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Symbolic Narrative, Psychological Growth, and Aesthetic Education in Fairy Tales

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Abstract: Fairy tales, through fantastical scenarios, stereotypical characters, and symbolic imagery, transform children's fears, desires, conflicts, and developmental experiences-which are difficult for them to express directly-into perceptible narrative forms. This paper focuses on the symbolic narratives, psychological development mechanisms, and aesthetic values of fairy tales. Based on a review of relevant findings in narratology, analytical psychology, developmental psychology, and aesthetic education, it analyzes the composition of the symbolic system in fairy tales, the internal mechanisms by which symbolic narratives influence children's psychological development, and the basic path of transforming emotional experience into aesthetic judgment in fairy tale aesthetic education. Research shows that fairy tales primarily promote children's emotional regulation, self-cognition, empathy, and value judgment through symbolic encoding, emotional projection, role identification, conflict rehearsal, and meaning reconstruction. Existing research has established major pathways such as psychoanalysis, socio-cultural studies, and educational empirical research, but problems remain, including insufficient theoretical integration, limited empirical research, weakened child subjectivity, and insufficient cross-media research. Future research will focus on the fairy tale education mode of cultivating children's self-interpretation and creating beauty, and strengthen cross-cultural comparisons, longitudinal tracking and multimodal studies.

Keywords: Fairy Tales; Symbolic Narrative; Psychological Growth; Aesthetic Education; Children's Literature

1. Introduction

Fairy tales is one of the most representative types of entertainment in children's literature. Forests, castles, monsters, magic props, rescuers, animals, the transformation of characters and other elements are very magical and happy, but they are not random imagination divorced from real experience. Like symbol, they tell children the problems they will encounter when they grow up, such as anxiety about leaving, doing their own thing, mood problems, and getting along well with everyone. Through these easy-to-understand cartoon characters, children can be slightly divorced from reality and safely understand the difficult experiences such as terror, jealousy, loneliness, loss, courage and responsibility.

Fairy tales's educational purpose is not only to convey the ideas of good and evil. Repeating the same thing, making clear mistakes, exaggerating writing, changing forms and ending with happiness will impress children's sensibility, imagination and mood. Through the experience of characters and the change of story flow, we can understand ourselves and others and think about which is better. Therefore, the production of hospitality with symbol has become an education to feel the spiritual growth and beauty of children. Psychological growth is a process in which children create topic meanings in their own minds. Feel the education of beauty, and turn this experience into the ability to feel the shape, understand the mood of others and judge the beauty.

Previous studies mainly focused on the structure, psychological symbol, cultural thinking mode, moral education and classroom application of fairy tale. Some research results emphasize the relationship between fairy tale image and children's unconscious entanglements. Other studies have clarified the gender, class and family rules in fairy tale's articles. Other studies analyze children's actual reading feelings by observing courses and conducting education. However, there is still a gap in these research directions, and there is still a lack of unified explanation for the internal relationship between symbolic stories, psychological growth and aesthetic education.

Therefore, paper will focus on answering the following three questions: how does fairy tale establish a symbolic system through characters, spaces and plots, how does a symbolic story involve children's psychological development, and how does fairy tale's aesthetic education proceed? This paper first analyzes the theoretical basis of fairy tale's symbolic narrative, then summarizes the mechanism of psychological development, aesthetic value and its application in education, compares the existing main research practices, and finally summarizes the shortcomings and development direction of the research.

2. Research on Symbolic Narrative in Fairy Tales, Psychological Development, and Aesthetic Education

2.1 Theoretical Basis of Symbolic Narrative in Fairy Tales

2.1.1 Growth patterns in narrative structure

Through the study of structuralism, we find that there is a stable story pattern behind the appearance differences of various fairy tales. Propp summarizes the functions of basic stories such as "leaving home", "forbidding", "destroying", "testing", "helping", "struggling" and "going home" by analyzing Russian magic stories [1]. These functions are not only the arrangement of the story, but also jointly shape the growth process of the protagonist from the original order to the crisis, to be tested and to become a new self.

The change of place in fairy tales also has the significance of important spiritual symbols. Family represents a relatively stable initial order. On the one hand, it means that the forest, wilderness and underground world are unfamiliar environments and possible dangers. Castle, marriage and return all correspond to the hero's new identity and strength. In this way, fairy tales have developed into a growing process of "leaving the guardian-encountering disputes-understanding the test-accepting help-completing transformation". While understanding the behavior in the story, children will also be exposed to growth themes such as self-reliance, choice, responsibility, and reshaping their identity.

