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Fairy Tales – Yesterday and Today

Baśnie – wczoraj i dziś

Abstract: Fairy tales play a key role in a child's life because they stimulate emotional development, shape sensitivity, enrich vocabulary, and create social attitudes. Thanks to fairy tales, the child has the opportunity to identify with his favourite heroes, experience adventures, get used to difficult emotions and learn the rules governing the world. In addition, fairy tales have been passed down from generation to generation creating unbreakable bonds between the child and the parent, which affects their relationship and provides an attractive way of spending time together. By listening, reading and watching fairy tales, the child builds his worldview, shapes moral values, learns about positive models and prepares for a life in which he will have to make constant choices. Thanks to fairy tales, a child becomes more aware, interprets the various experiences of the characters, overcomes fear and becomes more flexible in overcoming the encountered difficulties. However, living in such dynamic times, with rapid technological development, a person should be prepared to receive modern fairy tales that differ in form, theme, personality of the protagonist, as well as extraordinary adventures of characters. Also, the adaptations of fairy tales produced in cinemas are famous for their excellent music, phenomenal special effects, and the selection of a talented cast. Therefore, while moving forward, man should not close himself to modernity. On the contrary, he should willingly participate in the reception of modern forms of fairy tales, which will make it easier for him to compare the classical form to modern one and provide knowledge, making it a sophisticated person, and also help encourage the child to reach for the book. In the article, the author describes the concept of a fairy tale and its necessary elements, emphasizes its significant impact on the development and education of a child. She also pays attention to the specificity of a modern fairy tale, detailing the differences between its traditional and contemporary form.

Keywords: child; fairy tale; tradition; modernity

Abstrakt: Baśnie odgrywają kluczową rolę w życiu dziecka, pobudzają bowiem rozwój emocjonalny, kształtują wrażliwość, wzbogacają słownictwo oraz kreują postawy społeczne. Dzięki baśniom dziecko ma możliwość utożsamiania się ze swoimi ulubionymi bohaterami, przeżywa przygody, oswaja się z trudnymi emocjami oraz poznaje reguły rządzące światem. Ponadto, przekazywane z pokolenia na pokolenie baśnie tworzą nierozzerwalne więzi pomiędzy dzieckiem a rodzicem, co wpływa na ich relacje i zapewnia atrakcyjny sposób wspólnego spędzania czasu. Dziecko poprzez słuchanie, czytanie i oglądanie baśni buduje swój światopogląd, kształtuje wartości moralne, zapoznaje się z pozytywnymi wzorcami, przygotowuje się do życia, w którym będzie musiało dokonywać nieustan-

nych wyborów. To właśnie dzięki tej formie literackiej jest bardziej świadome, interpretuje rozmaite doświadczenia bohaterów, pokonuje strach oraz staje się bardziej elastyczne w pokonywaniu napotkanych trudności. Co istotne, żyjąc w czasach tak dynamicznych, w których następuje gwałtowny rozwój technologiczny, człowiek powinien być również przygotowany do odbioru nowoczesnych baśni, które różnią się formą, tematyką, wzorcowym typem osobowości bohatera i niezwykłymi przygodami postaci. Warto dodać, że ekranizacje baśni słyną obecnie z doskonałej muzyki, fenomenalnych efektów specjalnych czy doboru utalentowanej obsady. Dlatego idąc z postępem, człowiek nie powinien zamykać się na nowoczesność. Wręcz przeciwnie, z chęcią powinien uczestniczyć w odbiorze nowoczesnych form baśni, co ułatwi porównywanie formy klasycznej z tą nowoczesną oraz dostarczy wiedzy, czyniąc go osobą obytą, a także pomoże w zachęceniu dziecka do sięgnięcia po książkę. W artykule przybliżono pojęcie baśni i wskazano jej niezbędne elementy oraz podkreślono istotny wpływ tej formy literackiej na rozwój i edukację dziecka. Uwagę zwrócono również na specyfikę bajki nowoczesnej, wyszczególniając różnice między jej tradycyjną a współczesną formą.

Słowa kluczowe: dziecko; bajka; tradycja; nowoczesność

If you want your children to be intelligent,
read them fairy tales.
If you want them to be more intelligent,
read them more fairy tales.

Albert Einstein

INTRODUCTION

“Once upon a time” is a phrase familiar to children all over the world as the beginning of a fairy tale, whether it be a story of kings, farmers or orphaned children. These four words serve as an invitation to an adventure in a magical world of wonder, but fairy tales are more than simple stories told to entertain children. Fairy tales have followed human societies through the ages and still play a significant part of children’s lives (Benediktsdóttir 2014, p. 2).

