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THE INFLUENCE OF FAIRYTALES
ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF
PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

Abstract: Fairytales are crucial for children's psychological, moral, social, emotional, and cognitive development. Preschool children encounter numerous problems and their solutions through fairytales. By listening to, reading, and watching fairytales, children build their views of the world, shape their moral values, and become familiar with positive behavior models. Fairytales point to ethical problems and teach children to differentiate between good and evil in an age-appropriate way. This paper discusses the influence of fairytales on the development of preschool children. The concept of a fairytale, its structure and characteristics are described. The paper lists the most common fairytale motifs and points out the therapeutic aspect of fairytales. The significance of telling fairytales to chronically ill hospitalized children is also emphasized, as well as their identification with the main characters and expressing their fairytale experience through play, dramatization, and drawings. By their length, dynamic plot, and the speed at which realistic and fantastic images interchange, fairytales improve the attention, imagination, communication, and creativity of preschool children.

Keywords: fairytales, therapeutic effect, preschool children.

INTRODUCTION

Children's literature helps preschool children understand the world around them (Girsang et al., 2023). In all aspects of children's literature, nothing enriches or fulfills a child like a fairytale. Fairytales are part of the cultural heritage originating from oral tradition (Rahman, 2017). More than any other type of children's stories, fairytales can teach us about people's inner problems and the right solutions to their difficulties in any society (Betelhajm 2021; Chang, Luh 2022).

Fairytales are many children's first storytelling experience (Saxby 2022) and, in most cases, their first encounter with literature. Their seemingly simple structure and significant symbolism often become incentives for returning to fairytales later in life (Bistrić, Ivon 2019). Stories written a hundred years ago still appear in various forms and remain popular (Zehetner, 2013). Fairytales are defined as narrative prose with unspecified settings and include temptations and misfortunes of a character who experiences magical adventures that end happily and involve folklore characteristics (Hasse, 2008; Teverson, 2013). Their particular value lies in the fact that they represent reality through allegories, metaphors and symbols (Vučković 2018).

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Different theoreticians believe that children are the ones to be asked what fairytales are, thus emphasizing their two essential characteristics – being simple and unfathomable. Children become familiar with fairytales from their earliest childhood. Many people view fairytales as primarily children's literature, "childhood literature", or "all books written for children" (Anderson 2006; Bacchilega 1997, according to Popović 2013). Fairytales are one of the most studied literary genres. With its specific structure and life views, this genre enables children to get to know the world and people around them and their mutual relationships. Fairytales contribute to the development of a child's entire personality and stimulate their cognitive, emotional, social, moral, and speech-language development.

Fairytales are still present in the lives of preschool children. However, the medium through which children become acquainted with them is nowadays completely different and mostly involves screen adaptations of this old children's literary genre (Sala-Suszyńska 2021). Technological advancement has led to significant changes in the production and reception of fairytales (Haase 2006). A screen-adapted fairytale does not have clear outcomes of the battle between good and evil, which was a crucial characteristic of these stories and a moral postulate for the (both media and literary) audience in childhood. Modern screen adaptations reduce the battle between good and evil to constant changes, dealing with the characters' biographies and explaining their motifs, essentially changing the universal perception of famous heroes (Vuković 2017). Today, popular fairytales have become global cultural icons with great popularity and influence along with the Internet. There are numerous interpretations of these fantastical stories adapted to the new social media and communication networks of the 21st century (Chang, Luh 2022). The application of modern technology at the preschool age is considered an important element of the education process and a means of achieving educational goals that can offer children innovative ways of acquiring knowledge (Chronopoulou, Riga 2012).

Fairytales play a key role in children's lives since they encourage their emotional development, shape their sensitivity, enrich their vocabulary, and form social views (Sala-Suszyńska 2021).

CHARACTERISTICS OF FAIRYTALES

Fairytales are ancient and exciting oral folktales about very unusual experiences of the main hero in a magical world. As a rule, fairytales are told in extremely beautiful, picturesque, rich, and refined language. A fairytale is an incredible story about fantastical things. It is one of the oldest and most beautiful forms of oral literature (Trebješanin, Jovanić, Stajić 2013). The term fairytale, denoting the entire genre, originated in France in the 17th century and gradually spread across Europe and North America (Zipes 2011). Jack Zipes (2011) indicates that Madame Catherine-Anne d'Aulnoy invented the term fairytale (contes de fees) in 1697 when she published her first collection of stories for upper-class readers. Fairytales were long considered parlor literature written and told by women (Zipes 2012, according to Libong Ngai, 2022). Sayer et al. (2018) point out that fairytales are stories about a fairy world where good always defeats evil. A moral dimension of fairytales points to essential life lessons (Jones, Schwabe 2016).

Deretić (2002) believes that fairytales are the most developed and significant type of oral narrative. Their characteristic is that they "narrate various fantasies that cannot be". Kalezić-Đuričković (2019) indicates that a fairytale is a folk, complex tale composed of various motifs dominated by fantastical elements.

Unlike other types of stories about realistic and possible things, fairytales describe impossible events and narrate what could be categorized as "magical". The key to understanding the nature of the impossible in fairytales lies in the term "magical". In fairytales, "magical" does not describe the attitude toward the narrated events, but it is the very feature of those events (Deretić 2002: 308). Magical is the term most frequently related to the concept of fairytales, and thus, they are described as stories about the magical or magical stories. The fantastical category is also often used with fairytales. As a story about the magical, a fairytale is most similar to a myth.

