

Twisted Fairy Tale: Promoting Multiculturalism in Young Adult Postmodern Picture Book

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ABSTRACT

The flexibility and anonymity of the traditional oral fairy tale enable this genre to be adapted and adjusted to any contemporary thought, including the postmodernism. This open-minded and critical notion of postmodernism are represented in the nowadays fairy tale to its media, function, and content. This article aims to interpret critically and creatively those three factors embodied in Lela Lee's *Snow Yellow* in *Fairy Tales for Angry Little Girls*, as one of the provocative postmodern children picture books that promote multicultural issues. The concept of multiculturalism in this study refers to the theory of multicultural literature for Children and Young Adults proposed by Cai. This study carries out the qualitative research with content analysis and eclectic approaches. The results of the interpretation show that 1) the media factor demonstrates its uniqueness, creativity and innovation, while 2) the content which is supported by the media represent the multicultural issues related to race, gender, and class of the marginalized community and 3) the function of the studied fairy tale is as a parody.

Keywords: *Fairy Tale, Multiculturalism, Parody, Picture Book, Postmodernism*

1. INTRODUCTION

Snow White, as one of well-known fairy, has been transformed into numerous variant adaptations through the ongoing and evolving process. By its originality as anonymous traditional oral story telling, *Snow White* has been converted to diverse creative modification in line with the development of democracy and technology. Because of these political and technological developments, *Snow White* has been represented in written and audiovisual forms. The Grim Brother's version (1812) on *Snow White* was considered to be the first classical written story that contributes to the conversion of *Snow White* to films. As the outcome of that, Walt Disney's production entitled *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) was the first animated film which is ongoing transformed into live film in 2019 by the same title and producer. The earlier live film entitled *Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012) was PO Box film directed by Rupert Sanders. Apart from these variations, a postmodern short fiction version of *Snow White* (1996) was written by Donald Barthelme whose prose has been appreciated as "eccentric, dazzling, and playful writing" commented *San Francisco Chronicle* [1].

Referring to *A Brief Literary History of Snow White*, Kawan mentions three categories of the adaptation on *Snow White* afterwards the traditional oral story telling versions.

The first category belongs to be canonic that is referred to the first full variants emerging in 1782 to 1833, while the second category relates to the playful adaptation and the same time the third category appears to be widely more independent [2]. Among those unique mentioned versions of *Snow White*, another postmodern style of *Snow White* enriches the variants of this fairy tale. *Fairy Tales for Angry Girl* (2012) written by Lela Lee is a comic-like picture book consisting four fairy tales, the first one entitled *Snow Yellow* that is classified as the third category to Kawan's category [3]. Applying similar plot to the traditional *Snow White*, *Snow Yellow* and *the Seven Short Men* is recreated and modified to be innovative imitation that magnetizes critical research. The main purpose of this article is to explore analytical and critical *Snow Yellow* based on its media, content, and function by applying the postmodern approach.

2. METHOD

Ruth B. Bottigheimer defines fairy tales as "a complex narratives in which magic brings about closure and in which heroes and heroines achieve elevation through wedding in which both participants in royal" [4]. Further, she states that fairy tales were originally storytelling-based activities that represent the idea of transformation of the disadvantages characters to advantaged successful ones through miracles. However, fairy tales are indicated by the

miraculous transformation and happy ending through marriage. This main characteristic of fairy tale is universal and consistent. Apart from its universality and consistency, Jack Zipes perceives that fairy tale is “a flexible and fluid text” due to the lack of hypo-texts which based on oral story telling roots [5].

Because of this flexibility and fluidity of fairy tale text, postmodernism affects the fairy tale which is represented in picture books. Goldstone identifies postmodernism as a concept that eliminates the establishment of the canon and the universal truth of the early 20th century. Further, he characterized the postmodernism in the children picture to a five salient and recurring concept: 1) artistic is not in a linear creation, 2) an artistic whole with unusual degree of playfulness, a narration that has the most unexpected interruption and addition, 3) the story threads and themes in either text or illustration contradict to the main plot, 4) It has more horizontal power order than hierarchical structure of authority, 5) The creative act of writing and illustrating is now overt, allowing the readers’ attention to be directed to the actual process of storytelling process [6]. As the result, postmodern writers and illustrators infuse their works with playfulness, irony, nonlinearity, multiple perspectives, and parody [7].

Regarding parody, *Webster’s College Dictionary* defines it as “a humorous or satirical imitation of a serious piece of literature or writing.” A parody is not designed to be critical or hurtful, but humorous, entertaining, and informative [8]. The picture book entitled *Snow Yellow and the Seven Short Men* retains the postmodern characteristics mentioned.

