

The Meaning of 'Sleep' in the Fairy Tales "The Prince's Progress" and "The Sleeping Beauty"

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Abstract

In this paper I discuss two types of princesses: "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" (hereafter used as "The Sleeping Beauty") by Joseph Jacobs and "The Prince's Progress" by Christina Rossetti. One is a positive type, surviving the magic sleep to get married and bear children, and go on to face the struggles of real life. The other is a passive type who follows her maidens' suggestions: "Sleep, dream is better than weep" (The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti, p. 89) and waits for her prince's coming and dies in vain. By comparing the two, we can see the difference of views between a female writer and a male one. Additionally we can consider the meaning of "sleep" in fairy tales in general. Finally we can find a lesson for a new attitude which is required in contemporary women's daily life.

1. Introduction

Men are fascinated by the fairy tales even for their grotesqueness. Children are entertained by the fantastic world and are enriched in their imagination. It is also well recognized by many experts in their investigations that fairy tales offer a great deal of help for children to develop creative ability and adaptability in real life. In *A Study of Fairy Tales*, Laura Fry Kready and Henry Suzzallo indicate that

“The fairy tale, like every other literary production, must be judged by the fitness of its emotional effects. Fairyland is the stage-world of childhood, a realm of vicarious living, more elemental and more fancy-free than the perfected dramas of sophisticated adults whose ingrained acceptance of binding realities demands sterner stuff. The tales are classics, artful adaptations of life and form which grip the imaginations of little folks.”

(xv–xvi)

Thus Kready and Suzzallo emphasize the archetypal patterns fairy tales follow. The patterns are more influential than the refined subtle stories for adults because they are put into the innocent minds and because they are full of direct and primitive forces. Besides, in academic discipline, research on fairy tales is widely conducted in many ways, employing anthropological, psychological, sociological, and aesthetic approaches.

Different writers often depict the same characters in the same tales quite differently. It is often difficult to judge which story is right or which stories are original. In order for the young to understand a story in a suitable way, it is necessary for us parents or teachers to examine those different elements of stories in a proper light created by both male and female writers. In *Forbidden Journeys, Fairy Tales and Fantasies by Victorian Women Writers*, Nina Auerbach and U.C. Knoepfelmacher note that

“...the most acclaimed writers of Victorian children’s fantasies were three eccentric men—Lewis Carroll, George MacDonald, and James Barrie—whose obsessive nostalgia for their own idealized childhood inspired them to image dream countries in which no one had to grow up. The most moving Victorian children’s books are steeped in longing for unreachable lives. Carroll, MacDonald, and Barrie envied the children they could not be; out of this envious longing came their painful children’s classics.” (Introduction, p. 1)

Do the female writers attempt to develop the same imagination as the male writers do? Auerbach and Knoepfelmacher explain that

“Most Victorian women ... envied adults rather than children. Whether they were wives and mothers or teachers and governesses, respectable women’s lives had as their primary object child care. British law made the link between women and children indelible by denying women independent legal representation. In theory, at any rate, women lived (in) the condition Carrol, MacDonald, and Barrie longed for. If they were good, they never grew up.” (p. 1)

Auerbach and Knoepfelmacher’s description apparently give us an interpretation that men write fairy tales from his dreaming inspiration and women write the fairy tales come from her own real experience in daily life. Generally we are taught that women were regarded as the “Home Angels” in that patriarchal society. Under the patriarchal cultural constraints in the Victorian era, Auerbach and Knoepfelmacher relate that women writers “often seem to chafe against childhood rather than to envy or idealize it” (Introduction, p. 1). That is the reason why I think it is necessary to indicate the difference of fairy tales by a male from ones by a female.

In this paper, I try to explain the dual meaning of “sleep” in fairy tales. A comparison of Joseph Jacobs “The Sleeping Beauty” with Christina Rossetti’s “The Prince’s Progress” may apparently show the difference of concepts between a female writer and a male one.

2. Comparison of the Meaning of Sleep in Different Types of Princesses

In fairy tales many authors use sleep in their stories, for example, the famous “Snow White,” “Beauty and the Beast,” and “The Sleeping Beauty,” etc.