The thematic and artistic unity of fairytales is even more pronounced from an inner perspective when the research focus moves from their origin and assumptions to their structure. Prop (2012), a Russian folklorist, believes that all fairytales have the same structure. In his analysis of the fairytale structure, Prop discusses the functions of characters and the characters as constants of that structure. Prop singled out 31 stable functions whose sequence comprises the syntagmatic structure of a fairytale (Prop 2012).

The repetition of motifs, characters, and actions is associated with another feature typical of all oral genres, particularly pronounced in a fairytale as a highly conventional form – stereotypical or formulaic composition and style. Fairytales use formulas, constant numbers, stereotypical beginnings and endings, and exact repetitions of episodes, all of which form the basis of their unique abstract style.

The international motifs and structure uniformity are also reflected in the expression. A fairytale is a literary work *sui generis* with its specific artistic design and style. The fairytale world is one-dimensional with no separate "this" and "that" worlds. The character's lack plasticity, individual traits, and inner lives. The presentation is superficial, focused only on external events. There are no descriptions of things and phenomena - they are only named. The characters have predetermined functions, the episodes within the plot are pre-planned, and constant formulas, numbers, and stereotypical beginnings and endings are repeated. The uniform composition and abstract style correspond with the characteristic magical events (Deretić 2002: 308).

Fairytales typically have linear time – the plot starts at a particular moment, has a specific course and end, and the linearity involves three time periods: past, present, and future. Past and future are not dominant categories for fairytales and can appear indirectly – through the narration of characters about past events or their assumptions about the future.

Rahman (2017) believes that fairytales take place in an unspecified time. "Once upon a time" or "In a land far, far away" are frequent beginnings of these magical stories, which mainly take place in the distant past. The fact that most fairytales begin with "once upon a time" and the consequent time and place omitting are crucial for their perceived universality (Rahman 2017).

The action mainly takes place in kingdoms, castles, and forests, and the characters are either rich and noble or poor and excluded from society because of their financial status. Places that are particularly emphasized in fairytales include the following: house,

castle, forest, mountain, basement, lake, town, garden, room, well/pit, sea, village, and cave. A house is usually where the plot of a fairytale begins, and the hero takes action. It is a place where human beings live, it determines the human world and represents the hero's position in "this" world. On the other hand, a castle symbolizes the hero's goal and what they need to acquire on their long journey full of vicissitudes – an imperial bride and position. The text in fairytales implies that a castle is the place and symbol of achievement for the hero (Popović 2013).

The characters are usually queens, kings, stepmothers, princes, princesses, fairies, and wizards. When they read or are being read to, children experience the story and identify with the main character. That is why the main characters represent kindness, honesty, and sincerity. Negative characters represent what children should not identify with and end with punishment and failure.

Massie (2019) described fairytale characters with interesting traits children can identify with. He perceived and analyzed the literary descriptions of the characters' state of health in certain fairytales and some illness symptoms.

Zhetner (2013) states that numbers play an important role in the world and that fairytales are no exception. Numbers have different meanings in different cultures and civilizations. The frequent numbers in fairytales are three, seven, twelve, fourteen, and a hundred. Three is one of the magical numbers: three bears, three little pigs, three wishes, etc. Number three is a cardinal number that represents perfection, totality, and completion. Thus, fairytales include syntagms such as three days, three sons, or three roads. In addition to religious connotations, God – the Holy Trinity, children see their place in the mother, father, and child triad. Just like in fairytales, children usually choose the third road compared to the other two characters: their own. Seven is another significant number. The symbolism of the number seven can be found in the world's great civilizations and religions. Number seven denotes circular completion and the totality of 14 times. In fairytales, we come across seven dwarfs, and there is also Christian symbolism. With its secret powers, the number seven keeps all things in existence. It enables life and movement and also influences heavenly bodies. Apart from Christian symbolism, twelve also plays a significant role in fairytales. There is usually a king with twelve sons.

Pintarić (2008) lists six parts of the classic fairytale structure: introduction, plot, rising action, climax, twist, and resolution.

The style of a fairytale is general, formulaic, and characterized by repetitions, frequent dialogues, and a lack of description. All fairytales have two layers – the magical and unreal layer and the realistic one. An oral fairytale derives its meaning from the mythical and ritual basis from which it developed as a literary genre and which emphasizes its universality and eternity.

FAIRYTALE MOTIFS

Fairytales are characterized by a concise and direct presentation of an existential dilemma. This allows a child to tackle the problem in its most basic form. All situations are simplified in fairytales. The fairytale characters are clear and unimportant details are omitted. All characters are typical rather than unique (Betelhajm 2021: 14).

Contrary to many modern children's stories, evil and virtues are always present in fairytales. In almost every fairytale, good and evil are embodied in some characters and their actions, just as good and evil are present in life, and tendencies towards both are present in everyone. This duality represents a moral problem and requires a struggle to solve it (Betelhajm 2021: 14). Evil is symbolically represented by a mighty giant, dragon, or witch and often prevails for some time. In many fairytales, the usurper manages to take the place that rightfully belongs to the hero for a while. The fact that the villain is punished at the end of a fairytale does not make it the experience of moral education, although it is part of it. In both fairytales and life, punishment or fear from it are only limited intimidations for criminal acts. The belief that crime is not profitable is a much more effective intimidation, and thus, an evil character always loses in fairytales. Morality is not promoted by virtue winning at the end of a fairytale but by the fact that the most appealing character for children is the one with whom they can identify in all his struggles. Thus, children imagine that they suffer together with the hero in all his trials and misfortunes but also enjoy the triumphs because virtue triumphs in the end. Children independently identify with the heroes whose internal and external struggles imprint morality (Betelhajm 2021: 15).

