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The Industrial Revolution and Fairy Tales

Fairies, witches, evil step mothers, animals that talk, princes, and princesses in distress; all these magical elements appear in the fairy tales we all loved and enjoyed as children. However, these fairy tales we enjoyed as children have not always been intended for children. In our culture fairy tales are a cultural object that has endured changes over the years. With any change in cultural objects it is necessary to understand how the structure of that society changed in order to really understand why the object changed. Just as in any math equation. It is easy to have a processed equation to find an answer to a solution. In order to really understand, however, it is necessary to understand where that equation was derived from. By understanding the process by which the equation was found, one is better to understand the final result. Fairy tales work the same way. It is easy to understand that the tales have changed over time, however, in order to truly understand the tales one must look at the structural elements that made those changes necessary. The Industrial Revolution was the structural change that allowed society to create a notion of childhood that had not previously existed. As a result, new cultural objects changed as well; the fairy tales children enjoy and love today were one of those objects.

The industrial revolution transformed society. The idea of childhood is an evolutionary process that was brought with industrialization. Pre-industrialization, children were viewed as miniature adults. Life consisted of birth, life, and death because the life expectancy of the time was much shorter than it is today. Up to the seventeenth century the idea of childhood did not exist, "basic living conditions were a contributing factor; people were wed at a relatively young age, and therefore left childhood-in the modern sense of the term-at a very tender age"(Shavit318). With the new industry focused more on machines than hard labor, a cultural transformation placed emphasis on a new leisure class. People in America were no longer working long exhausting hours, mechanical machines created more time for leisure among the people. A shift in the social function of children changed. A shift in the social function of children occurred and the young ones began to create a new public perception for themselves. The idea of children, who no longer had to work and could go to school in "industrialized societies created a gap between childhood and adulthood"(Henslin74). Perhaps the reasons that society began protect children's needs is the common conception that Locke introduced that infants possess "tabula rasa, a blank slate upon which experience imprinted knowledge" (Locke). This new perception of children as being innocent identities implied that they also needed to be safeguarded from the evil of society. With any transformation of the structure changes will occur in the cultural objects that are in that structure as well. The industrial revolution created changes in the texts of fairy tales.

With the distinction of children from their adult counterparts, children's literature was able to emerge. The industrial revolution also created, "cheaper and more efficient methods of production. From the 1860's on, books were more easily produced and were generally less precious"(Wolf). Books were once reserved for the upper-class elite, but

with the invention of the printing press, books became more affordable for the under classes. Children were then able to enjoy literature without financial loss if something happened to a book. Children however needed their own books specified to children's needs. Since the idea of childhood had previously not been explored, books would have to be created specifically for children's specific comprehension capacity. Most of the literature would be adapted from adult versions in order to preserve innocence among the children.

By analyzing the text I found that after looking at a fairy tale from different time periods one can see that the changes in the text reflect the concepts of childhood during the period in which they were written. The Grimm Brothers' stories were not originally intended for a child audience, at first their fairy tales were written for an adult audience. Over the course of the years the Grimm Brothers revised the stories throughout several editions. Like most fairy tales of the time, "Because of the lack at this time of reading material produced solely for children, *Kinder and Hausmärchen* was read by children which induced Brothers Grimm to adjust the text" (Shavit *Poetics of Children's Literature*). The Grimm Brothers adapted their original text to be suitable for children. With the creation of childhood, I believe that parents wanted to preserve the innocence by censoring the material that their children were exposed to. The once tragic endings, were intended "to scare the hell out of kids so they'd do the right thing" (Ingrassia). With the emergence of John Locke's, *tabula rasa*, the endings began to change to happy endings.

The main difference in the fairy tales historically is that with folklore the retelling of tales is specific to each general society's elements. Therefore telling a story in Charles Perrault's time served a different purpose than telling a story in Grimm's time. The structure of the society had changed and different things became emphasized in daily life. In the Grimm's time the notion of children as individual people came forth and was reflected in their fairy tales. In Charles Perrault's time, the notion of childhood was still a concept that was lumped with the adults. This reflection of the society in which Perrault lived is shown in Charles Perrault's fairy tales.