Transferring the paradigm of the Grimms and Charles Perrault, Joseph Jacobs also adopted the theme of sleep in his edited books. Christina Rossetti writes many poems about sleep, for example, “Sleep, sleep, happy one” (697), “Sleep, let me sleep, for I am sick of care” (708), “Sleep, little Baby, Sleep” (748), “Sleep, unforgotten sorrow, sleep awhile” (783), “Sleeping at last, the trouble & tumult over” (871), etc.

Both Jacobs and Rossetti included various instances of “sleep” into their stories. Jacobs’ “The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood”, famously known as “The Sleeping Beauty” or “The Briar Rose” in English, and Rossetti’s “The prince’s Progress” are the objects of my analyses at present.

2A. *The meaning of sleep in Joseph Jacobs’ “The Sleeping Beauty”*

Joseph Jacobs was born in Sydney in 1854 and died in 1916. In 1890 he edited fairy tales the collections *English Fairy Tales*, *More English Fairy Tales*, *Celtic Fairy Tales*, *More Celtic Fairy Tales*, and *European Folk and Fairy Tales*. “He wished English children to have access to English fairy tales, whereas they were chiefly reading French and German tales; that are in his own words, ‘What Perrault began, the Grimms completed.’”

Jacobs presented an intellectual and witty heroine to emphasize women’s position differing from those of the sister characters in the classical “The Sleeping Beauty.” If we look on the history of the fairy tales we find two stereotypes of “The Sleeping Beauty”: one is Charles Perrault’s “La belle au bois dorman,” of 1697 and the other is Basile’s *Pentamerone* of 1636. Like the writers Perrault, Basile, and Grimm, Joseph Jacobs stressed woman’s angelic virtue that was demanded by men or requested from parents in conventional patriarchal society. Here, I will focus on the meaning of sleep to discuss about women’s problems in the transition from girlhood to womanhood.

The first women’s problem in the story is of sterility; the royal couple had

no children. Jacobs describes: "There was once upon a time a King and a queen, who were so sorry that they had no children, so sorry that it was beyond expression. They went to all the waters in the world, vows, pilgrimages, every thing was tried and nothing came of it." ("The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" 108). Children symbolize a continuity of human life. And they represent a hope or a light to the parents in the family. Women play the key role in maintaining continuity of human life. "At last however the Queen was with child, was brought to bed of a daughter" (108). It should be a princess or else the life would be interrupted. But Marie Louise Von Franz looks on sterility as human unconsciousness, which can be expressed as sleep. In *The Feminine in Fairy Tales*, Von Franz explains that "these periods of sterility mean that something specific is in preparation in the unconscious" (27). Furthermore, she continues with her interpretation:

"Before the birth of the hero or heroine, there is often such a long period of sterility; and then the child is born supernaturally. Put into psychological language, we know that before a time of outstanding activity in the unconscious, there is a tendency toward a long period of complete passivity. It is, for instance, a normal condition in the creative personality that before some new piece of work in art or a scientific idea breaks through, people usually pass through a period of listlessness and depression and waiting; life is stale. If one analyzes them, one sees that the energy is meanwhile accumulating in the unconscious." (p. 26–7)

Von Franz' assertions tell us that in real life, human beings face many varied difficult problems and suffer in a resistance to the transmutation. She asserts that human beings accumulate energy during sleep. Actually, according to Von Franz's opinions, those fairies invited by the king could be thought as the consciousness of man and the forgotten one as the unconsciousness.

Second, let's view the problem of paternal protection for a daughter or a

single girl. After the birth of the princess, the king was amused and held a celebration. “There was a very fine Christening; and the Princess had for her godmothers all the Fairies they could find in the kingdom (of whom they found seven) that every one of them might give her a gift, as was the custom of Fairies in those days; by this means the Princess had all the perfections imaginable” (108). As a father, the king certainly wished his daughter to possess all the good fortune in the kingdom, so he invited all the fairies to be her godmothers; furthermore, he wished her daughter to have all the imaginable perfections presented as gifts by the fairies. The fairies were invited by the King, the father of the princess, to the party to celebrate the birth of the heroine, and in return they gave their presents to the new-born, as follows:

The youngest gave her for gift that she should be the most beautiful person in the world; the next that she should have the wit of an angel; the third, that she should have an admirable grace in every thing she did; the fourth, that she should dance perfectly well; the fifth, that she should sing like a nightingale; and the sixth, that she should play upon all kinds of music to the utmost perfection. And the young Fairy came out ... and spoke these words aloud: “...The Princess shall indeed pierce her hand with a spindle; but instead of dying, she shall only fall into a profound sleep which shall last a hundred years, at the expiration of which a King’s son shall come and awake her.” (The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood, 108–109)

Those virtues are demanded of women and expected by both men and women in general. Undoubtedly women like ourselves might naturally admire to have those qualities from our ingrained conceptions of man-centered society, not only in former times but also today. However, these feminine qualities might work to constrain women in society—the Victorian patriarchal society. Some feminists criticize those feminine characteristics as preventing women from being independent. Von Franz criticizes it as “man’s femininity.”

“If we look for feminine archetypal models of behavior, we at once stumble over the problem that the feminine figures in fairy tales might have been formed by a man, and therefore do not represent a woman’s idea of femininity but rather what Jung called the anima—that is, man’s femininity” (2).

The organization of our society has improved for a woman to have a more free and equal position as a man. Some feminists assert that an independent woman has to work outside as men do and to abandon the natural feminine roles in family, for example, the role in bearing children, in educating children, etc., if she wants to maintain her working career life. But it might be a misunderstanding of the original meaning and purpose of independence as an individual woman. Like the *Sleeping Beauty*, the original concepts of those earlier feminists would respect a woman to be independent and to be individual in order to have more abilities to solve the varied trouble in real life.

The second problem centers on the paternal protection before girls’ marriage. Many experts have noticed that over-protection by parents would prevent children from having an independent personality. As an ideal relationship between father and daughter, Jacobs asserted that girls should be kept at home before they got married. In Jacobs’ story this paternal protection of the daughter is regarded important. First, for getting the old fairy’s wicked words, that “the princess should have her hand pierced with a spindle and die of the wound” (109), her father the King immediately ordered a proclamation “whereby every body was forbidden on pain of death to spin with a distaff and spindle, or to have so much as any spindle in their houses” (110).

Then, when the princess “fell down in a swoon” because she played with a spinning and was wounded by it, the King came up because of the noise and realized the fate that the princess had to go through as it was predicted by the fairies. As a father, he ordered “the Princess to be carried into the finest

apartment in the palace, and to be laid up in a bed all embroider'd with gold and silver" (110), and "commanded that they should not disturb her, but let her sleep quietly till her hours of awaking was come" (110).

This is all done in order only to prevent the misfortune foretold by the old forgotten sinister fairy. All things like these could be considered as letting the young girls stay at home and prohibiting them from coming in contact with the outer world. The notion of the "Home Angel" of the Victorian Era is stressed precisely in this way.

Another point about the spindle is that in western culture, a spindle symbolizes a woman. Von Franz explains "The spindle is also the attribute of the wise old woman and of witches. The sowing of the flax and spinning and weaving are the essence of feminine life with its fertility and sexual implication" (44–5). As a hypothesis of mine, sleep implies the growth of girlhood, and we might notice that the princess was entirely protected by King in this way in her girlhood. In the male-oriented society, such paternal protection as the King's actions completely interferes with his daughter from being an independent individual. Certainly in the patriarchal paradigm, women could do nothing but choose the parasitic ways and passive attitudes of depending on a man.

Finally the woman's independence after marriage can not be ignored either. Back to our story, the prince from another family came to the rescue and married the princess, and brought her and their two children home after his father, the king, died. A symbolic act of obedience to the father in the patriarchal society is this home-coming and inheritance of the kingdom after his father's death. Walt Disney's versions of fairy tales usually offer a happy ending with a magnificent wedding, as in *Snow White*, *Cinderella* and *Sleeping Beauty* etc. Some critics pointed out that such endings of fairy tales instill an overly idealistic imagination about marriage to girls or young women. John Townsend