Milašinović (2020) examined the motif of death in preschool education. The author analyzed the presence of the motif/representation of death in literary works that educators use (or do not use) with preschool children. It has been observed that the motif of death is present in fairytales. This motif is mainly contextualized and represents only one segment of the plot in many fairytales. However, there are fairytales in which death takes a prominent place (*The Little Match Girl*).

Research results indicate that educators approach this topic quite consciously when talking to children, and use, among other things, children's experiences, their own experiences, opinions of parents, and literary texts that include the motif of death. All this helps them discuss death with children in situations where they show interest in it and/or wonder about it. Children are curious about death, but it is also one of their biggest fears and a primary cause of sadness. Ortego et al. (2016) argue that fairytales are appropriate means for discussing the concept of death.

Fairytales also include religious motifs. Many biblical stories are of the same nature as fairytales. The conscious and unconscious associations that fairytales evoke in the listeners' minds depend on their general frame of reference and personal preoccupations. Fairytales directly or indirectly deal with religious topics.

SIGNIFICANCE OF FAIRYTALES FOR CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Fairytales influence all aspects of child development: social-emotional, cognitive, and physical development and the development of communication and creativity. They stimulate imagination, develop attention, and enrich the vocabulary of preschool children.

By reading fairytales and stories, parents and educators connect with children. Also, it is advisable to discuss the fairytale with children after reading it and discover what they think about it and whether they understood it well. To fully achieve their symbolic and interpersonal meaning, fairytales should be told and read with emotional engagement and getting into the story.

Betelhajm (2021: 11) indicates that stories-fairytales should entertain children and encourage their curiosity to keep their attention. To enrich a child's life, fairytales should stimulate their imagination, help them develop their intellect, and clarify their feelings. Fairytales should be in accordance with children's aspirations and fears and fully enable them to recognize their problems while simultaneously pointing to their solutions. Preschool children are typically drawn to emotionally rich content with which they come into direct contact through their senses (Stojanović, Bogavac 2016).

Fairytales stimulate imagination and develop critical thinking in children (Sayer et al., 2018).

Imagination in preschool children is closely related to limitations and specificity of thinking. Preschool children still insufficiently control their thoughts, and, in their minds, images they acquire about reality are easily replaced by fantastical ideas in which the imagined and real are mixed. The worlds of words and pictures are, for children, as realistic as the world around them. A modern child is in constant contact with the imaginary world of "virtual reality", presented on TV screens and monitors, picture books, and toys, which occupies their thoughts and distracts them from real life. That is why it is wrong to say that a child is more imaginative than an adult – those are two types of imagination that cannot be compared.

Grgurević & Fabris (2012) point out that preschool children 4-7 years of age are very interested in fairytales and believe in what is told in them. This childhood period is referred to as the fairytale period by some psychologists. By listening to fairytales, children are introduced to the world of imagination with unimaginable events, unusual characters, and phenomena. Since, at that developmental period, children still do not have a developed idea about the world and reality, fairytales present an extraordinary means of getting into an unusual and imaginary world.

A study of fairytales and children's imagination points out that generations of children have excitedly listened to their favorite fairytales ever since they were first published, insisting on hearing the same fairytale over and over again. Fairytales have kept their status of favorite stories for children 6-10 years of age. However, adults also point to the influence of fairytales that left a strong impression on them (Golomb 2012: 198; Vuković 2017).

Fairytales contribute to children's emotional and social development. Telling, retelling, and roleplaying fairytales contribute to emotional balance (Fleer, Hammmer 2013). Fairytales are a predictable genre that is full of emotions and where emotionally imagined situations help children become aware of their emotions and emotional states (March, Fleer 2016).

From early childhood, children discover the world around them, their personalities, and life in general with the help of fairytales. They start to think about heroes' intentions and actions and experience different emotions, such as sympathy for heroes, identifying with them, and relating the fairytale events with their experiences. The problems of fairytale characters are familiar to children, and by listening to stories about their adventures, children experience and gradually overcome the provoked emotions such as sadness, fear of losing love, hatred, anger, jealousy, envy, helplessness, guilt, suffering, and disappointment. "Fairytales are directed toward eternal fears and longings

of childhood, form abandonment, humiliation, and ways to surpass a sibling, become rich, and find happiness at some other place ..." (Golomb 2012: 204).

Grgurević & Fabris (2012) state that a fairytale is the first home of a child's emotional intelligence. It teaches a child how to deal with negative emotions (greed, envy, lies, stinginess, etc.) and positive emotions such as patience, self-sacrifice, and truthfulness. By listening to stories, preschool children experience emotions such as joy, surprise, sadness, fear, anger, and disgust.

