which Disney princesses had on children during three main periods from the classical era

since *Snow-white* (1937) till the most recent period when *Frozen* (2013) was released, whereas the current study investigates implied morals and ethics in selected animated tales beyond enjoyment.

Compared with Oana Leventi-Perez's dissertation *Disney's Portrayal of Nonhuman Animals In Animated Films Between 2000 and 2010* (2011) from Georgia State University, wherein the researcher inspected portrayals of race, class, gender, and speciesism in non-human animals by analyzing 12 animated films released by Disney's Incorporation Company between 2000 and 2010, the current thesis differs in all aspects of the discussion. While the previous dissertation emphasized the animal rights and calls for rejecting animal subordination to human's superiority, the current thesis investigates the best methods of constructing their ethical basis through watching Disney's animated films to be good members of society.

Finally, the current thesis is also different from Umme Haneef Sharif's dissertation entitled *From Fairy Tales to Disney Movies: Gender Roles and Stereotypes Then and Now* (2016), from BRAC University, Sharif explored the portrayals of gender stereotypes as well as gender roles through a comparative method including classic fairy tales of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries by Perrault, the Grimm Brothers and Hans Christian Andersen on one hand. On the other hand, he investigated many films released by Disney to elaborate that the modern representations of these classic fairytales largely changed gender stereotypes and role models during the time. Unlike Sharif, the current study follows a new brand of thematic analysis and moral theories aiming at building a healthy milieu for bearing good children through enjoyment.