2.1.2 Archetypal images and psychological symbols

Analytical psychology will further explain why the characters in fairy tales appear many times across regions and times. Jung believed that archetypes such as heroes, shadows, mothers and wise men constitute important content of the collective unconscious, and monsters, stepmothers, magic assistants and wandering children in fairy tales can be regarded as symbolic representations of different forces within the personality[2].

Within this theoretical framework, monsters typically correspond to fears, desires, or aggression that the subject has not yet accepted; wise old men and animal helpers symbolize psychological resources that have not yet been recognized; and death, sleep, and resurrection represent the disintegration of the old identity and the formation of a new self. The significance of symbolism lies not in providing a single answer for each image, but in transforming abstract and vague internal experiences into story objects that children can observe, imagine, and discuss.

2.1.3 The socio-cultural formation of symbolic meaning

Fairy tales are not fixed codes detached from historical context. Zips points out that fairy tales change constantly in the process of oral transmission, literary writing, publication and media adaptation, and their character relationships and happy endings contain the family concepts, class order and power structure of a specific era[3]. Warner also emphasizes that the magic of fairy tales is always related to the storyteller's identity, social experience and media of dissemination[4].

If the same painting has different cultures, it may be interpreted as different meanings. For example, the forest can represent loss, danger and unconsciousness, and it can also represent escaping from family rule, gaining freedom, exploring strange worlds and reinventing yourself. Therefore, when investigating the symbol of fairy tale, we must carefully analyze the creation, inner experience and cultural background of the story. This is because literary paintings with many meanings cannot be mechanically applied only to a symbol of the soul.

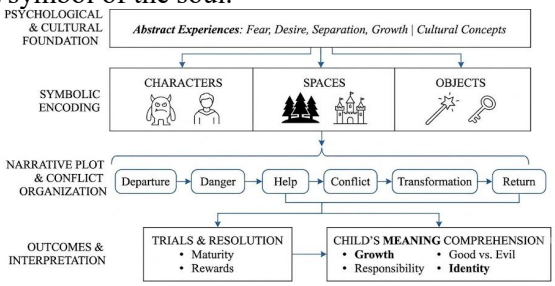


Figure 1. The Structural Framework of Symbolic Narrative in Fairy Tales

As shown in Figure 1, fairy tale's symbolic story creates meaning from the spiritual experiences of anxiety, desire, parting and related culture thoughts. This is symbolically written through the characters, places and objects on the scene, creating an uninterrupted flow of information in the story scene of leaving home, encountering danger, getting help, competing, changing and going back. In the process of testing and solving problems, the choice and result of the characters on the stage will transform the abstract experience into the idea of growth, responsibility, good or bad judgment and who you are that children can understand. Therefore, the symbol of fairy tale is not the same picture, but the structure of working story composed of the basis of experience, the construction of symbol, the organization of narrative and the way of meaning generation.

2.2 The Mechanism by which Symbolic Narratives Promote Psychological Growth

2.2.1 Emotional projection and externalization of psychological conflict

The primary role of fairy tales in children's psychological development is to transform unspeakable emotions and conflicts into concrete characters and story events. Bettelheim believes that children can project attachment, jealousy, feelings of abandonment and aggression onto characters with clear distinctions between good and evil, and gain a sense of psychological order through the protagonist's process of overcoming difficulties [5].

Fairy tale characters often possess distinct, even extreme, personality traits. This portrayal doesn't mean children can only make simple judgments of good and evil, but rather helps them temporarily separate conflicting desires and emotions. Kind protagonists, wicked stepmothers, ferocious monsters, and magical helpers each fulfill different emotional functions, enabling children to distinguish between love, fear, anger, and dependence that are originally intertwined.

Lubetsky further points out that fairy tales can provide children with a symbolic space to express their inner feelings and deal with the tasks of growing up[6]. The dark forest can bear the fear of unfamiliar environments, monsters can bear the anger that cannot be directly directed at real people, and transformation can express the desire for identity instability and self-renewal. Children do not have to directly state their real-life predicaments, but can indirectly approach their own experiences through the encounters of characters.

This symbolic distance provides a degree of psychological protection. Children are able to cope with fear, separation, and loss without being completely controlled by real-world pressures; fairy tales thus constitute a safe space for emotional expression and psychological practice.

2.2.2 Role identification and simulation of growth experience

Fairy tale protagonists are typically in a state of limited ability, weak status, or exclusion, a setting that easily resonates with children. When children follow the protagonist into unknown environments, accept tasks, encounter dangers, and make choices, they are essentially simulating the risks and actions of growing up on an imaginary level.