Betelhajm (2021) points out that children become frightened when experiencing certain emotions (anger and sadness) that are beyond their control. The ability to control one's emotions is not only in the way they are expressed but also in understanding them, comprehending their causes, and predicting the situations in which they occur (Kamenov 2006). Fairytales help children see the consequences of choosing a certain behavior. With their happy ending, fairytales provide children with courage and the opportunity to get to know their emotions and deal with them appropriately. In the real world, children are often weaker and more vulnerable compared to adults, other children, or older siblings. Thus, they most often identify with heroes in fairytales. Through fairytales, children experience everything the hero does, and in that way, they replace the feelings of fear and vulnerability with courage and fearlessness. Preschool children identify with fairytale heroes and experience the plot together with them. Empathy is learned and acquired while growing up. With its specific construction of time, space, and narrative, fiction stimulates perception, attention, imagination, memory, empathy, and other aspects of children's cognitive activity (Nikolajeva 2019).

Children use fairytales and stories to observe the world around them and acquire basic life concepts. A favorite fairytale gives children a sense of security and relieves them of fears and stress. Preschool children enjoy reading bedtime fairytales. In addition to strengthening the bond with parents, this ritual helps children fall asleep and acquire a routine. Children often insist on one same book, i.e., a favorite fairytale. Children like predictable things and enjoy knowing what will happen in the end. Also, when they like a particular fairytale or story, they relive the adventures with the main heroes with whom they feel safe. Listening to fairytales and watching how adults tell them helps preschool children enrich their vocabulary and develop social skills and emotional reasoning. By telling stories to children, we contribute to their better understanding of their feelings and actions, development of compassion and adequate social relations with peers and adults from their environment (Grosman, 2010, according to Bistrić, Ivon 2019).

Fairytales encourage children's moral development. A fairytale has a clear structure: characters, plot, composition, realistic images, fantastical motifs, magical events, and specific language. They always have a certain ideological and moral meaning (Kovačević, Isaković 2010). The concept of the story is simple. The battle between good and evil is clearly presented, and it is easy for children to identify with the main character. Children experience the excitement of adventure and the moments of fear, but, as in all fairytales, evil is defeated in a dramatic way (Golomb 2012, according to Trebješanin, Jovanić, Stajić 2013).

Preschool children acquire moral attitudes and ethical concepts through fine arts, dramatic arts, and literature. Children learn positive values: love, respect, truth, justice, and honesty.

Children's first interests are developed at the end of the preschool period. Apart from general and rather imprecise and inconsistent concepts of good and evil, children start to build a system of values – what they value, such as courage, honesty, wisdom, and resourcefulness. These abstract terms are more intuitive and do not need to be defined so that a child can define them. Children appreciate these qualities in other people and want to become like them (Kamenov 2006; Stojanović, Bogavac 2016).

Children have naive views of the world and want the good to defeat evil. Fairytales strengthen children's moral awareness and offer many opportunities for them to feel strong and safe. Small fairytale heroes often acquire perseverance, wisdom, and courage. An entire world of good creatures, such as fairies, dwarfs, and animals, helps them fight evil forces. Fairytales are necessary for preschool children of the information age, just as they were necessary for their peers in ancient times.

By reading, listening to, and watching fairytales, children can adopt different forms of behavior, manners, and cultural behavior and also learn how to acquire positive qualities such as perseverance, courage, patience, self-sacrifice, and devotion. Furthermore, they can disregard negative behaviors and emotions such as lies, jealousy, greed, and stinginess. Children often identify with fairytale characters. The contrast between the characters and the comparison between good and evil are always emphasized in fairytales, and children, by nature, choose the good and recount the characteristics of bad characters.

Preschool children believe that everyone they meet is equally good, well-intentioned, and full of love. The role of fairytales is to teach children that the world is very different from the community they grow up in. Children should be prepared that various dangers await them in the outer world that they will probably face someday. Thus, evil must exist in fairytales, as well as the battle between good and evil in which good always wins in the end. Fairytales allow children to develop by moving from ignorance and total naivety to the next developmental stage in which they accept the existence of bad and evil. A fairytale is the first step toward a child's moral education (Betelhajm 2021).

Vuković (2017) points out that the relationship between good and evil is directly related to moral development. In the script context, fairytales clearly distinguish between good and evil as general categories. They also prepare children to overcome the black-and-white stage of naivety, i.e., accept the concepts of good and evil. Fairytales do not hide the elements of evil (or unpleasant emotions such as jealousy, envy, hatred, possessiveness, etc.), but the story ends with the victory of good, thus offering moral support to readers, i.e., hope for a happy ending.

Fairytales confront us with the knowledge that our personal problems were many people's problems in the past. Fairytales unequivocally show us that a solution always exists, no matter how difficult and painful the path to it may be. Fairytales teach us that we must be brave, wise, honest, and full of understanding to achieve our life goals.

As the means of regulating the relationships between people to achieve the common good, morality conditions the survival of the human community. Morality is

passed on to children from the moment they start feeling like community members, from preschool age (Kamenov, 2006).

Through fairytales, preschool children can adopt different forms of behavior, cultural and hygienic habits, and learn to acquire positive personality traits (kindness, self-sacrifice, perseverance, patience, courage, and truthfulness).

Fairytale characters are not two-faced. They are not both good and evil at the same time as most people in reality. However, as polarity dominates children's minds, it also dominates fairytales. Children's choices are not so much based on polarity, right versus wrong, as on who evokes sympathy and who aversion. The simpler and more honest the main character is, the easier it is for a child to identify with them and reject the bad ones. Children do not identify with good characters because of their goodness but because they incite deep positive appeal. A child is not asked "Do I want to be good?" but "What do I want to be like?" Children make that decision by wholeheartedly projecting themselves as one of the characters. If the fairytale character is a good person, children decide they want to be good too (Kamenov 2006).