Fairy tales are classed as cultural heritage and many people associate them with childhood memories. For centuries, they have grown, evolved, and reshaped. They have taken many different forms and projected many different messages across a vast number of cultures. It is because of this growth and adaptability that the fairy tale has become one of the world’s most important literary traditions (Lee 2013, p. 2).

Fairy tales are highly functional, that is, they address basic problems that confront their audiences. Readers can categorize these issues or fairy tale themes as falling into three major categories of experience: the psychology of the individual, the sociology of the community, and the cosmology of the universe. In other words, fairy tales can be seen as telling people about their own feelings and psyches, as instructing them how to conform to society’s expectations, and as offering spiritual guidance about how to see our place in the cosmos (Swann Jones 2002, p. 19).

It is suggested that fairy tales are most generally human in their structure and in each type of tale you can study the most basic structures of human behaviour (von Franz 1995, p. 13). This universal human connection is the reason why the classic tales of princes, princesses, witches and wolves in lands far away and long ago, are as appealing to children today as they were a century ago.

FEATURES OF TRADITIONAL FAIRY TALES

Fairy tales are a specific kind of folk tales spread orally and handed down usually in working-class contexts by storytellers to all members of the community. Their main feature is to involve magical or marvellous phenomena as a valid part of human experience. Fairy tales usually illustrate wonder and uncanny adventures and events, where a hero, because of a change in his status, starts a quest or a mission leaving his environment for a hard journey to unknown lands. Along the path the protagonist generally overcomes several tests and makes wondrous encounters, which can either provide him with magical help and the knowledge needed to solve the tests, or divert him temporarily from the journey's purpose (Zola 2016, p. 5).

The stories are episodic in nature, contain supernatural challenges and magical motifs. Fairy tales are childhood memories of adventure and imagination. They are abstract and adaptable, somehow seemingly simple and complex at the same time (Lee 2013, p. 2). They are relevant metaphorical means of communication in which people discuss and debate social, political, and cultural problems such as the formation of gender roles, sibling rivalry, social class conflicts, revolution, social codification through dress, and so on. As a genre, the fairy tale has cultivated specific recognizable conventions and motifs for narrating important messages that have a bearing on readers' lives. Consequently, they are more apt to remember and recall a fairy tale than other generic forms because this specific genre has provided them with an effective linguistic mode to deal with what is relevant and special in their lives and it is with them practically from birth to death (Zipes 2004, p. 79).

Vladimir Propp outlined basic functions that constitute the formation of the model narrative in a fairy tale. Function is understood as an act of character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action. Functions of characters serve as stable, constant elements in a tale, independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled. They constitute the fundamental components of a tale. The number of functions known to the tale is limited (Zipes 1988, pp. 8–9). By functions, Propp meant the fundamental and constant components of a tale that are the acts of a character and necessary for driving the action forward. To summarize the functions with a different emphasise (Zipes 2007, pp. 3–4):

1. The protagonist is confronted with an interdiction or prohibition that he or she violates in some way. Often the protagonist commits an error or seeks to improve his

or her social status by embarking on a journey. One way or another, the protagonist is commissioned – sent on a mission.

2. Departure or banishment of the protagonist, who is either given a task or assumes a task related to the interdiction and prohibition, or to the desire for improvement and self-transformation. The protagonist is assigned a task, and the task is a sign. That is, his or her character will be marked by the task that is his or her sign.

3. The protagonist then encounters: (a) the villain; (b) a mysterious individual or creature, who gives the protagonist gifts; (c) three different animals or creatures who are helped by the protagonist and promise to repay him or her; or (d) three different animals or creatures who offer gifts to help the protagonist, who is in trouble. The gifts are often magical agents, which bring about miraculous change.

4. The endowed protagonist is tested and moves on to battle and conquer the villain or inimical forces.

5. The peripety or sudden fall in the protagonist's fortunes is generally only a temporary setback. A wonder or miracle is needed to reverse the wheel of fortune. Sometimes a fairy, hermit, wise man or woman, or magically endowed human or animal will intervene to benefit the protagonist.

6. The protagonist makes use of gifts (and this includes the magical agents and cunning) to achieve his or her goal. The result is (a) three battles with the villain; (b) three impossible tasks that are nevertheless made possible; and/or (c) the breaking of a magic spell.

7. The villain is punished or the inimical forces are vanquished.

8. The success of the protagonist usually leads to (a) marriage; (b) the acquisition of money; (c) survival and wisdom; or (d) any combination of the first three.