Hall believes that difficulties, rules and relationship changes in fairy tales can help children understand responsibility, cooperation, loss and social conflict, and their educational significance comes from the joint participation of cognitive understanding and emotional experience [7]. The protagonist's eventual recognition not only means external reward, but also symbolizes that he has completed the psychological change from dependence to independence and from passive acceptance to active choice.

The magical help in fairy tales should not be simply interpreted as accidental rescue. The magical assistant usually appears after the protagonist demonstrates kindness, courage, honesty, or perseverance, thus establishing a symbolic link between the quality of action and the story's outcome. Children learn from this that growth requires both external support and the individual's proactive approach to problems and acceptance of the consequences of their actions.

2.2.3 Formation of emotion recognition and regulation abilities

Fairy tales also help children find their feelings, name themselves and calm themselves down through the feelings of the characters and the results of the stories. Freer and Hammer found that when children tell fairy tales, play roles and chat together, they can relate the fear, anger and sadness of the characters to real life and practice suppressing impulses and expressing feelings in images [8].

It can be seen from this study that fairy tales can not cultivate children's minds by doing nothing. Its influence depends on how you read and participate. If teachers and parents only ask

children to recite the plot, change the content and summarize the teachings, it will be difficult for children to turn the experience gained in the story into real calm power. Endless questions, role-playing, continuing to tell stories and changing the ending can all motivate children to analyze the reasons, expressions and behavioral results of role feelings.

In this process, children not only listen to stories passively, but rearrange their feelings and experiences through language, physical activities and image activities. In this way, fairy tales have become a practice place for children to see their moods, understand disputes and try various coping styles.

2.2.4 Narrative reconstruction and the generation of self-meaning

Mohammed's psychological function is also reflected in the personal retelling of his own experience. Ruyney held traditional activities such as reading, discussing themes and making up stories together, and found that people who participated in the activities had better feelings about personal growth, self-acceptance and the meaning of life [9]. This study shows that Mohammed is not only a passive reader, but also a tool to reshape personal stories.

In the process of rewriting the story, individuals can change the choice of characters, rearrange disputes and create new endings. By doing so, we can understand and explain that what was originally helpless hard work can become a growth process that can be sorted out. By rewriting the story, children can also realize that there is more than one way to deal with the same difficult situation, and they also have the ability to make choices and change their behavior direction.

In a word, Melheng thinks "symbolic projection-role identification-conflict experience-emotional regulation-meaning reconstruction". First of all, symbolic stories allow us to see psychological experiences. Secondly, through the behavior of the characters and the ending of the story, help children understand and sort out the real problems on the imaginary level.

2.3 The Connotation and Implementation Path of Fairy Tale Aesthetic Education

2.3.1 Development of form perception and imagination

The fault verification version does not mean to instill a fixed story in children. Cultivate children's ability to perceive shape, taste mood and create meaning. Dewey believes that aesthetic experience comes from the relationship between materials, moods and shapes designed and arranged by people themselves [10]. Repetition, contrast, exaggeration, rhythm and change in Fairy tale create a unique order, which makes children feel simple and interesting between familiarity and unfamiliarity, expectation and unexpected development. For example, repeated work, increasingly difficult challenges, and finally unexpected development will make the story rhythm better and help children understand the structure of narrative. Color, sound, space, and the appearance of the role are in sharp contrast, so that children can understand the relationship of opposites through specific images. Magical elements not only denies the rules of reality, but also gives children the possibility that "the world may become like this". Talking animals, things that can change fate, and ever-changing space allow children to go beyond the limits of daily experience and cultivate symbolic connections and creative ideas. Therefore, fairy tale aesthetic education is mainly manifested in the ability to cultivate imagination and perceive forms.

2.3.2 Empathic experience and ethical judgment

The actions and fates of characters in fairy tales can help children understand the situation of others. Nikolayeva pointed out that although fairy tale characters usually lack complex and detailed psychological descriptions, their clear action structure can provide an effective context for children to understand the characters' intentions, develop empathy and conduct ethical reasoning[11].

Children can compare the choices of different characters in similar painful situations. Then you can analyze whether its behavior is correct and imagine other options. For example, when in danger, whether the protagonist runs away, assists or takes responsibility will lead to different results. When evaluating the characters on the stage, children can not only see the results from the actions, but also gradually understand the wishes, anxieties and conditions behind the actions.