A significant developmental aspect is encouraging communication and creativity.

Imaginative or pretend play can be initiated by fairytale or movie motifs. Children play roles that appear in fairytales and learn how to recognize, understand, and express different feelings. Playing also creates conditions for forming an emotionally stable, social, and creative personality (Kovačević, Isaković 2019). Children's interest in fairytales grows because of pretend play. What is appealing to preschool children is the possibility to recognize what is happening in their real lives or the imaginary world. Playing inspired by fairytales often expresses feelings such as fear or anger. Through play, children express their problems, worries, and perception of the world around them. Children learn to understand speech and language by listening to fairytales, which also enriches their vocabulary and communication abilities. Dramatization of fairytales develops and stimulates creative thinking and expression of preschool children (Kulikovskaya, Andrienko 2016). In imaginative or pretend play, children create new roles in their own ways and make up new dialogues and plots.

When working with preschool children, parents and educators try to instill new knowledge, habits, values, and behavior patterns. Many parents want to arouse their child's interest in reading from their earliest childhood. Learning to read can be a fun activity for children. One of the strategies to encourage reading in children is reading appealing picture and color books. Reading fairytales opens new horizons and stimulates children to develop their imagination (Rahman 2017).

Many children ask to hear the same fairytale over and over again, and, although seemingly compulsorily, they really want to hear it always in the same wording. Children listen very attentively and criticize every accidental or deliberate variation. If a parent or an educator starts telling a familiar fairytale, many children will surprisingly quickly continue to tell the story on their own. Fairytales stimulate verbal memory and speech and language development. Telling fairytales can encourage children to tell and make up stories. Children enjoy fairytales. Their perception of the world becomes more complex and diverse as their language competence develops (Wilkes, 2018).

Children's reception of fairytales is best observed in their spontaneous reactions and ways of expression that result from the dynamic relationship between storytellers (educators or parents), the text, and a child. Bistrić & Ivon (2019) point out that a fairytale that is told is always more spontaneous than the one that is read since the storyteller's gaze is directed towards a child, which leaves a greater impression. Children are encouraged to think and develop their imagination by listening to fairytales. In this way, children create their unique experience of themselves and the world around them, and they can create mental representations stimulated by auditory, visual, and verbal experiences, as well as by the storyteller's facial expressions, gestures, and personal experience (Velički 2013).

In their mental representations, children subjectively create the image of the space, time, environment, characters, and events. After reading and experiencing a fairytale, children can present it through artistic expression. Preschool children feel emotional satisfaction when participating in any artistic creation (drawing, painting, sculpting) (Kovačević, Đoković 2023).

Vivid characters and dramatic events develop children's imagination and arouse children's interest in creativity. Children make up new story contents, plots, and situations and, thus, develop their speech and language abilities. Cooperation with peers and learning how to solve problems and conflicts are also encouraged. If telling fairytales is associated with children's consequent dramatic performance, creative, or artistic expression, and if verbal expression or creating a different story ending is encouraged, children's imagination, creativity, and critical thinking are stimulated. The ways in which children experience a fairytale and its moral and literary values will certainly affect their attitudes toward their experience and their cognitive skills (Bistrić, Ivon 2019: 137).

One of the main reasons fairytales are important is that they help child development. Fairytales are often designed to test children's initiative. Reading a story is not the only important thing. Acting out a story is equally important for the development of children's consciousness and their moral and cognitive development.

El'koninova (2001) examined children's cognitive development and types of behavior while playing roles in fairytales. The results of this research indicate that a vivid performance of an integral part of the plot becomes possible when children intuitively understand that what happens in fictional stories is actually fictional but also believe that the story is real. It has been determined that younger preschool children (3-4 years of age) cannot fully play the roles because the story is too real for them. For older preschoolers, 6-7 years of age, the story is too fictional (El'koninova, 2001).

Kamenov (2006: 176) points out that the contents and organization of imaginative and pretend play change throughout the whole preschool period. In younger preschool children, such play most often involves using toys to imitate what adults do with real objects, and children play alone or in parallel (side by side without actively cooperating). In older preschoolers, actions are no longer reduced to simple imitation, but children become involved in the role. Unlike imitations, the symbolic actions performed while playing are shortened compared to the real world and reduced to their essence.

Integral and vivid acting out a story occurs around the age of five because children at that age can best establish a balance between their experience of what is real and what is fictional in the story when it is played. In imaginary plays, children gain the experience

of becoming something or somebody else, which is an internal image of initiative. Children develop initiative by overcoming behavioral stereotypes and controlling impulsive actions. Although it has been determined that children can already test their initiative at the age of five, this does not mean that fairytales are not important at an earlier age (El'koninova 2001). The research findings (El'koninova 2001) are significant since they provide essential information about child development and how fairytales are a valid part of learning, especially because there is a specific age at which children can differentiate between reality and fiction.

Playing is an activity that reflects all psychological functions and, in its way, contributes to the development of each.

Fairytale researchers, both theoreticians and psychoanalysts, believe that younger preschool children should be read Grimm's fairytales since they provide models of fundamental life values, have happy endings, and mitigate the violence in Perro's fairytales (Bettelheim 2021; Velički 2013) or the sad endings in Andersen's fairytales.

THERAPEUTIC ASPECT OF FAIRYTALES

The value basis of fairytales is their cathartic effect. Since ancient times, fairytales have had a healing effect on children and adults (Kamenov 2006).