One of the postmodernism issues is multiculturalism which includes multicultural literature. Mingshui Cai recommends three definitions on multiculturalism related to multicultural literature. The first one refers to the terms multicultural indicating multicultural literature should include as many cultures as possible, without differentiating between the dominating and dominated. The second view focuses on racial and ethnic issues in multicultural literature. The third view belongs to the idea that every human being is multicultural and all literature is multicultural. Further, multiculturalism includes diversity and inclusion that involves power relation and struggle. However, in his argument, Cai defines multiculturalism, in the context of multicultural literature, as a complex term incorporating with “nationality, ethnicity, class, gender, religion, age, sexual orientation, family status, geographic difference, linguistic variation, and any other possible differences from the main stream culture” [9].

To conduct this study, the qualitative research with content analysis referring to Krippendorf’s method. The contemporary content analysis is influenced by the new conceptual and empirical orientation. Because of these, the contemporary content analysis examines “data, printed matter, images, or sound-text- in order to understand what they mean to people [10]”. As the studied Picture Book consists of written and pictures in conveying the meanings, the content analysis methods reveal not only the structural meanings but also the implied ones. By making some inferences that relate to the issues of multiculturalism represented in *Snow Yellow*, the deep meanings are disclosed.

The method of content analysis follows the following steps 1) Identify the data sources referring to identify the appropriate data sources based on the research questions, 2) Develop categories by refining categories and defining specification about what should be included or not as there may be uncertainty to ensure reliability of code. 3) Code data means to code to one category or multiple categories, then 4) Assess reliability, and then 5) Analyze result based on the code scheme, review items by category. Those five steps are reflective process. There is no linear progression in the analysis. This means that identifying and condensing meaning units, coding, and categorizing are not one-time events. It is a continuous process of coding and categorizing then returning to the raw data to reflect on the initial analysis [11].

3. DISCUSSION

The drawings in the comic look-like picture book as the media of *Snow Yellow and the Seven Short Men (SYatSSM)* serve as the twist and of the race, class, and age aspects. The illustrative elements related to race issues in *SYatSSM* are represented through the main character’s name and physical appearances. The name of Snow Yellow and illustration of her as a short young yellow skin common teenager with straight black hair and slit eyes indicate her race as a non-Caucasian. These appearances are exceptional to the traditional Snow White whose looks are depicted as a white with blonde hair and wide-round eyes, slim beautiful princess.

Apart from the physical appearances, the T-shirt and skirt combines with sketch shoes worn by Snow Yellow (Figure 1) suggest simplicity, modernity and novelty which are contradict to the classical, tight, elegant princess gown worn by the traditional Snow White (Figure 2). The dress of Snow Yellow evokes her behaviors as an active, straight forward and assertive girl, the opposite from the traditional Snow White who is always passive, submissive, and graceful.



Figure 1. Snow Yellow and the Seven Short Men



Figure 2. Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs

Another modern aspect represented in the picture book is the telephone (Figure 3) that as communication device used by the queen in giving order to the soldier to kill Snow Yellow (SY) as the beauty rival to the queen. The implied meaning of this modern device here is the need of speed and urgent of the order received by the soldier to fulfill his duty. In line with this modern technology functions, the impatience of the step-mother queen shows her cruelty and selfishness driven by her strong jealousy.



Figure 3. The Step mother as a queen using telephone

The content of the *SYatSSM* reveals the gender issues related to beauty, jealousy, domesticity and marriage. Similar to the plot and theme of the traditional Snow White, SY also divulges the topics of the uniqueness of female matters on attractiveness of being female that are standardized by physical prettiness. SY is considered to be a rival to the step-mother queen whose beauty is regulated by the miraculous mirror. The illogical judgment on this matter of beauty is represented by the extreme differences between the step-mother queen who is a witch and SY Mongolian teenager-look girl who admits herself not as a model. Apart from the excessive different in physical look and being, the dissimilar age between the old witch step-mother and common naive young girl is another irrationality of jealousy on beauty. The paradoxical notion of the unreasonable envy towards SY by the witch step-mother queen proves the severe hatred driven by the blind jealousy of the witch step-mother queen.

Domesticity serves as punishment to SY during her stay in the castle with her step-mother since her step-mother wants to overpower SY physically and mentally. Domesticity in this setting performs as reprimand as the

domesticity relates to rough task that decreasing SY's noble position as the legal princess. Apart from these, the implied intention of the domesticity is to make SY's beauty spoiled. Consequently, SY is the victim of her step-mother's jealousy, anger, and obsession. As the targeted on these deleterious manners, SY is going to be positioned in the inferior status.