The value judgment made in this way is not to mechanically remember the "correct answer". Through the experience of mood, the evaluation of the characters on stage and the comparison of the results, it gradually emerged. Therefore, fairy tale's aesthetic education can link the experience of feeling with ethical ideas. In this way, children can make relatively independent judgments on

the basis of their resonance with the characters on the scene and their understanding of the struggle.

2.3.3 Children's active interpretation and aesthetic openness

Children's understanding of fairy tales does not depend entirely on the ideas decided by adults in advance. Kaliszewska- Henze's research on children's reading activities shows that when children understand "The Goldfish", they will not only focus on the traditional metaphor of "opposing greed", but also take into account the rules of wish realization, the relationship between the characters on stage and happiness [12].

This result shows that children have the ability to interpret symbol and reorganize the meaning of stories themselves. Even the same image will have different understandings according to the children's age, life experience and mood. If students are only allowed to tell the outline of the story in class and summarize the central idea, then the literary texts with all aspects will be reduced according to the regulations, and the ability to freely feel the beauty of fairy tales will be weakened. The real fairy tale aesthetic education should allow children to ask questions, express different opinions, draw pictures, perform, write follow-up stories and rewrite them to express their own understanding. Children's wrong reading style, unexpected things and rewritten things are not correct answers, but an important process of transforming the experience gained from the text into their own beautiful experience.

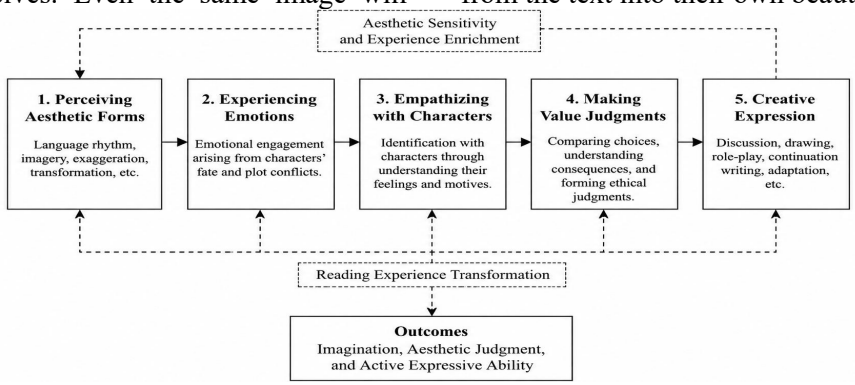


Figure 2. Main Implementation Paths of Fairy Tale Aesthetic Education

As shown in Figure 2, fairy tale aesthetic education starts from the aesthetic form, and progresses through inner experience, resonance with the characters on the scene, and value judgment. Finally, creative expression such as talking, drawing, performing and subsequent writing are not piecemeal, but are connected with each other in the change of reading experience, thus enriching children's aesthetic feelings and life experiences.

2.4 The Intrinsic Connection between Symbolic Narratives, Psychological Growth, and Aesthetic Education

Symbolic narrative, psychological growth, and aesthetic education are not three separate functions of fairy tales, but rather constitute a continuous process of information transformation. Fairy tales first symbolically encode psychological experiences through characters, spaces, objects, and plots, giving concrete form to fears, desires, and growth conflicts; children then enter the story through role identification and emotional projection, experiencing conflict in character choices and plot consequences; on this basis, children further develop an understanding of form, emotion, and value, and transfer the meaning of the story to their real-life experiences. From the perspective of their processes, symbolic narrative addresses the question of "how complex experiences are represented," psychological growth focuses on "how children understand and reorganize these experiences," and aesthetic education answers the question of "how this understanding rises to imagination, empathy, and value judgment." Together, these three form an internal chain of "symbolic encoding-emotional entry-conflict experience-meaning reconstruction-aesthetic judgment."

This chain is also feedback-driven. Children's age, cultural environment, and personal experiences influence their understanding of fairy tale symbols, while their aesthetic concepts and value judgments influence their reinterpretation of characters, plots, and endings. Therefore, the meaning of fairy tales is not the result of a one-way transmission of the text, but is constantly generated between the text structure, children's experiences, and educational interactions.

2.5 Educational Applications of Fairy Tale Aesthetic Education

Fairy tales are currently mainly used in literary reading, emotional education, drama activities, artistic creation and critical reading and writing. Wei, Jin and Li guided children to analyze silence, gender identity and power relations in stories such as Cinderella by comparing classic fairy tales with parodies. The study found that children were able to question the passive behavior of the characters and propose alternative endings[13].