Sigmund Freud and many psychoanalysts have tried to explain the inclination of preschool children toward fairytales. This affinity for fairytales is based on the fact that children, without being aware of it, face their unconscious complexes, fantasies, and difficulties in seemingly naive stories. The appeal of fairytales and obsession with their content is based on the fact that these engaging and scary stories satisfy children's hidden needs and help them overcome crises, conflicts, and fears that occur while growing up (Trebješanin, Jovanić, Stajić 2013). Carl Gustav Jung believed that fantastical stories represent a spontaneous expression of archetypal motifs, characters, and symbols of the collective unconscious. Jung interpreted a fairytale as a dangerous and exciting adventure the main hero dared to embark on. A difficult path of individualization that leads to self-awareness and completeness is represented by the language of archetypal symbols. VisikoKnox-Johnson (2016) points out that Jung's interpretation is a symbolic approach that creates the dialectical relationship between the conscious and the unconscious. Jung's therapy, also called analytical psychotherapy, essentially treats all unconscious sources, such as dreams, fantasies, daydreams, and even pictures and drawings (Shekhawat, Mishra 2018).

Betelhajm believes that fairytales have a therapeutic effect because individuals find personal solutions by thinking about what the story could say about them and their internal conflicts at that moment in their lives (Betelhajm 2021). A fairytale addresses the child's unconscious by using archetypal images and symbols, and these unconscious processes can be clarified through images. Freud calls these images or symbols archaic remains, and Jung calls them archetypes or archetypal images. According to Jung, they live in the human spirit as unconscious, instinctive, and psychological elements (Bistrić, Ivon 2019).

Eric Berne, the founder of transactional analysis, developed the script theory using fairytales as a method of analysis: "To avoid tedious searching through collections of fairytales and stories, the easiest way to discover the fairytale basis of the patient's

script and life story is to ask the patient to narrate their life as a fairytale". An individual's moral development takes place within the script and life plan, which clearly determines the ethical frame of reference at the age when the fairytale hero/character we are ready to identify with is chosen (Vuković 2017: 1571).

In modern psychotherapy, working with fairytales can be similar to psychodrama, where an individual takes the role or identifies with the fairytale hero (in this way, fairytale characters become the bearers of our own projections). Fairytales are revealing and liberating, and experiencing them is healing.

The deepest meaning of a fairytale is different for every person, and different for the same person in different life periods.

Fairytales are the genre recommended in bibliotherapy. Adequate literature selection is crucial for the effectiveness of bibliotherapy. Bibliotherapy contributes to the development of emotional experiences, learning about different solution options, identifying with the main hero, awakening of empathy and an independent life attitude (Savić 2021: 17). Bibliotherapy is used in children and adults as an effective technology for emotional state psychotherapy and acquiring a new, adequate model of behavior. It encourages personality integration, the development of creative abilities and adaptive habits, and improves communication with the environment (Oganesjan according to Savić 2021).

Bibliotherapy is a psychotherapeutic method used to achieve different therapeutic goals, including educating individuals, reducing various disease symptoms, and changing social contacts to learn different skills. The aim of literary text analysis for therapeutic purposes is to use the bibliotherapy processes – identification, projection, catharsis, and insight to achieve a turnaround through which clients would become aware of the core of a problem and approach it in a different way (Pleh, Đedović 2021).

Savić (2021) points to the importance of developmental bibliotherapy, which involves group activities in which individuals participate voluntarily. The implementation of developmental therapy as a way of helping individuals deal with stress factors manifests the preventive aspect of bibliotherapy since the aim is to prevent the conditions that may result from crises people find themselves in. The process of developmental bibliotherapy involves the selection of appropriate literature according to therapeutic requirements because the focus is on discussing what has been read. It is necessary to create a list of provisionally positive and negative books. Developmental bibliotherapy is appropriate for children.

Fairytales have a significant therapeutic effect on preschool children. They are used to resolve painful and disturbing issues. For example, the battle between good and evil is a common topic of fairytales worldwide. Therapeutically, this can be interpreted as the internal conflict or tension between the id and the ego. Many children may suffer from internal conflicts due to bullying, teasing, or family problems. The role of parents and educators is significant in choosing and interpreting fairytales for children, as well as influencing children to experience and understand fairytales so that they help them resolve numerous internal conflicts (Kamenov 2006).

The influence of fairytales and children's literature becomes even greater with children's active participation in experiencing, processing and presenting the events

described in the text. This is made possible by all forms of dramatic arts, from improvisations and symbolic play with dolls or their own interpretations of characters, to performances in puppet theaters, picture theaters, shadow theaters, etc.

The complex synthesis of speech, movements, pictures, and music, which achieves a new quality in dramatic games and performances, enhances children's experience and acquaints them with different social roles and forms of behavior (Kamenov 2006: 80).

FAIRYTALES AND PRESCHOOL CHILDREN
WITH CHRONIC DISEASES

Fairytales positively affect the development of children with chronic diseases. Telling and reading fairytales is used in a wide range of physical and mental illnesses in children and adolescents. Therapists, doctors, and parents use fairytales as support for children (Arad 2004; Konz 2006; Mazzeschi et al. 2001; Noktor 2006, according Tsitsani et al., 2012).

