Since their beginning, fairy tales have managed to stay popular and relevant despite the constant evolution of society’s culture and norms. Fairy tales are like a virus; they can spread and evolve. In my paper, I will be analyzing how fairy tales were able to stay relevant. I will look at their origins with the creation of the term “fairy tale”. Then, I will continue on to their transition into a literary genre and their introduction into high class salons. I will look at the changes that fairy tales needed to make in order to appeal to an upper-class society. Then, I will analyze the next change that fairy tales had to make in order to appeal to a new educational view. Finally, I will analyze how fairy tales have changed in the 21st century. Throughout my paper, I will be using the tales of *Little Red Riding Hood* and *Beauty and the Beast* to show examples of the changes in fairy tales.

In the beginning, there were no such thing as the fairy tales we know today. In fact, the term “fairy tale” wasn’t even used until Madame d’Aulnoy coined the term in 1697. “To summarize my argument, the fairy tale was first a simple, imaginative oral tale containing magical and miraculous elements and was related to the belief systems, values, rites, and experiences of pagan peoples” (1). D’Aulnoy would take aspects from folklore, medieval literature, and even Greco-Roman mythology to build her new “modernist” creation. This new genre was different from the folktale and would eventually become one of the most popular genres ever. One of the great things about this new genre was its cross-cultural appeal. The motifs and themes introduced in these fairy tales were universal and could be applied to almost any culture. Take *Cinderella* or *Hansel and Gretel* for example. Almost every country has some version of these stories that fits the cultural needs and style of that country. These universal motifs would also become relevant to future eras and cultures as well.

After the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century, the genre of the literary fairy tale became much more popular. Scribes began to write down and preserve these well-loved oral tales. “The recording of these various tales was extremely important because the writers preserved an oral tradition for future generations, and in the act of recording, they changed the tales to a greater or lesser degree, depending on what their purpose was in recording them” (43). Almost like a game of telephone, oral tales would change constantly from person to person based on how the story was told and what purpose it served. Now that these tales had been written down, there was no variation from person to person.

The literary fairy tales made their way into the salons of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century elite. Since most of the lower class could not read, writers of the literary fairy tales had to write in a way that appealed to its mainly upper-class audience. Jones and Shacker touched on this by analyzing the language choices used by the authors of the time when literary tales would have been popular in salons. In terms of Perrault’s *Le Petit Chaperon Rouge*, “…these secondary meanings throw culturally relevant light on the phrase and on the warning that wolves may not only pursue girls when they are out in the street, but also when they are out in society, and even in their own homes” (29). Perrault and other authors wrote their tales in a way that could be interpreted by readers as relating to court life.

Examples of these new interpretations can be found in the tales of Little Red Riding Hood and Beauty and the Beast. As I already showed previously, Charles Perrault wrote his version of Little Red Riding Hood to appeal to those of the literary elite. He found that certain aspects of the original tale might not appeal to his audience. In *The Story of Grandmother*, one of the first Little Red Riding Hood stories, Red strips down and gets into the bed with the wolf. There are also scenes where Little Red unknowingly eats her grandmother. In Perrault’s time, these aspects would not have been received well. In order for the fairy tale to continue to be successful and relevant, Perrault had to adjust certain details of the story to better relate to court life.

In Madame de Beaumont’s *Beauty and the Beast*, a young girl takes her father’s place after he is given an ultimatum by a Beast; hand over one of your daughters or die. Throughout the tale, Beauty learns to see beneath the Beast’s appearance and love him for who he is. After she proclaims her love, he transforms into a handsome prince and they get married. According to Maria Tatar, de Beaumont’s tale was actually meant to calm girl’s fears and prepare them for arranged marriages. “Written at the dawn of the Enlightenment, Madame de Beaumont’s tale attempted to steady the fears of young women, to reconcile them to the custom of arranged marriages, and to brace them for an alliance that required them to efface their own desires and to submit to the will of a “monster” (34). Arranged marriages were common at the time this tale was written. *Beauty and the Beast* taught girls to hope for a prince but be prepared for a monster.