However, SY's resistance towards her step-mother is exposed by her rejection to fulfill her order and admit her status as her own mother even addressing her step-mother as "cow" as it is shown in Figure 4. This harsh expression indicates SY's anger and bravery to oppose her step-mother. It also indicates disrespect of SY to her step-mother and disposition her step-mother's queenly position. On the other hand, the domesticity done by SY in the little men's house is accomplished by her own willingness. This freedom to carry out the house chores bestows the understanding that SY is aware of her own rights. Nevertheless, it also indicates that SY considers domestic tasks as her natural inner call as it is seen in Figure 5.



Figure 4. Domesticity as punishment



Figure 5. Domesticity as inner call

Marriage in *SYatSSM* refers to the remarriage of SY's father to the step-mother and the marriage of SY to the young prince for her life salvation. The first one causes physical and psychological sufferings to SY as she has to do the house chores and she is planned to be slaughtered. On the other hand, to the step-mother the marriage to the King reveals her cunningness, jealousy, and cruelty. To be claimed as the most beautiful woman, she does not want to have any competitor. For this status of beauty, she almost loses her sense of humanity for her desire to murder SY. Afraid of being chased by guilty feelings, the step-mother chooses to give SY poison which can be cured by the first kiss of a prince. The marriage of SY to the charming prince represents the impression on psychological and economical dependency of woman to man who can guarantee her life and prosperity.

There is also issue of jealousy when the charming prince rescues her from the deathly-sleep poison. This envy is caused by the misunderstanding on the term of the seven short men with seven guys. The charming prince assumes SY has been living with seven guys during her escape from the cruelty of the step-mother. Nevertheless, SY addresses the seven short men who refer to the seven dwarfs by the term of seven guys to pun in creating witticism. Impliedly, this misunderstanding is intentionally made by SY to tease the charming prince.



Figure 6. SY in death sleep



Figure 7. SY is rescued by Prince Charming

The function of The *SYatSSM* picture book is as a parody. The contents ridicule the issues of race, gender, and class by twisting the traditional folktale *Snow White*. However, as one whole related inseparable aspect, those issues are revealed in humorous ways. The joke on the race is revealed through the contrast images constructed by the physical appearances of SY to the traditional Snow White (SW). The child-like naive Mongolian girl images of SY disrupts the establishment on the superiority of the white female royal prince represented by the traditional SW. However, this extreme divergence initiates the joke not only on the race, but also to the age and class. Apart from the physical appearances, the clothing of SY contributes the parody of the complication traditional costume of the traditional SW.

The parody on the gender related to beauty, jealousy, and marriage mock in humorous ways the attitudes of female characters through generation and class gaps. Beauty plays crucial factor to the interrelated issues. The step-mother as the older generation blindly envies towards the beauty of the step daughter who deserves the position of princess by heritage. SY loses her royal position because of the severe jealousy of her step mother who wants to murder SY.

The survival of SY is bartered to her royal position as the princess. On the other hand, the step-mother whose her origin is unknown obtains more power as the queen. The implied meanings of these contrasts tease the stereotypes of the wisdom of being older generation. The meanness of the step-mother is contrasted to the kindness of SY with the mockery aim to construct the establishment of the maturity of SY. However, this celebrates the minority ethnic represented by SY by her maturity, kindness, and humbleness.

The subject of marriage is represented by the remarriage of the King and the marriage of SY to the charming prince. The absence of the King after the remarriage to the step-mother derides the weak and powerless of the King who is over dominated by his second wife. The opposite from the King, the charming prince is powerful therefore he enables SY alive after

death-sleep poison. This contrast power between the King and the charming prince relates to marriage demonstrates the charming prince is more superior to SY as well as the step-mother.

4. CONCLUSION

The promotion of the multiculturalism in this postmodern comic-like picture book is elevated through the uniqueness, creativity, and innovation of the comic-like illustrations in *Snow Yellow and the Seven Short Men* that embeds the content of the parody narration on multicultural complicated issues. The complexity of the issues on race, gender, class, family status, age, and sexual orientation are ridiculed in paradoxical purposes. Apart from humorous, entertain, and informative functions, the comic-like twisted fairy tale picture book aim to develop high critical thinking.

The extremes differences of the issues on race, gender, class, family status, age, and sexual orientation in *Snow Yellow* and the traditional *Snow-White* play essential roles to increase high critical thinking. To comprehend the implied meanings represented through the extravagances of the postmodern *Snow Yellow* and traditional *Snow White* requires thinking process of the primary stage of knowing, then to the second stage of analyzing, followed by stage of interpreting and the highest stage referring to creating.

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