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## The Features Of Fairy Tales In Western Culture

Fairy tales have been around for many generations, heavily involved in our modern culture and formation since we were kids. Many of these old fictional stories were originated in the old Germanic culture, like Cinderella, Rapunzel, and Snow White, and have been passed through many generations by means of storytelling. Many of these tales often resemble the common pattern of the misery of a beautiful woman against evil, and her salvation by marrying a prince and becoming a princess. Modern society has absorbed these stories deep into our cultural values, but since most fairy tales are really old and belong to a different culture, these are usually a source of stereotypes and even inaccurate role models inside our society. Consequently, western culture as well as many others around the world, have been influenced by the inaccurate models for beauty and personal values as well as several stereotypes and beliefs all contained in the charm of fairy tales.

For instance, in most of these fictional stories, young girls in our society are delighted with the common stereotypical model of what a princess looks like. The princess' beauty, is the factor that makes them different and thus princesses, but what about their moral values? For example, we have the tale of Snow White, in which it is depicted the beauty of this young girl as being glamorous, and thus the main cause for her misery and salvation. Everything in the story of Snow White from the envy of her stepmother to the prince falling in love with her rotates around her beauty. However, the values directed to the character of a princess, like goodness, honesty, intelligence, and courage are replaced by innocence, passiveness, and beauty. It teaches the youngest in our society, especially young girls the wrong and shallow format that "only good looking people can find love and happiness while unattractive people are evil and deserve miserable lives" (U.) which is also seen with Cinderella and her stepsisters. This sometimes could even affect the "self-esteem of young girls while setting children up to be shallow and uninterested other people's personalities" (U.). Therefore, the stereotype for beauty that has influenced many generations in the western culture which is depicted in most fairy tales, follows an outdated and shallow description of what beauty represents in a person since the personality and moral values can be deeper and more representative of the universal format for the beauty of a person.

Also, fairy tales very often depict the feminine model of a stepmother as being evil. For example, in the tales of Cinderella, Snow White, and Rapunzel it is not the male figure who stands as being the villain, but the stepmother, and in some other tales, again some female figure represents evil, like in the tale of the Sleeping Beauty. This has enrooted in western culture the belief of stepmother as being rude or cruel, this could be considered a stereotype since this is not always the case. For example, in our culture today it is noticeable the difference we feel even when we mention the word 'stepmother' versus 'stepfather'. This difference may be perpetuated by the fact that since we were kids, we saw the representation of evil linked to the figure of the stepmother in almost every fairy tale we watched, read or heard. Regarding the fairy tale representation of a stepmother, "The pervasive image of the malefic stepmother has real-life consequences... A three-year study by Auckland University doctoral candidate Anna Miller found that a majority of stepmothers felt they were treated as if they played a negative role in their stepchild's life" (Maddeaux). In fact, "Despite cultural depictions" of stepmothers "ruining their stepchildren's lives through sinister plots... research by Athabasca University in

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Calgary shows they often serve as the glue that holds a family together after a divorce, providing essential support to children” (Maddeaux). Therefore, the representation of the evil stepmother or mother or anyone related to a child’s life constitutes in western culture a stereotype that makes it harder for modern stepmothers to cope with their role within a family.

Furthermore, the salvation of every beautiful woman in most fairy tales doesn’t come from the fact that they are capable, smart and brave, but from the fact that their beauty impressed some prince, and he came to save her from evil. Is this the right role model for especially girls in our culture, who grow inspired and parallel to the model of princesses that solely rely on her beauty to succeed? In tales like Rapunzel, Cinderella, Snow White, and others the common pattern of Prince Charming liberating them from evil always comes to play. For example, in the tale of Rapunzel, having she all the means to escape from that tower, she had to wait many years so that a prince could come and save her from her imprisonment. This leaves the audience with a helpless, vulnerable and dependent role model of a woman or princess, and this audience is full of young girls that grow inspired by the belief of a Prince Charming. For example, in the tale of Cinderella, 'the messages being received about gender by children from this story are flawed... Children, mostly young girls, are probably led to believe that a handsome man will be the solution to all of their future problems, which is not a very good universal message for young children” (Kr44). Furthermore, the need of every fairy tale princess “to change in order to get a man to like them and the lack of empowered women” in most of these tales could cause “ young girls to think they should be dependent on men, and young boys to think they are more powerful than girls” (U.). The dependence of the woman character upon man, which is depicted in most fairy tales could be considered in modern western culture as being an inaccurate and nonprogressive representation of the modern woman, which is being tough to the youngest in our society.

In short, fairy tales follow a common pattern for the representation of influential characters like a princess, prince, and stepmother which generally don't connect with the actual beliefs in western culture, since these tales' beliefs are outdated. Today, the dependence of princesses like Cinderella, Snow White, Rapunzel, and others upon being saved by a prince is considered as an unprogressive representation of a woman's role. Also, the representation of a princess possessing only physical beauty as part of their character teaches the youngest at home a mistaken universal representation of beauty, which is shallow as it badly depicts moral values. Furthermore, the stereotype of a 'wicked stepmother' which is present in most fairy tales creates real consequences in the modern role of stepmothers, making it even more difficult for women to cope with this role in blended families. Because of these negative influences of fairy tales in western culture, movie industries like Disney have created and tried to reshape different princess' models for today's fairy tales, like for example in 'Mehana' and 'Tangled Ever After'. These princesses, unlike Cinderella or Snow White, are depicted as being more active, courageous and independent, providing a new generation of children, especially girls, with an empowered view of their capabilities reflected not just in the beauty, but in the moral values of modern princesses.