Typically, fairy tales also have the “happy ending” that most people are familiar with today. They triumph over death. The tale begins with “once upon a time” or “once there was” and never really ends when it ends. The ending is actually the true beginning. The once upon a time is not a past designation but futuristic: The timelessness of the tale and lack of geographic specificity endow it with utopian connotations – utopia in its original meaning designated “no place”, a place that no one had ever envisaged. Readers form and keep the utopian kernel of the tale safe in their imaginations with hope (Zipes 1988, p. 10).

The significance of the paradigmatic functions of the fairy tale is that they facilitate recall for the teller and listeners. They enable people to store, remember, and reproduce the utopian spirit of the tale and to change it to fit their experiences and desires due to the easily identifiable characters who are associated with particular assignments and settings. Fairy tales include magical and unrealistic events. For instance, there are (Zipes 2007, p. 5):

- terrifying beasts like dragons, lions, and wild boars,
- kind animals like ants, birds, deer, bees,
- the evil and jealous stepmother,

- the clever peasant,
- the power-hungry and unjust king,
- haunted castles, mysterious huts in woods, glass mountains, dark, dangerous caves; and underground kingdoms,
- seven-league boots that enable the protagonist to move faster than jet planes,
- capes that make a person invisible, magic wands that can perform extraordinary feats of transformation,
- animals that produce gold,
- tables that provide all the delicious and sumptuous food people can eat,
- musical instruments with enormous captivating powers,
- swords and clubs capable of conquering anyone or anything,
- lakes, ponds, and seas that are difficult to cross and serve as the home for supernatural creatures.

IMPORTANCE OF FAIRY TALES

Thanks to fairy tales, children find out what is good and evil in life and accurately define their attitude towards them, thus, moral aspect of the world outlook is being shaped. Moral dilemmas from childhood stories remain relevant later in adult life. Understanding the idea that purely good and evil characters exist only in fairy tales allows children to build up relationship with peers. They come to understand that at different life periods either good or bad qualities prevail in each person and that to err is human (Kulikovskaya, Andrienko 2016, p. 55).

Although fairy tales are populated with kindly helping figures and noble kings and queens, they also include witches, monsters, trolls, and other scary creatures. Some fairy-tale adaptors minimize the fear, evil, and violence, forgetting that many children enjoy dangerous situations, particularly in the safe environment of fiction (Dewan 2016, p. 27). Children who have heard fairy tales from young age are introduced to some of the problems they fear the most in this world. This display of abandonment and loss is frightening to the child, but is presented in such a way that the child still feels safe and protected because the setting is more often a magical place in a land far away and a long time ago. They experience the same fear and anxiety as the characters, but they do so in a safe simulator-type environment. These stories allow children reassurance that even though the situation seems desperate, the clever and dexterous child can take care of himself (Benediktsdóttir 2014, pp. 5–6). Gilbert Keith Chesterton once said: “Fairy tales do not tell children the dragons exist. Children already know that dragons exist. Fairy tales tell children the dragons can be killed” (Garshfield 2021, p. 1).

Fairy tales have a unique value, as they offer new dimensions to the child’s imagination, and the form and structure of these tales suggest images to the child by which he can structure his daydreams and with them give better direction to his life (Bettel-

heim 2010, p. 7). The best of them present wondrous worlds that captivate and inspire readers. Stripped of localized and particularized detail, characters and places offer infinite possibilities to the imagination. The child reader is free to visualize a world that is larger than life. And by eliminating nuances and particulars, fairy-tale authors focus on the essential, the universal, and the elemental (Dewan 2016, pp. 29–30).

Fairy tales appeal to children because they typically embody patterns of growth and development. Children become adults in these tales by moving away from home and entering “the wide world”, a place filled with danger, challenges, and exciting adventures. Many fairy tales begin with a domestic problem, one that propels children into the larger world. This movement away from home stimulates personal growth as characters face new challenges (Zipes 2006, p. 79).

Fairy tales strengthen and exercise the child’s ability to set values, precisely as a result of the process of abstracting in black and white. Later, he/she will learn to distinguish between person and value. The early experiences with fairy tales will not prevent the realization that one should not view an adversary as the representation of evil. Psychologists and psychiatrists consider a fantasy-level confrontation with dangers to be necessary. What is more, children who have not been exposed to fairy tales are unprepared for the cruelty in life when they encounter it (Benediktsdóttir 2014, p. 21).

Michal Černoušek claims that we cannot protect children by denying an existence of negative examples. On the contrary, we should allow them to see both sides and assist children in distinguishing between them. Children are pushed to take sides, make opinions and thus, they develop their critical judgement of a life in the world (1990, p. 70). Fairy tales provide the context where the relationships among people are very simple and depicted in a comprehensible manner for young readers. The children get easily the right and wrong poles clear and since evil is always punished, it serves as a distracting example for them.