in “Fact and Fancy” of his *Written for Children* said that “people stuff children’s heads with stories of Ghosts, Fairies, Witches, and such Nonsense when they are young, and so they continue to be Fools all their Days” (47). However, the classical fairy tales offer a dreamland and also expostulate against unreality with the young girls to realize the conflicts in real life after marrying. The later parts of Jacobs’ tale go on in an interesting way. After their marriage, the story develops the new wife’s war with the royal family. The wicked step-mothers in “Snow White” or in “Cinderella,” the queen mother of the prince could not accept a new woman for her son to intrude on her privilege in the kingdom and tried to kill her. In this story, the newly married wife should be protected and guided by her husband in a new unknown family, but she must also be strong enough to face and fight another woman’s jealousy in this new family situation. This pattern of women’s war can be seen in the ancient tale “Amor and Psyche” : the young goddess Psyche is seriously persecuted by her mother-in-law Venus because of Venus’s jealousy of Psyche’s beauty. Such problems also commonly exist in our real life when two opinions conflict on the same issue. Von Franz explains “The good fairy godmother turns death into sleep for a hundred years, which makes a long period of sleep and repression. This happens in reality. An individual’s problems do sometimes disappear, but often one has the awkward feeling that they are somnolent rather than solved. Generally, the conscious attitude is such that the problems cannot come up for some reason, and therefore fall asleep—although one feels they will recur” (44). Also, Francine Prose questions

“Is this, then, one moral of the tale (The Sleeping Beauty): that the long sleep of girlhood is a brief, welcome interval of peace between the battles (with other women!) that deform childhood and adult life?” (302)

The princess fell asleep cursed by the wicked godmothers, woke by the prince’s kiss, and became independent to protect her children from the prince’s ogress

mother. Thus it might make us sure that “sleeping” means a metaphor for a girl’s growth out of the entire protection of her parents into the independence of womanhood. Von Franz interprets it like this:

“The dream showed that the energy in the unconscious was readjusting itself; energy and instinctive patterns were rearranging. Before the outburst of a psychotic interval, there is also such a time when everything becomes stale. But then comes the explosion. Libido has been accumulating in the unconscious and comes out in a destructive explosion” (27).

So, we realize that sleep implies a great power to comfort human beings. “Sleeping” supplies an invisible energy accumulated to raise the heroine out of the enchanted plight to start a new life partly by the help of this unknown prince. After marriage, the mother-in-law could not accept the new woman to threaten her dominance and was crazy enough to try to eat her grandchildren and even to kill her daughter-in-law. It might be inconceivable that the mother’s craziness was in her nature only because she was a wicked Ogress. To stop this wicked woman’s intention, Jacobs let the attractive prince revolt against his mother and rescue in time “the Sleeping Beauty” from her. Von Franz interprets the instinctive feeling on the part of the prince as a sort of growth out of mother’s dominance: “To hate the mother is a healthy instinctive reaction in this case. That is a genuine tragedy which occurs over and over where the healthy nature collides with the neurotic family attitude. The instinctive right behavior causes undeserved misery. It is the theme of an infinite number of hero motifs” (35). Through the story, Jacobs exposes women’s battles in marriage to warn the young that the wedding may be neither romantic nor happy. Besides, a woman is asked to assume the abilities to adapt herself to a new circumstance after her marriage not only for herself but also for her children. The notion of marriage might be influenced by a male viewpoint. And what can a female think of in her own independent mind? And what can the female expect for the marriage?

Another feminist writer in Bernheimer's book, Francine Prose, indicates that

"the story of *Sleeping Beauty* is not so much as promise of future romantic awakenings as a warning, an etiquette lesson, a prescription for behavior. It's not so much that we are asleep, on ice till the Prince comes to rouse us. It's that—if we want the Prince to come ... well, forget the makeup, the curlers, the short skirts, the feminine wiles, forget the flirtation, the conversation. The surest route to a man's (or to some men's) heart is to pretend to be unconscious: I'm asleep, dear ... and actually, to tell the truth, I may not even be ... real. I'm what you've always dreamed about. Do with me what you will" (*Mirror*, 300).