This teaching method changes the teaching of fairy tales from "looking forward to it after reading it, remembering it and saying it" to "thinking, analyzing and remaking it". Comparing the old text, different culture versions and modern rewritten versions, children will find that "there is not one way to convey the same story motif". When children discover the difference of text, they will not only know the role and plot, but also begin to pay attention to the narrator's perspective and the underlying cultural values.

Sachsby said that fairy tales are helpful for learning across emotional intelligence, cultural inclusion, social justice and disciplines. However, the traditional story may have some problems, such as gender stereotypes, cultural homogenization, too simple social relations [14]. Teachers can neither covet historical boundaries because fairy tales are classic, nor completely deny their beauty and good effect on the soul because of the outdated value of something.

A more alternative method is to read, write and creation together. Teachers establish basic aesthetic experiences through reading, find out the feeling and value contradiction of the role through questioning and discussion, and then the children pass the drawing and performance, sequel writing, adaptation courses. The center is "What lessons will this story give us?" Then he said, "Why did characters make this choice? "The story in addition to how to read? "Can have a different ending?), a failure will occur.

2.6 Comparison and Evaluation of Main Research Approaches

Up to now, the research is mainly divided into three ways: psychological psychoanalysis, socio-cultural studies and educational empirical studies. Psychoanalysis focuses on the relationship between fairy tale images and children's internal contradictions, which can explain the inner depths of monsters, forests, deaths, transformations and other images, but often interprets symbols as fixed unconscious passwords. Tatar criticized some psychological psychoanalysis studies for properly using story materials and imposing the premise of adult theory on children's reading style [15].

Sociocultural approach believes that fairy tales are created in a specific historical and power structure, and it focuses on revealing the concepts of gender, class and family in the text. Its advantage lies in correcting the tendency to view fairy tales as transhistorical, universal texts. However, if ideological critique is overemphasized, the aesthetic value of fairy tales' language, rhythm, sense of wonder, and fantastical elements may be overlooked.

Empirical approaches to education study children's actual responses through classroom observation, interviews, psychological scales, and activity interventions, which are highly relevant to real-world situations. However, existing studies often employ small sample sizes and short-term designs, which limits their ability to explain long-term psychological development and changes in aesthetic abilities.

The common understanding among the three types of studies is that fairy tales have the potential to promote emotional expression, self-awareness, empathy and value judgment, but this effect is not automatically achieved by the text. Nordman pointed out that the evaluation of fairy tales should not be based solely on abstract moral content, but should also focus on the role of form, humor, wonder and emotional connection in children's reading[16]. Therefore, the psychological and aesthetic value of fairy tales comes from the combined effect of text form, children's experience, adult guidance and cultural environment.

3. Conclusion

The symbolic system in fairy tales is primarily composed of character types, spatial imagery, magical objects, and plot patterns. Common narrative elements such as forests, monsters, transformation, helpers, and return transform fears, desires, separation experiences, and identity confusion that are difficult for children to express directly during their development into concrete and perceptible story forms. Although the shape of such a symbol is stable to some extent, it will also be influenced by historical conditions, cultural habits and media. Therefore, it cannot be simply summarized as a fixed psychological meaning.

Symbolic stories help children's spiritual growth.

Because children will give them a safe distance when they understand and sort out their inner experiences. In the process of overlapping with the characters on the scene, feeling disputes and judging the ending, children will turn their vague feelings into a visible and easy-to-understand story flow. Especially in heart-to-heart, performance, follow-up, storytelling, storytelling and other activities, the growth experience in fairy tales makes it easier for children to understand their relationship with others and society. Therefore, the effect of fairy tales on the mind does not come from the one-sided influence of the story, but from the interaction of story content, children's experience and reading.

The value of fairy tale aesthetic education should not be limited to taking out certain moral significance. A truly aesthetic way of reading can make children pay attention to the changes in the rhythm, image, language and mentality of the story, and create their own thoughts through the choice of characters and the differences in values. Only by asking questions, comparing different explanations, painting, acting and rewriting can children participate in the creation of meaning, and fairy tales can be transformed from moral education textbooks into literary resources to cultivate imagination, empathy and aesthetic judgment.

Generally speaking, symbolic stories are the most basic way for fairy tales to influence children's mental growth and aesthetic education. On the other hand, the complex inner experience is transformed into an easy-to-understand story form. On the other hand, it gives children the space to feel the world, judge the world and reinterpret it. The following research needs to study cross-cultural comparison, long-term follow-up investigation and children's reaction when they actually read, so as to explain the specific relationship between fairy tales and children's growth more correctly.

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