As the times change and society begins to evolve, so must fairy tales. In the eighteenth century, a new concept began to emerge; childhood. With this new emergence, fairy tales began to shift from an adult genre to a more childish literature. “Up until the nineteenth century, folktales were told and read, as were romances, by adults…Members of the literary elite, whose tastes were becoming more “sophisticated”, regarded folktales as too “simple” and “childish,” suitable, in their estimation, only for children and members of the lower class” (322). Now that fairy tales were seen as meant for children, authors had to adapt and write in ways that would appeal to their new pint-sized audience.

Originally, children were seen as sources of entertainment for their parents and other adults. After this new concept of childhood was developed, it was seen that children needed to be educated. With this new idea, authors of fairy tales had to change how they interpreted and wrote their stories. An example of this change can be seen in the different versions of Little Red Riding Hood by Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm. Perrault was before the creation of this concept, when children were still seen as sources of amusement. He knew this, and his version, *Le Petite Chaperon Rouge*, had an ambiguous nature that allowed him to reach adults through the children themselves. The Brothers Grimm, however, were writing tales when educating a child was deemed important. According to Shavit, “The Brothers Grimm, like other writers of the mid-nineteenth century, adopted the new image of the child, stressing his straightforwardness and the ability, uniquely his, to look at the world in a special way” (327). With this is mind, The Brothers Grimm made a few changes to their version, *Little Red Cap*, that were aimed towards the education of children. One of the main differences between Perrault’s and Grimm’s versions is the ending. Rather than Little Red getting eaten and a moral following in Perrault’s version, the Brothers Grimm opted for a happy ending. In the end, Little Red and her grandmother are saved by a hunter. In the Grimm version, Red actually has an opportunity to learn a lesson when she is rescued by the hunter. The child reading the tale must also learn a lesson and about punishment. *Little Red Cap* allows the child to be educated and learn something.

Jack Zipes, a well-known children’s literature criticist, is very pessimistic when it comes to how fairy tales are being portrayed in the 21st century. In one of his essays, *Why Fantasy Matters Too Much,* he tends to focus on the negative ways that children’s literature and fairy tales are being transformed by modern day consumerism and globalization. Zipes states that “Fantasy is a celebrity and money-making machine” (77). Fantasy has become so important that it has lost its original meaning and purpose. He argues that the twentieth century has seen the most significant change in children’s literature as a commodity since the eighteenth century. Rather than sticking with the idea that children need to be educated, fairy tale authors have begun to focus more on commercialism. Fantasy and fairy tales have become a spectacle to many and no longer serve the purpose of educating readers. According to Zipes in *Breaking the Disney Spell*, the early fairy tale movies of Disney were meant purely to impress and entertain audiences. Gone was the idea that fairy tales needed to educate people. Here is the beginning of the next evolution of fairy tales.

Examples of this focus on commercialism can be seen in Disney’s version of the tale of *Beauty and the Beast*. For this example, I will be focusing on the 2017 live action film, not the original 1991 animated film. Compared to the 1991 version, this live action film was the closest in similarities to the original tale by Madame de Beaumont. The main similarity is the request of a rose by Beauty and her father getting caught by the Beast when he is trying to pick a rose. Other than that, few similarities can be found. Disney strays far from Beaumont’s original tale by adding aspects and characters that are not meant to add to the moral of the story. These extra additions were meant to further the success and appeal of the movie. Some main examples are the characters of Gaston and the magical servants in Beast’s castle. These characters do not appear in Beaumont’s version because they were not necessary or helpful for getting her message through to readers. These extra characters were purely for commercialist gains. The addition of a backstory for Beast and musical songs were also commercialist focuses by the director and creators of the movie. All these additions were really only meant for cinematic purposes. This retelling of *Beauty and the Beast* shows that fairy tale writers have once again changed their writings to adapt to a new society.

Like an animal in a new environment, fairy tales have had to adapt and evolve in order to survive in our ever-changing society. They have transitioned from oral tales to literary masterpieces to movies up on the big screen. The fact that fairy tales have managed to hold on for so long shows just how important they are to people. Though it may not seem like it, we need fairy tales. They are irresistible to us and have become a necessity in our lives. No one can imagine a life without fairy tales. With all the changes they have been through, one can only imagine how fairy tales will evolve next.

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