Men expect women to live by the man's guidance and authority reign. However, the colonial policy, the Industrial Revolution, and the war, women faced many crises to have complete protection by marriage, though this was the only profession for women to choose for living. Women realized that they had to earn money for themselves as men did. Fortunately, some feminists were brave to fight against the unfair social system under patriarchal dominance, such as Jane Austin, Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, Elizabeth Browning, and others. Some critics analyze the fairy tale psychologically; for example, von Franz says, "On a primitive level, the image of the real woman and the image of the anima of man is more or less the same thing and in our civilization underwent certain slow, secular processes of transformation which took about three to four hundred years" (2). And the movement broke to the surface to fight against the male-oriented society. They make much effort to stress that they had experienced rejection and insufficiency in the constraint. Actually, it is a new current that women introduced into the male-dominated writing field in the Victorian Era. And women writers poured new feminine figures into their fiction. In studying feminine figures in fairy tales, Franz advises to

"start with a paradox: feminine figures in fairy tales are neither the pattern

of anima nor of the real woman, but of both, because sometimes it is one, and sometimes another. But it is a fairly good guess to say that some fairy tales illustrate more the real woman and others more the man's anima, according to the sex of the last person who wrote down the story, thereby giving it a slightly different nuance" (p. 2).

That is the reason why it is necessary to read the fairy tales in different versions of both sexes. Now that we have examined the male view of the fairy tale, let us review some published by the female writers just for comparison. In contrast to Jacobs, I chose to look at the tales by Christina Rossetti.

2B. *The sleep in 'The Prince's Progress' of Christina Rossetti*

"The Prince's Progress" was a 'dirge-song' originally named "The Prince who arrived too late." Christina adapted her brother Dante's suggestion to develop it into a long narrative poem for publication. And in a letter to the poet Dora Greenwell (1821–1862), Christina refers to "The Prince Who Arrived Too Late" as "my reverse of the Sleeping Beauty" (Penguin Book, Notes, p. 913). In the essay "The Kingly Self: Rossetti as Woman Artist" in *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti*, edited by David A. Kent, Betty Flowers describes that

"her childhood home was both exotic and conventional; exotic in that it was enlivened by visiting Italian revolutionaries and writers, and conventional in that her mother Frances's teaching and example led Rossetti into an intense and lifelong devotion to Christianity" (xxxviii).

Rossetti was sensitive to social injustice and sympathetic with reforms at the time, like the other literary women within her circle. Flowers says that

"Rossetti's life, publications and letters reveal her to be both ambitious and competitive. She was intensely aware of her role as a woman, tending to compare herself with other women writers, especially Elizabeth Barrett Browning... Though in her outer life, Rossetti chose to submit to the

discipline of religion, her essential independence of spirit shines through her work” (xliv).

Rossetti’s works acknowledge many aspects of the conventional paradigm in the middle-class Victorian woman. That is why her works are recently reviewed with more concerns than those of Mrs. Browning or the other female writers among her contemporaries. In *Christina Rossetti, Critical Perspectives, 1862–1982*, Edna Kotin Charles acclaims,

“The Victorian century claimed Christin Rossetti as its own, but her poetry has commanded the attention of critics in the twentieth. And today there is heightened interest in the works of the woman who, new critical perspectives reveal, may well have conducted a fierce inner struggle against assuming the role of a middle-class Victorian woman” (11).

Here, I center on the “The Prince’s Progress” in order to find a rational female figure in comparison with Jacobs’ princess in “The Sleeping Beauty.” “The Prince’s Progress” is a story of a Prince who hesitates to visit his bride. Though his bride awaits his coming with sorrow in sleep and weeping, the prince spends time on the journey, first attracted by a milkmaid, then meeting an old alchemist in a cave for “the broth” of life, undergoing a dangerous trial in the boredom land, etc. He is conscious of his delay in visiting but too weak to resist the temptation and distraction. He arrives only after the bride’s death and fails to see that she dies from lack of love. Similar to Jacobs, Rossetti also painted the portrait of a passive woman awaiting her prince’s arriving. In the first stanza of “The Prince’s Progress,” the princess cried,

Till all sweet gums and juices flow,
 Till the blossom of blossoms blow,
 The long hours go and come and go,
 The bride she sleepeth, waketh, sleepeth,
 Waiting for one whose coming is slow:

Hark! The bride weepth.

How long shall I wait, come heat come rime?"-

Till the strong Prince comes, who must come in time"

(Her women say), "there's a mountain to climb,

A river to ford. Sleep, dream and sleep:

Sleep" (they say): "we've muffled the chime,

Better dream than weep" (ll. 7-12).