In the text of Charles Perrault's version of *Cinderella*, "Donkeyskin," it is obvious that the notion of childhood was a concept that had not yet been created. The word choice of the text shows that the audience was intended for adults:

Preparations were made right away for the wedding. The monarch invited all the kings from the surrounding countries, who radiant in their diverse finery, left their lands to attend to the great event (Perrault 116).

This text was obviously intended for adults because most adolescents do not know what a monarch is and adjectives such as radiant and diverse are considerably advanced for most children to be able to understand. Furthermore, the world of a child is so small that it is sometimes hard for them to grasp the concept that there is life outside where their immediate surroundings are. It is hard for a child to grasp the concept that there are other countries and places that the child can not see. At the time when Charles Perrault wrote this fairy tale adults and children had not yet been differentiated as a result the text is intended for adults that can grasp these concepts.

The Grimm Brothers on the other hand, direct the story at child audience by altering the same story:

It happened that one day the king announced a festival that would last for three days and to which all the beautiful young ladies of the land were invited from whom his son might choose a bride(Grimm119)

In the same section that was examined in Perrault's version, the adaptation is apparent. The Grimm Brothers incorporated the concept and comprehension of the child into their fairy tale. Instead of people coming to attend the party from different countries, as in Perrault's version, Brothers Grimm use many subjects attending from one kingdom. The shorter version of the agency in the Grimms text relates to the shorter version of a child's agency in the world compared to an adult.

The industrial revolution created more effective ways to produce books and as a result the under classes were able to afford them. As with all cultural objects the more available to a broad audience the less prestige the object holds. Shavit notes that only after the industrial revolution did the elite class begin to regard fairy tales as suitable for the under classes and children. I think that the changes in availability of fairy tales played a large role in which the tales were written for. I feel as though the text reflects this as well. Previously fairy tales were a status symbol of the upper classes because the under classes were unable to afford them. Once the stories were mass produced and more people were able to read them, the stories no longer held prestige and the upper-class no longer wanted to be associated with middle class literature. Changes in the structure led to other changes in the text. With the change the industrial revolution created in the availability of text, the audience for fairy tales also changed.

By taking one particular text and examining different versions I suggest that one can see the different social implications of the time; more certainly through a particular tale one can observe how the creation of childhood and transition of classes are reflected in the tales themselves. The original tale of Little Red Riding Hood that was recorded in 1885 by Paul Delarue is called "The Story of Grandmother." This author claims to be, "more faithful to an oral tradition...because the folklorist recording it was not invested in producing a highly literary book of manners for aristocratic children"(Tatar4). This tale is significant because it shows that the original fairy tales in their folklore form were much more gruesome and risqué than the contemporary tales. In this original tale the little girl that is presumably Little Red Riding Hood is unknowingly cannibalistic. The wolf arrives at the grandmother's home and killed her and then he put her flesh in the pantry and her blood in a wine bottle. The little girl came to the house and ate her grandmother's flesh and drank her blood. Another deviation from contemporary stories is that little girl then gives the wolf a striptease, "When [the girl] asked the wolf where to put all her other things, her bodice, her dress, her skirt, and her stockings, each time [the wolf] said: "Throw them into the fire my child. You won't be needing them any longer" (Briffault10). This story ends with the little girl escaping because she tells the wolf she needs to go outside to use the bathroom. The wolf ties a rope to her leg so she cannot run away. While outside the girl ties the rope to a tree and escapes the wolf. This story was supposed to be true to the original folk tale. This tale includes sexual references and cannibalism, things our society no longer views as appropriate for children. At the end of the tale the grandmother does not miraculously come to life. The realism of death in this story stands out. Once someone dies, they are not capable of returning to life.

When society began to change their views of children as innocent creatures the text of the fairy tales also transformed. These changes can be emphasized by comparing

the text of “The Story of Grandmother” to The Brothers Grimm’s version of little red “Little Red Cap.” Jack Zipes points out that “Wihelm did take more care to refine the style and make the contents of the tales more acceptable for a children’s audience, or really for adults who wanted the tales censored for children”(Two Brothers Named Grimm). The Grimm Brothers transformed the story from the original version in order to appeal to a wider audience. The sexual implication of the wolf sleeping with the girl was removed in the Grimm’s version because sex was something that was not suitable for children. The language of the Grimm Brother’s text also changed from the original. In the original fairy tale, by Briffault opens with: “There was once a woman who had made some bread. She said to her daughter: “Take this loaf of hot bread and this bottle of milk over to Granny’s.””(Briffault10). The Grimm Brother’s opening to the story differs significantly:

Once upon a time there was a dear little girl. If you set eyes on her you could not but love her. The person who loved her most of all was her grandmother, and she could never give the child enough. Once she made her a little cap of red velvet. Since it was so becoming and since she wanted to wear it all the time everyone called her Little Red Cap.

