Abstract

This dissertation is concerned with parenting (love, caring and guidance) as it relates to the social-cultural development of magic tales, both in the oral tradition (as recorded in folktales) and in literary expression (in fairytales). Through applying the Marxist theories (represented by Jack Zipes) and psychoanalytic approaches (of Bruno Bettelheim) about fairytales, the parenting messages across cultures and epochs are explored. Messages about parenting are transmitted under the guise of various folk motifs such as 'absentation' (death, parental weakness, cruelty of step-parents) and the 'guardian angel' (substitute parents). Key theorists like Vladimir Propp, Philippe Ariès, Walter J. Ong and Roni Natov are involved in the argument because they cast light on parenting messages, from the point of view of the folk/fairytale's functions, the folk/fairytale's dynamics in relation to childhood, the folk/fairytale's orality and literacy and the folk/fairytale's poetics.

This drastic evolution of the parenting message in the magic tales, from the folktale to the contemporary fairytale, provides a literary picture about the creation, development and full development of parenting (in the modern sense). This picture helps us understand the generalized assumption of how parenting is socially/culturally shaped and how bourgeois ideological values are inculcated in childhood through parenting messages.

This dissertation makes a comparative study of selected representative stories of three cultures (those of Portuguese, Chinese and English languages), with focus on the story of Cinderella. Through studying these concrete examples, it is hypothesized that the parenting messages of the commercialized fairytales both challenge and limit children's imagination and critical capacities.