The Princess cried sadly because her prince did not come though she spent hours and hours in waiting. In contrast to the sad princess, the prince rose up to "stir and to seek, Going forth in the joy of his strength" (ll. 45-46) and started with a "light step" and a "merry smile" on his face ... Here, again in contrast to Jacobs' brave prince, who "did not cease from continuing his way: a young and amorous prince is always valiant" ("The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" p. 112), Rossetti develops a tragic narrative story about a conventional and stereotypical female who was kept at home to await her prince's coming whether he appeared or not. It is unconvincing in our contemporary society that a woman should be kept at home in obedience to her father, her husband, or even her son. But in the Victorian Period, women's rights were ignored not only at home but also outside in society. Like the Prince of "The Prince's Progress," men could rightly be allowed to experience anything they liked in their lives, but women were prohibited from doing the same because the conventional principles prevented them from doing anything unusual. In Jacobs' work, these conventional lessons have been shown. He says that if the young girl broke from her parents' protection, she might fall into a long sleep as the princess did. In the essay "Christina Rossetti's Lyricism as revealed in "The Prince's Progress," Eriko Takada says that

Rossetti has presented the prince as representing a man's lust for conquest.

He is easily dissuaded by some kinds of temptation and delays his journey towards the palace, although he is determined to rescue his spell-bound bride. This princess seems quite different from such a female figure as the heroine of *Jane Eyre* (1847) who claims herself to be “a free human being with an independent will” as to be equal to a man in the sight of God. What Christina Rossetti is trying to convey to us is that the Victorian society has been totally centered on men, where women tend to be vastly marginalized. (33)

Generally, Rossetti's poem and her attitude of life offered a passive imagination to her readers. And some feminists describe Rossetti as a enigmatic woman. However, Frances Thomas notes that she “remains a shadowy figure, and those who define the mainstream of English poets have still refused to take her into their number (11). In fact, her poems indirectly give her readers a powerful encouragement to face the troubles of the world:

“Time is short, life is short,” they took up the tale:

“Life is sweet, love is sweet, use today while you may;

Love is sweet, and tomorrow may fail;

Love is sweet, use today” (p. 90, ll. 39–42).

This stanza stirs the prince to start his trip in his indulgent way. It might be interpreted too as an active quest for women as men normally did. Like these lines “A hundred sad voices lifted a fail, And a hundred glad voices piped on the gale” (ll. 37–8), Rossetti illustrates the happiness and sadness of real life. Perhaps Rossetti might be conscious in her poems of women's actual constraint in life. The next stanza expresses the opposite feelings of the prince in comparison with princess:

“Is there life?—the lamp burns low;

Is there hope?—the coming is slow:

The promise promised so long ago,

The long promise, has not been kept.

Does she live?—does she die?—she slumbers so

Who so oft has wept (ll. 379–84).

In this male-oriented society, women's position was always marginal. Literature was even thought of as a sacred field that was not suitable for women, as Anne Finch described:

Alas! A woman that attempts the pen,

Such an intruder on the rights of men,

Such a presumptuous Creature, is esteem'd

The fault can by no virtue be redeem'd. ("The Introduction," 4–5)

Also, Poet Laureate Robert Southey in his letter to Charlotte Brontë in 1837 advised that "Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be." Jane Austen, Barbara Smith Bodichon, and Elizabeth Browning in 19th century Literature succeeded in criticizing women's exceptionally unfair treatment. Differing from Barbara Smith and Elizabeth Browning, who were always positive as noted feminists, Christina Rossetti was in a passive position to feminism, as she showed us in this fairy story. Frances Thomas describes that

"Her renunciation might be seen as a legitimate response to the pressures of being a talented woman in an anti-feminist society; or as genetic, the result of her continual struggle against the inherited instability that drove her brother to a drug-hazed premature death. It might be partly attributed to effects upon her at an early age of an inward-turning and restrictive religion; or to the erosion of her vitality by constant illness. It has been seen by some writers as mere perversity, a sour rejection of life" (p. 10–11).