One day her mother said to her: “Look , Little Red Cap. Here’s a piece of cake and a bottle of wine. Take them to your grandmother...when you are out in the woods, walk properly and don’t stray from the path”(Grimm14)

First, one can tell simply by looking at the text that the Grimm’s version is much longer. The understanding of child comprehension as lower than that of an adult became a public awareness. The Grimm Brothers did things that over simplified the story. Explaining the title thoroughly so that a child would understand this is one example of how the Grimm Brothers changed the tale. The Grimm Brothers could have simply said that there was a girl that wore a red cap and it would have been assumed by the adult reader that this was the reasoning for the girls name, however a child’s comprehension is much less. The Grimm brothers explaining that there was a child that wore a red cap, and therefore people called her Little Red Cap, seems redundant, but it clarifies the information for a child. The Grimm’s version also adds more information in their text in order for the child to create a mental image in their head. The changes in the tale of Little Red Ridding hood also reflect the changes that occurred in society. In the time when “The Story of Grandmother” was written, the creation of childhood had not yet taken place. By the time the Grimm Brothers got around to writing down their version of the tale, children were seen as separate from adults. The Grimm Brothers added into the text lessons to be learned such as listen to your parents and do not talk to strangers. When walking to her grandmother’s house Little Red Cap meets a wolf that asks her where her grandmother lives. After Little Red Cap told the wolf, he went to her grandmother’s house, ate her, and waited to eat Little Red Cap as well. The Grimm Brothers exemplify in their story that by talking to strangers horrible things could happen. The fact that all this could have been avoided if Little Red Cap did not leave the path also is intended scare children into obeying their parents. The Grimm Brothers also allow for a happy ending, in which the Grandmother lives after being cut out of the wolf’s stomach. This happy ending also fulfills a child’s psychological needs of good overcoming evil.

Analyzing the text of these two very different versions of the same fairy tale that were written at different times, shows that the differences that occurred in society were

reflected in the text. Shavit points out that “one could also regard the differences between the two as the result of different perceptions of the concept of childhood which prevailed in each of the two periods”(Concept of Childhood). The original version was written in a period where childhood had not been created and was addressed for adult readers that could handle such topics as cannibalism and sex. The fairy tale of Little Red Riding Hood changed significantly when children became a large audience and the tales were used in educational settings. The Grimm Brothers acted as the catcher in the rye by omitting sexual references and adapting stories to fulfill the child’s comprehensive needs as well as the parent’s needs for censorship of the fairy tales.

The text of fairy tales transformed from being adult based to children based because “mass culture’s contents are determined solely by the demands of the masses” (DiMaggio151). Is it the culture that influences objects or objects that influence culture? I argue that culture influences objects. The cultural objects reflect the society. Objects are created in order to serve a purpose within a given society. Fairy tales were traditionally told in order to convey a message or explain a particular event. In those times the object reflected the particular society’s values. When the industrial revolution changed the ideology of the people the object changed yet again. Barriers were created in order to ensure publishers profits. Publishers would only publish material that the public would buy and as a result only the material that reflected the ideology of the people would be published and widely accepted. When the “ideas about childhood has been replaced, the characteristics of American children’s culture have changed accordingly”(West1). This was the case with fairy tales; notion of childhood that emerged with the industrial revolution created a need for children’s literature. Since children already read fairy tales and parents found a need to preserve the innocence of their children the masses demanded fairy tales that had been censored to include children as part of the intended audience. The demands of the people along with profit motives for authors and publishers urged for the transformation of fairy tales to fit children’s needs.