The knowledge about the system of human relationships in fairy tales facilitates children to understand human relations in real life. Attention to the consequences of breaking laws and norms in fairy tales allows them to learn to predict possible scenarios in daily life and gain experience of building more competent relationships with peers and adults. It is an indicator of children’s holistic world outlook since they learn to establish various cause-and-effect linkages, existential and other dependences between certain aspects of reality (Kulikovskaya, Andrienko 2016, p. 56).

Almost every fairy tale carries the moral message. It is a proof that fairy tales are not a mere entertainment but also educate. Morals intentionally instruct the reader and warn him what would happen if he deceives because every cheat is revealed and punished in the end. The reader learns that what is important is pure modesty, wit and not the richness or social status (Cernousek 1990, p. 166). They have a big educational value and foster the right ethical attitudes in the young reader’s life.

Family and the relationships of parents and children are prominent symbols in all of these tales, and very important subjects to children hearing the stories since the

lives of young children still essentially revolve around their parents and family. The fact that their parents are the most important people in children's lives can be very frightening as children are completely dependent on them, and some children cannot fathom surviving without them. These complexities that can bother children are addressed in many fairy tales, and these stories serve to assure them that they need not worry, by depicting children who suffer hardships and adversity but find the strength to persevere and emerge victorious (Benediktsdóttir 2014, p. 9).

Kids should be taught to perceive the deep meaning of fairy tales. At first it is necessary to learn to take a close look at events around them, progressively going from facts to conclusions. It is crucial to talk about characters' behaviour, their feelings in order to know if children understand the message of the discussed fairy tale. In brief, it is important to analyze and see the impact that fairy tales may have on children's capacity for communicating ideas, but also, on their ability to represent the world using their acquired knowledge (Rojas González, Rodríguez Garcia, Cardozo Peña, Varón Lopez 2019, p. 5).

Fairy tales have been useful tools to foster students' lexical competence in foreign language classes, especially when it comes to young learners. Lenka Mikešová (2006, p. 17) states that the inclusion of fairy tales contributes to a good classroom atmosphere, since reading stories allows the teacher to introduce or revise new vocabulary, and it is easier for children to acquire it.

In addition, fairy tales as a teaching tool catches children's attention, interest and increments their curiosity, since it enables children's imagination. Fairy tales provide entertainment and many new topics to discuss with children. Likewise, they are fun and have a rich vocabulary (Lepin 2012, p. 9). The inclusion of literature into a foreign language class provides wonderful source materials for eliciting strong emotional responses from students. Moreover, these fairy tales combined would be an effective strategy that allows young learners gather multiple lexical forms of English as the target language (Rojas González et al. 2019, p. 5).

CHARACTERISTIC OF MODERN FAIRY TALES

Modern fairy tales are called "modern fantasy", because they are tales of pure imagination. They contain people or creatures and sometimes a setting that does not really exist. The best fantasy for children demonstrates two characteristics (Nikolajeva 2003, p. 21):

- it shows a strongly realized vision of a fantasy world. That world, however fantastic, must still be logical,
- it usually contains a moral or lesson. Themes are frequently demonstrated through symbolism.

Fantasy is created by the author's manipulation of three elements (Tunnell, Jacobs, Young, Bryan 2016, pp. 37–42):

1. Setting – the setting may be of this world, but not readily accessible, as the land of Narnia in *The Chronicles of Narnia* by Clive Staples Lewis. The setting may also be totally fantastic as in *The Hobbit* by John Ronald Reuel Tolkien.

2. Time – time and setting are closely related. The characters may go ahead in time, they may go backwards, or the story may take place in current time. The protagonists are often surprised at how little time has elapsed when they return to the real world. The typical example is *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll.

3. Characters – characters range from humans, such as *Alice in Wonderland*, humanized creatures, such as the hobbits in Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, and they can also be personified animals such as *The Ugly Duckling* by Hans Christian Andersen.

Modern fantasy is braided into a number of subgroups, based on themes (Grenby 2008, pp. 144–156):

Tales of pure imagination – these stories can range from picture books to more complicated stories. Though they begin and end on a realistic note, the character's adventures take place in totally imaginary settings.

Modern tales of talking beasts – tales of talking beasts are very old. They are found in the ancient fables and in many contemporary fantasy stories. In contemporary talking-beast tales, the animals are shown as near humans and often live in human-like surroundings. *The Wind in the Willows* by Kenneth Grahame is an example of a modern talking-beast tale.

Personified toys – Hans Christian Andersen was the first to write stories about toys that came to life. His tale, *The Steadfast Tin Soldier*, is a classic example of a toy that accomplishes great deeds.