Similarly, Takada also points out that

"With regard to this narrative verse, the princess is depicted with an image of "entranced passivity" which is redolent of our poet's attitude towards

her own life.... However, the sorrowful, tragic life of the princess has been highly elevated into the blissful and serene real of Heaven, the New Jerusalem as sun in the form of the final dirge which is turned somehow into a bridal song sung with a tune of elegiac rhapsody.” (33)

Rossetti apparently advised that the passive attitude has possessed not only by women but also by man. The prince, though he started his trip with strong limb but weak purpose, acknowledged his bride waiting for him and escaped from the dead man, the old alchemist in the cave. Before he started his trip again, he allowed himself to have some sleep: “‘One night’s rest,’ thought the Prince: ‘This done, Forth I speed with the rising sun: With the morrow I rise and run, Come what will of wind or of weather’” (ll. 253–55). And he was glad to share the liquid called “exile of life” with his bride, but before that, he was “prompt to crave Sleep on the ground” (ll. 263–4). The prince accumulated energy and awoke suddenly because he heard the voice unconsciously: “Thro’ his sleep the summons rang, Into his ears it sobbed and it sang” (ll. 277–8). The prince felt guilty in his delay and so wanted to comfort his princess’ suffering in awaiting. He said

“If she watches, go bid her sleep;
 Bid her sleep, for the road is steep:
 He can sleep who holdeth her cheap,
 Sleep and wake and sleep again.
 Let him sow, one day he shall reap,
 Let him sow the grain” (ll. 265–70).

Then, he awoke and started his travel again after a long sleep. Here Rossetti criticized the fault that man makes woman wait for his coming and waste her bloom of life, only to die. Some critics point out that the idea comes from Rossetti’s brother Dante and his wife Lizzie, who died weary of waiting for her husband. Unlike Jacobs, Rossetti tried to urge men to pay more attention

to women, as her fairy narrative poem illustrates. Maids of the princess said sorrowfully to the prince that

Too late for love, too late for joy,

Too late, too late!

You loitered on the road too long,

You trifled at the gate:

The enchanted dove upon her branch

Died without a mate;

The enchanted princess in her tower

Slept, died, behind the grate;

Her heart was starving all this while

You made it wait" (ll. 481–490).

Dream or sleep in passive way might cure women's sorrow temporarily or help them escape from the social problems of reality for a while. But the central concept that Christina might want to offer was a strong message for women to face reality positively and not to wait in vain like the Princess in the story. The suggestion that "tomorrow would be better than today" is a passive way to postpone decisions. In "'My Alchemist': Another Archetype Reworked in Christina Rossetti's *The Prince's Progress*," Paul Hullah says that

Throughout the poem, Christina Rossetti's Prince is a dumb participant in the death(s) surrounding him on his journey, making implicit symbolically what is made explicit in terms of the plot at the poem's close: his guilty complicity in bringing about the demise of the princess, original and still ultimate object of his mission. The flawed Prince moves idly through a series of what Rossetti, writing as a Victorian woman, sees as being redundant quest conventions, always blind to the fate he is actively inviting, a fate which must be painfully and passively submitted to by the helpless princess (49).

Similarly, men like the Prince lost many “todays” to enjoy temporary temptations and failed to visit their princesses in time. Rossetti spent time working at the Highgate Penitentiary for Fallen Women and saw many women who had suffered from difficulties of their marriage and “Campaign[ed] actively against vivisection and child prostitution” (F. Thomas, p. 11). Particularly, we can see her assertion against the problem of the illegitimate child in her another of her narrative poems, “The Iniquity of the Fathers Upon the Children.” Rossetti boldly attempted to show that a positive female figure should be independent of male domination and not to be trapped by an illusion of sleep or dream for marriage life. She also suggested that men help women. Rossetti encourages women to be independent as the poem “Later Life: A Double Sonnet of Sonnets” describes:

When Adam and when Eve left Paradise
 Did they love on and cling together still,
 Forgiving one another all that ill
 The twain had wrought on such a different wise?
 She propped upon his strength, and he in guise
 Of lover tho’ of lord, girt to fulfil
 Their term of life and die when God should will;
 Lie down and sleep, and having slept arise.
 Boast not against us, O our enemy!
 Today we fall, but we shall rise again;
 We grope today, tomorrow we shall see:
 What is today that we should fear today?
 A morrow cometh which shall sweep away

Thee and thy realm of change and death and pain (p. 352, No. 14).