With a new concept of childhood at hand with the industrialization, there was a call for books that were written directly for children. These new fairy tales written for children kept in mind the special needs of the child and the conceptual capacity that they could hold. These stories emphasis learning through example because, “factual knowledge profits the total personality only when it is turned into “personal knowledge,” (Bettelheim54). The fairy tales appeal to children because at their age, children can not fully understand the factual information that is handed to them, they must be able to relate it to their own daily lives in order to internalize the information at hand. An adult, for example, could tell a child that they should not talk to strangers because x percent of children have been kidnapped when talking to strangers. Mere information, however, does not allow for the child to internalize the information. If the child hears a story, like Little Red Riding Hood, they are much able to understand that bad things can happen to them if they talk to strangers.

This happens because the child is able to identify with the characters in a fairy tale. “Although the fairy tale offers fantastic symbolic images for the solution of problems, the problems presented in them are ordinary ones”(Bettelheim40).I don’t think we give children enough credit when it comes to differentiating between fantasy and reality. Some argue that telling children stories of magic could confuse them. I think it is

obvious to children that although they pretend to be a doctor, a school teacher, Cinderella, or a dragon, at the end of the day when they go to eat dinner with their family they know that these characters are simply projected metaphors and that they are their own individual.

Children relate well to the stories because, “the child’s unconscious process can become clarified for him only through images that speak directly to his unconscious” (Bettelheim31) draws parallels to figures showing how to handles situations. The figures in the fairy tales are just like regular people, usually referred to by some sort of title or descriptive name rather than unique names. The stories suggest how conflicts can be solved and create some moral lesson. The transformation of fairy tales fufills a psychological void for children, the new tails “provide extraordinary hope” (Jack Zipes Interview). When a happy ending is guaranteed the child can believe that no matter what the situation the character, that they identify with, will find a solution. There is solution to their problems but they may have to endure harsh times to find the solution. Fairy tales fill a void that is created in the child’s continuing search for the questions that are most pertinent to them such as who am I, and how do I deal with the problem at hand?

The changing of endings as in “The story of Grandmother” where the little girl just escapes and nothing becomes of the wolf, to endings such as “Little Red Cap” where the wolf is punished for his evil deeds due to the fact that “as long as [children] have not yet achieved considerable security w/in [themselves], [they] cannot engage in difficult psychological struggles unless a positive outcome seems certain” (Bettelheim39). Fairy tales provide outlets in which certain pressures are externalized though stories and plot allowing the child to understand on his/her own terms. The child’s capability to identify to certain characters allows them to understand problems that they might not be able to understand unless through the example the fairy tale offers. Fairy tales allow for children to move on with their lives. Although they may feel as though the rivalry with their siblings will never stop, as in Cinderella, the happy endings that fairy tales contain allow them to move on because they believe a happy ending in their own life will also happen. These new stories that were written with children as the targeted audience have a socializing affect. The adults that write them incorporating certain morals into their stories that the children are able to internalize. For example, in *The Three Little Pigs*, the two youngest pigs build houses in a hurry so they can play, the third pig takes his time and builds a nice strong house. When the Big Bad Wolf comes, the only house left standing is the oldest brothers and as a result he lives. This moral lesson is that taking ones time to does things right the first time pays off. “In the traditional fairy tale, the hero is rewarded and the evil person meets his well-deserved fate, thus satisfying the child’s deep need for justice to prevail”(Bettelheim144). The punishment of evil helps the child to overcome their fears catering to their need to believe that all bad things will be punished.

To understand the changes in the text of fairy tales, first one must look at the ways in which society has changed. The industrial revolution created changes in the text of fairy tales. With the rise of a leisure class and children attending school, children became seen as separate beings than those of the adult world that required protection in order to retain innocence. With a new age bracket that required special needs special literature for children was also demanded. Because there was no literature written especially for children at that time, adaptations from adult literature occurred to fulfill

this purpose. As a result the fairy tales that were once reserved for the adult population were changed according to the public perception of what children should be reading, in order to appeal to a wider audience. These new tales took out violence and sexual content that was not viewed as appropriate for children and replaced with material that was believed to be a psychological asset to children. Fairy tales continue to fulfill their initial purpose: stories that are essentially the same are altered in different cultural settings in order to explain something that is relevant to that society. After the industrial revolution the stories changed in order to meet the needs of the adolescent stage of life.

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