Beauty And The Beast Essay, Research Paper

The message that fairy tales send readers about female virtues has been debated time and time again. Some people, like Karen Rowe, believe that fairy tales exhibit “passivity, dependency, and self sacrifice”. While many fairy stories embody self-sacrifice, passivity and dependency are two virtues not widely portrayed in fairy tales.

Self-sacrifice can be found throughout fairy tales. The tale of Donkeyskin has a young girl who gives up her rich life to be able to leave her incestuous father. She also disguised herself in the skin of a donkey in order not to be recognized. This took away her beauty. These two instances show that she was capable of sacrificing her comfort and beauty for her safety. While she does not sacrifice herself for others, she does “expose herself to harsh adversity” (116).

An even greater example of self-sacrifice can be found in Beaumont’s telling of Beauty and the Beast. Beauty sacrifices herself many times throughout the story. Her first sacrifice is not marrying. She chooses to stay with her family, even though times are tough and she would be far more comfortable with a wealthy husband. She also does not want to leave her father alone with only his sons and two lazy daughters to give him comfort and help him with the chores. She sacrifices her own comfort for that of her families. She does this again when she wakes up extra early each morning to cook breakfast for her family and do the household chores. Her lazy sisters would never have cooked. Men would never think to cook food. Therefore, had Beauty not cooked for her family everyday, they would not have eaten.

Beauty’s greatest sacrifice is agreeing to die in her father’s place at the Beast’s castle. Instead of just crying about her father’s fate, Beauty offered to go to the castle as the Beast requested. She was prepared to give the ultimate sacrifice to save her father’s life. She was willing to make this sacrifice because she loved her father very much.

Evidence in fairy tales that supports self-sacrifice as a virtue instead of a vice can be found in Beauty and the Beast as well. Beauty’s sisters give nothing of themselves, In fact, they blatantly take all they can get and never consider how it affects others. The sisters do not, cook, clean, or offer to die in their father’s place. They are punished for their selfishness at the end of the story by becoming statues until they learn their lesson. By being punished for their selfishness, self-sacrifice is portrayed as a virtue. Beauty, on the other hand, is rewarded with a prince and much wealth and happiness at the end of the story. Her reward infers that self-sacrifice is a virtue. Even a fairy tells her “The good deed you have done in saving your father’s life will not go unrewarded” (37). This explicit example shows that self-sacrifice is seen as a virtue in fairy tales.

However, passivity and dependency are not seen as virtues in fairy tales. Donkeyskin does not sit idly by and do as her father bids her. She runs away with a trunk full of expensive clothes and escapes to the unknown. She has no idea where to go or what to do. She sets out to find a better life. Once she reaches a new destination, she uses her abilities to enrapture the prince. When asked to make a cake for the prince, she bakes a ring into the cake so that the prince will find it and think of her. Some may say that she did not do that on purpose, but “she put it in there with a purpose” (114). Donkeyskin “was confident that her young admirer would accept the ring with gratitude” (114). Her actions show no dependency or passivity. She refuses to be dependent on her father and does not passively obey his wish to marry her. She also does not ask for anyone’s help with capturing the heart of the prince. Furthermore, she is rewarded for her actions by getting the prince and becoming wealthy once more.

Beauty displays no signs of passivity or dependency. Actually, her family is very heavily dependent on her. She cooks their food, cleans their house, and keeps her father happy. She also saves her fathers life by agreeing to give her own instead. She is also very stubborn and does not concede when her father refuses to let her take his place at Beast’s castle. She says, “You can’t keep me from following you” (36). She willfully disobeys her father’s wish for her to stay home. She blatantly tells him what she will do. She does not ask or plead, but simply states her plans.

Beauty’s sisters are punished not only for their selfishness, but also for their passivity and dependency. They do nothing for themselves and depend wholly on Beauty and others to do their bidding. In the end, Beauty has the prince, money, and happiness while her sisters remain statues until they can “recognize their faults” (42).

Fairy tales do embody certain virtues such as self-sacrifice, independence, and self-promotion. Fairy tales do not, however, display dependency and passivity as good traits to have. Donkeyskin and Beauty and the Beast show that one is rewarded for self-sacrifice, independence, and actively helping one’s self. These two tales also show that passive, selfish, dependent people get punished until they learn the error of their ways. These unmistakably morals found in fairy tales will continue to be disputed. However, no matter how critics will try to argue that fairy tales incorporate dependency and passivity as virtues, one can expressly see from these two stories that fairy tales do not include such virtues.