Storytelling is considered a universal message everyone can understand and experience that has already been lived through at some point in life (Ceribelli et al., 2009). Through the language used in fairytales, children understand some things they would not be able to internalize if explained too realistically. Fairytales positively psychologically contribute to children's internal development because the "truths" in fairytales, if internalized, serve as a basis for solving psycho-emotional problems in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Storytelling initiates and enhances various feelings and experiences, such as compassion, relief, sadness, happiness, fear, and courage. Reading fairytales to children is a form of nurturing their souls and creative force so that they can face difficulties such as illness (Ceribelli et al.,2009; Velez, Prieto 2018).

Margherita et al. (2013) examined the influence of oncohematological diseases on children. These traumatic events cause pain and frequent hospitalizations and interrupt daily life continuity. It is difficult for children to conceptualize their psychological state, share their pain, or ask questions about their disease because parents and doctors often cannot find a way to communicate appropriately. Children remain in a difficult and hopeless situation. Preschool children are not able to express themselves, fear, anxiety, and pain often cannot be communicated.

Chronic disease is a problem for both families and children. A child, especially at younger preschool age, cannot understand the nature of the disease and the importance of treatment, implementation of all hospital procedures, and painful, invasive, diagnostic and therapeutic interventions. It is difficult for children to be isolated and hospitalized (Đoković & Kovačević, 2019).

Activities of preschool children can be limited, and in many cases, their families have to change their way of life to adapt to the circumstances. Living with a chronic disease is challenging and demanding for children, their parents, siblings, and friends. Like all others, these children need family life (games, responsibilities, and daily activities), social life, relationships with family members and peers, education, and leisure time. Their development into happy and functional adults depends on many factors, as in all

other children: personal qualities (optimism, stress coping mechanism), community support (friends, peers, school, and social media), healthcare support (medications, physical, psychological, and occupational therapy), and society/government support (financial benefits and state policy) (Đoković, Kovačević 2019).

Fictional fairytales are used to share and communicate children's chronic disease experiences through play and expression. Children with oncological diseases can tell and share their experiences in different ways. They can symbolically express their pain. A fictional fairytale becomes a mediator of psychological processes offering new solutions while improving interpersonal relationships/communication between group participants (Margherita et al.,2013).

Adamo et al. (2008) conducted a research study on children with oncological diseases in Naples. Through the "Fairytale" workshop, children were enabled to safely come into contact with danger and fear of death by using the identification mechanism. The technique used was a storytelling methodology developed by a French psychoanalyst Pierre Laforgue, adapted for a hospital environment. The staff included two child psychotherapists, four psychologists undergoing psychodynamic training, and a storyteller. The fairytales used in this workshop allowed children to express fear, rage, and anger at their disease, parents, and medical staff. Through fairytales and fantastical stories that are understandable to them, hospitalized children relieve pain and suffering (Ceribelli et al., 2009). The authors (Adamo et al., according to VisikoKnox-Johnson 2016; Shekhawat, Mishra 2018) state how children perceived the following fairytales: Three Little Pigs, Little Red Riding Hood, The Ugly Duckling, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. Children expressed their fairytale experiences through art.

Three Little Pigs helped children face their anxiety and fears. In this story, each pig builds one house: out of straw, wood, and brick. The wolf destroys houses made of straw and wood because they are not solid enough. This story helped children examine their physical resilience and strength. The content of this fairytale is similar to what children feel in their diseased bodies and could thus relate their experience to the story. The houses resemble children's bodies, and the big bad wolf resembles the disease (Adamo et al., 2008).

Little Red Riding Hood helped preschool children with chronic diseases identify with different characters according to their defense strategies against the fear of illness. Two boys with chronic diseases perceived the fairytale characters that impressed them the most differently. The younger preschool boy, three years old, imitated the big bad wolf through dramatization and drew it with a big and open mouth. The older preschool boy had a different perception and presented the wolf in a completely different way – small, like an ant. His defense strategy was to deny the seriousness of his severe chronic disease.

Velez-Prieto (2018) indicates that *The Ugly Duckling* helps children with oncohematological diseases identify with the main character and accept its physical changes. After listening to this fairytale, the children had a task to express their experiences through art. This fairytale is a story about self-acceptance, and it helps hospitalized children to accept their severe chronic disease that is taking control over their minds and body. The main character – a duckling, feels sad and abandoned because nobody

wants it in their environment. A qualitative analysis of this study indicates that one boy tried to draw the duckling's head several times. He was not satisfied with the drawing and constantly erased the head he drew. The boy's continuous erasing of the drawing seemed to express his wish for his sick head to magically disappear and be replaced by a new, undamaged one (VisikoKnox-Johnson 2016: 78).

Even without speaking, children express their anxiety, unease, and fear, including fear of death, through games, drawings, and stories. This expression of feelings alleviates the stress caused by hospitalization (Ceribelli et al., 2009).

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs caused some fear and anxiety in hospitalized children. Preschool children did not draw all the main characters. They were frightened by the stepmother and refused to draw her. This character could represent their severe chronic disease or a person from their immediate environment participating in their treatment. Children presented places and characters that made a positive impression on them, like the castle and Snow White (Adamo et al., according to Shekhawat, Mishra 2018).

Hospitalized children's behavior shows they can use a fairytale to express their anxieties, fears, and defense based on personal experiences.