Humorous fantasy – much fantasy contains some element of humour. Younger children prefer an open, slap-stick type of humour.

The dynamics in those stories evolves very smoothly, the situations occur often easily, without any magical explanation. All the transformations and heroic deeds, incredibly long-distance teleportation and other regular overcoming of natural laws in fairy tales are nothing other than a miracle, and require explanation from a listener. In modern fairy tales, wonders are ordinary and rationalized and they help the heroes to complete their mission (Yashkina 2016, p. 35).

DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES BETWEEN TRADITIONAL AND MODERN FAIRY TALES

Nowadays, a fairy tale is extremely inspirational in various arts, it is transposed from media to media, recorded as a subtext in composite structure, and sometimes several classic fairy tales interfere with the unified narrative. The significance and

meaning of a fairy tale grows with these procedures. The new millennium has been characterized by technical-technological advances, a global connectivity and an extremely fast information flow. At the same time, with these benefits, everyday life becomes more complicated, society imposes ever growing demands on an individual from the earliest age (Vučković 2018, p. 310).

In the past decade, the number of modern fairy tale adaptations has risen drastically, even more so than in the past. These versions are everywhere in stores and on TV, but they are somehow different from their predecessors. They blur the lines between the fairy tale and other types of literature. The result is an array of adaptations which can only partially be called fairy tales due to their lack of certain necessary elements (Lee 2013, p. 4).

The fairy tale is not just an oral or written narrative. Today it can be a TV commercial, a poster, a napkin, a T-shirt, a videocassette, a postcard, a film, a play, a musical, and so on. It has been condensed and expanded through mass media and technology. It rarely assumes the same form twice, although there are basic constellations in the canonical tales that recur constantly (Zipes 2006, pp. 79–80).

Movies like *Shrek* and *Snow White and the Huntsman* give the fictional characters power, physically and mentally, that helps them fight the evil that will inevitably cross their paths. No longer is the sweet and innocent story line what captures audiences' attentions, it has become about the mystery, the intrigue, and the idea of complete failure in order to reach that happily ever after. These adaptations do not solely rule out the happy ending, but the turmoil that the fictional characters go through is more complex and more hard to overcome (Bell 2012, pp. 2–3).

Comparing the classic tales of magic to the modernist tales of vengeance, it is seen the difference decades have made on the idea of the good vs. evil. Movies and television are not wrong in giving such well-loved stories new ideas and depth, but there is a clear understanding that time has changed about the beloved fairy tale story. Times have changed and so have the ideologies of what makes a fictional story believable (Yashkina 2016, pp. 43–50).

The core message of fairy tales is essentially timeless, even in the times of the Brothers Grimm fairy tales were intended to educate. They deal with primal fears, which are reflected by Hansel and Gretel just as they are by Harry Potter, and they always present readers with heroines and heroes who overcome challenges and are richly awarded as a result. Modern fairy tales expand on this pattern. A modern child is less concerned with finding their way out of the forest but more anxious about getting good marks at school (Conrad 2020, pp. 2–3). However, the central values of love, faithfulness, kindness, bravery and humanity remain unchanged. New values which have been added include independence and individuality, tolerance and diversity, education and critical thinking. These aspects are becoming more and more important in today's society (Zipes 1988, p. 27).

CONCLUSIONS

Children's literature helps a young child make sense of what it is to be human and helps them understand the world around them. The fairy tale genre provides ways for children to receive important messages. Although there are some themes in fairy tales that are unrealistic, the overall effect is positive and offers fundamental elements for children's development (VisikoKnox-Johnson 2016, p. 77).

Fairy tales for children are universal, ageless, therapeutic, miraculous, and beautiful. This is the way they have come down to readers in history. Inscribed on their minds, as children and then later as adults, is the impression that it is not important to know about the mysterious past of fairy tales just as long as they are there and continue to be written. The past is mysterious. The history of the fairy tale for children is mystery (Zipes 2006, p. 1). Hundreds of thousands of tales continue to be told and come and go as easily as the wind whisks leaves into the air, lets them flutter, and eventually disperses them on the ground until they settle and die. But the best of our tales do not die.

The classic versions of fairy tales are still as essential to people today as they ever were, and will probably remain so for the foreseeable future. The modern variants can partially be called "fairy tales", however, it does not make them unnecessary or negative. These adaptations fit into a society where entertainment is valuable. Difference must pass through identity if it is to come into its own. So while these stories may be a dead end to the fairy tale – mimicking them but never replacing – they may very well be the start of something else that will one day be respected and enjoyed throughout the world (Lee 2013, p. 32).

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