According to Edna Kotin Charles’ *Christina Rossetti, Critical Perspectives, 1862–1982*, Edmund Gosse, who commends “The Prince’s Progress” as a

moral, expresses that “no man can ignore the influence of his tender years. Ultimately they will call to him and draw him home, and it is a sacred call to be heeded. Only sorrow awaits for those who delay too long” (60).

3. Conclusion

Some critics complain that the characters of fairy tales may give wrong images to children’s minds and lead them to imitate these foolishly in their grown-up lives. Recently, there is even a trend for some scholars to deny the role of the fairy tales in educating, but Henry Suzzallo bravely offered a different opinion. He asserts that

“To cast out the fairy tale is to rob human beings of their childhood, that transition period in which breadth and richness are given to human life so that it may be full and plastic enough to permit the creation of those exacting efficiencies which increasing knowledge and responsibility compel. We cannot omit the adventures of fairyland from our educational program. They take the objects which little boys and girls know vividly and personify them so that instinctive hopes and fears may play and be disciplined (xvi).

Suzzallo’s opinion is almost unanimous. In fact, those who have experienced reading fairy tales in their childhood would acknowledge the benefits from them. Jacobs in his tale exposed the social problem of women’s fight in the family; Christina Rossetti did, too. ‘The Prince Progress’ is a narrative poem which combines elements of fantasy, fairy tale, and social commentary. It is also a quest poem which, like other contemporary examples such as Tennyson’s “Ulysses” and Browning’s “Childe Roland,” transforms the genre by having its hero set out late. Katharine McGowan said that the poem also hints at the fate of

women in society, depicting them as “the passive objects of male desire, subject to men’s hesitations and vacillations” (*Selected Poems of Christina Rossetti*, xvi). “The Sleeping Beauty” of Jacobs is a metaphor for the sleep that leads to a girl’s growth. In contrast to Jacobs, Christina Rossetti wanted to encourage women to awake from the passive sleep and to learn to be independent or else they could not achieve real happiness.

Today, the media presents a visual message emphasizing the material desire for fame and money. It stresses the visibly effective result of economic progress or scientific research rather than the invisible influence in the research or creation of literature. A spiritual mind should be bred and nourished by reading. Fairy tales supply entertainment to enrich our childhood. In “The Sleeping Beauty,” Jacobs advises us to accumulate some invisible energy within the long sleep and face the struggle bravely after awakening; also in “The Prince’s Progress,” the author advises not only that girls or women rise up in action rather than waiting, but also that boys or men should come home in time. In our human world, God first created Adam with Eve, and both sexes should exist in cooperation. Some feminists might reject the description of Rossetti’s words, that “Woman is the helpmeet made for man” in “Monna Innominata” (297), but if anyone has fallen in love, not only he but also she might admit to and agree with the feminine emotion in the following poem by Rossetti:

I love you first: but afterwards your love
 Outsoaring mine, sang such a loftier song
 As drowned the friendly cooing of my dove.
 Which owes the other most? My love was long,
 And yours one moment seemed to wax more strong;
 I loved and guessed at you, you construed me
 And loved me for what might or might not be—
 Nay, weights and measures do us both a wrong.

For verily love knows not “mine” or “thine”;
 With separate “I” and “thou” free love has done,
 For one is both and both are one in love:
 Rich love knows nought of “thine that is not mine”;
 Both have the strength and both the length thereof,
 Both of us, of the love which makes us one (296).

“For one is both and both are one in love”—Rossetti proclaims that a complete love combines a free man and an individual woman to love and help each other. Like this poem of Rossetti’s, we should select and adapt fairy tales for children or for the young people and let them have mature minds in love and in creation. Both men and women should be sufficiently fertile in order to have a cooperative life. This is the only way that our humanity in daily life can progress in love and then stand “As happy equals in the flowering land/ Of love, that knows not a dividing sea” (297).

p.s. This essay is rewritten from my presentation at Aichi Shukutoku University 59th convention of the English Literature Society of Japan, Chubu Agent in Oct. 2007

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