VisikoKnox-Johnson (2016) points out that the need to rebel against the limitations imposed by their illness and hospital regulations sometimes makes children identify with bad or undisciplined characters. Children need to be able to relieve the anxiety and fears that come with illness. Even when children identify with negative fairytale characters, they can learn to cope with disease-related threats, conflicts, and anxiety, which positively affects their quality of life (VisikoKnox-Johnson 2016). Thus, fairytales become substitute objects for children to transfer their anger and fears rather than to their loved ones. Fairytales help children face different emotions (fear, anger, sadness, rage) and conflicts. By helping a fairytale character they have identified with to overcome conflicts and problems, children create a way and method to save themselves.

Fairytales significantly affect child development. Through the power of symbolism and metaphors, traditional fairytales and modern children's literature are widely used in psychotherapy for children with mental health problems (Tsitsani et al., 2012).

CONCLUSION

The nature of fairytale interpretation stems from its internal structure and genre specificities. These stories are specific in style, motives, characters, and space and time setting. Fairytales significantly affect all aspects of preschool children's development. By reading, listening to, and watching fairytales, children adopt different forms of behavior, discover their emotions, learn new concepts, etc. Fairytales stimulate children's attention, imagination, critical thinking, and the development of communication and creativity. These magical stories allow preschool children to create positive experiences and memories, as well as to identify with the main characters of magical and fantastical stories and express their impressions through play, dramatic and artistic creativity.

Fairytales are interesting, exciting, and magical. They have happy endings and a calming effect on children. These stories have a therapeutic effect on children and adults. They are particularly significant for children suffering from various chronic diseases. Telling stories allows these children to express their experience of pain, fear, anger, sadness, and anxiety through artistic, dramatic, or verbal expression. Fairytales are very significant for preschool children's moral development. They unequivocally tell us that a solution always exists regardless of how difficult and painful the path may be. Thus, fairytales teach us that we must be good, brave, wise, honest, and full of understanding to achieve our life goals. Fairytales are appealing to children because they satisfy their different needs and help them overcome crises, conflicts, and fears while growing up.

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Тамара Р. КОВАЧЕВИЋ

УТИЦАЈ БАЈКИ НА РАЗВОЈ ДЕЦЕ ПРЕДШКОЛСКОГ УЗРАСТА

Резиме

Бајке су од круцијалног значаја за психички живот детета, за морални, социјални, емоционални и когнитивни развој личности. Кроз бајке деца предшколског узраста, сусрећу се са бројним проблемима и њиховим разрешењима. Захваљујући бајкама, дете има прилику да се идентификује са његовим омиљеним јунацима, доживи авантуре и научи каква правила понашања постоје у свету. Слушањем, читањем и гледањем бајки дете гради свој поглед на свет, обликује моралне вредности, упознаје се са позитивним моделима понашања и припрема се за живот у коме ће морати да прави сталне изборе. Бајке на деци близак начин указују на етичке проблеме и уче га да разликује добро од зла. У раду се разматра утицај бајке на развој деце предшколског узраста. Описује се појам бајке, структура и њене карактеристике. Наведени су најчешћи мотиви бајки. Указује се на терапеутски аспект бајке. Истакнут је и значај причања бајки деци са хроничним обољењима која су хоспитализована, као и њихова идентификација са главним јунацима и изражавање доживљаја бајке кроз игру, драматизацију и цртеж. Бајке имају карактеристике фантазије и чаролије и омогућавају деци да замишљају и маштају. Дете може да тумачи различита искуства ликова, побеђује страх и постаје флексибилније у превазилажењу насталих тешкоћа. Децу предшколског узраста, занима фабула бајке. Они са великим интересовањем прате необичне и чудесне појаве и ликове, па онда њено идејно и морално значење. Бајке својом дужином и динамичном фабулом, брзином смењивања реалних и фантастичних слика доприносе побољшању пажње деце.

Бајка је стекла епитет једне од најпроучаванијих књижевно-уметничких врста. Медиј помоћу кога се деца данас упознају са њеним садржајем у потпуности је промењен и углавном је реч о адаптацијама и екранизацијама ове старе књижевне врсте намењене деци.

Бајка користи формуле, сталне бројеве, стереотипне почетке и завршетке, тачно понављање епизода. Ове приче су специфичне по свом стилу, мотивима, ликовима, одређењу простора и времена.

Најпопуларније и најпознатије бајке никада нису у потпуности јасне и увек остављају могућност за нова тумачења, што им неизбежно даје ноту магије, тајанствености и привлачности.

Вредносну основу бајки, чини њихово катарзично дејство. Бајке су још од давнина имале исцељитељски утицај на децу и одрасле. Бајке и приче деца предшколског узраста користе како би сагледала свет око себе и усвојила основне појмове из живота. Омиљена бајка даје им осећај сигурности, ослобађа их страхова и стреса.

Измишљене бајке се користе, за размену и изражавање доживљаја хроничних обољења деце кроз игру и ликовно изражавање.

Чак и када не говоре, деца своја осећања бола, беса, анксиозности, тескобе и страха, укључујући и страх од смрти, изражавају кроз игре, цртеже и у причама. То изражавање осећања ублажава стрес изазван хоспитализацијом

Читањем, слушањем и гледањем бајки деца предшколског узраста усвајају различите облике понашања, откривају своје емоције и усвајају нове појмове. Бајке играју кључну улогу у животу детета јер подстичу развој комуникације и стваралаштва, критичког мишљења и формирање друштвених ставова.

Бајке утиче на све аспекте развоја детета предшколског узраста.

Кључне речи: бајке, терапеутски утицај, деца, предшколски узраст